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Sinking Kiribati raises sovereignty questions

INTERNATIONAL
Alana Schetzer

As the last minutes of the year 1999 ticked over, the world counted down to the beginning of a new millennium. In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, on the tiny sovereign nation of Kiribati, the clock struck midnight first, leaving the 20th century behind. It is now likely to become the first country to be wiped before the dawn of the next century.

But this tiny nation of 120,000 people isn't just at risk of physically disappearing because of rising sea levels. It's also at risk of disappearing politically and culturally. Kiribati's shaky future raises the unprecedented question of what could happen to its sovereignty if - or when - it physically disappears. Can a nation still exist without an actual country?

It's far from unprecedented for national borders to change. Just last century, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic ceased to exist - but their lands, carved out to other, new nations, still very much exist. The prospect of an entire country actually disappearing is a challenge the world has yet to deal with.

The 33 islands that make up Kiribati are located some 3000km south of Hawaii, making it one of the most isolated countries in the world. Scientists have essentially concluded that a sea level rise of three to six feet by 2100 will swallow its low-lying atolls. No reduction or even elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from today will prevent this from happening, scientists have concluded.

Kiribati’s government has been planning for the worse-case scenario for several years, purchasing 7.7 square miles of land in Fiji - located around 2000km south-west - for its inhabitants for US$6.1 million. At the time, then-President Anote Tong said he hoped his people would never have to use the land, but 'if it became absolutely necessary, yes, we could do it'.

If the Kiribati people eventually move to Fiji, do they remain Kiribati? Or do they become new Fijians? Can an unofficial version of Kiribati exist within Fiji, or will that cause problems with the Fijian government?
Under the Montevideo Convention, a state can only exist if it meets four specific criteria: it must have a defined territory, a permanent population, and a government, which is also able to form relationships with other states. If Kiribati goes under water, it will lose at least one of these criteria, and possibly all four, unless changes are made to the convention, or unless Fiji relinquishes its sovereignty to the land that the Kiribati government purchased six years ago.

"Large and dominating countries such as Australia already potentially view this evolving disaster as an economic opportunity."

The issue becomes even more complicated when you factor in the future status of its rights to surrounding fisheries and minerals, and whether those waters could be re-labelled as international waters.

But a lack of political will on how sovereignty is defined has left Kiribati in a constant state of uncertainty. There have been talks and discussions about the political and legal status of Kiribati and yet as the sea levels inch closer to drown the islands, no agreement has been reached, leaving Kiribati a vulnerable player in any future negotiations with other nations. Large and dominating countries such as Australia already potentially view this evolving disaster as an economic opportunity.

Former prime minister Kevin Rudd was ridiculed when he suggested that South Pacific countries at risk of being swept under rising sea levels exchange their exclusive economic zone for their residents being granted Australian citizenship. Tuvalu Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga rubbed the idea, labelling it 'imperial thinking' and a new form of colonialism.

Kiribati is vulnerable, not just because it's a developing nation, but because its uncertain future gives other nations a stronger chip to play in any diplomatic and trade talks. While many may scoff at Rudd's idea, Kiribati and other sinking island nations may find their bargaining power lessen as the years pass and water levels go up.

Kiribati is just one of several nations to face the ultimate consequences - Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and the Maldives face a similar fate. It's not a destiny, though, but the result of the world powers, led by the United States, failing to put into action policies that could have made a noticeable difference to current greenhouse gas emissions, which is the undisputed cause of rising sea levels.

Sovereignty is the right to absolute independence, self-governance and determination, but this is dependent on having land in order to exercise this right. If Kiribati is forced to relocate to Fiji, its ability to exercise any state-like power and rights will be dependent on the Fijian government, which again, makes it politically vulnerable.

In theory, Kiribati could follow in the footsteps of the UAE, which has constructed artificial islands as replacements for their natural atoll islands. But with a GDP of just US$196 million (2017), such an enormous project would require significant international funding and support, something that is lacking.

Another option - which would again require international cooperation and funding - is to construct some sort of small, permanent, island-like structure, where only a few Kiribati citizens would live, so as to maintain international recognition of its sovereignty. The practical problems this would cause the small group of inhabitants are not particularly
difficult to recognise: lack of access to medical care, education facilities and basic infrastructure support. Where would their food come from, and how much would it cost to import? And that's just for starters.

Kiribati is more than its legal and political identity; its rich culture - language, food, customs, clothes and rituals - are also at risk. It has been failed by bigger and richer nations whose greenhouse gas emissions will see its lands literally disappear into the sea. It has been failed again by those same countries and international groups that have failed to address its impending loss of its own existence.

Alana Schetzer is a Melbourne-based journalist and academic. Main image: Kirtibati, Tararwa island (JohnHodkinson/Getty)
The 'kettle logic' of climate denial cultists

ENVIRONMENT

Jeff Sparrow

In 1956, a team of American psychologists published *When Prophecy Fails*, on the response by a group of UFO cultists to the non-appearance of a promised flying saucer. The researchers chronicled how the failure of predictions did not lead to the cult's collapse. On the contrary, after a brief period of confusion, the members readjusted their beliefs and became even more fervent in proselytising their faith. The book comes to mind these days as the environmental crisis increasingly confounds the assertions of sceptics.

Today, CO2 levels have reached 414 parts per million, a level not experienced on earth for millenia. The world's five hottest years have all occurred since 2014 - and 2019 looks set to continue the trend. Climate models have become sufficiently robust that the researcher James Annan has developed a tidy little sideline taking bets against those who tell him warming isn't real. Unprecedented fires rage across the Amazon, in Africa and the Arctic. In Australia, we have such fires, too - but we also have reef bleaching, mass extinctions and prolonged drought.

Yet Liberal frontbencher David Littleproud just explained that he 'didn't know' if humanity was responsible for climate change. With major rivers like the Murray Darling in a state of utter collapse, you might expect a Minister for Water Resources to have done some investigation into the key issue for his portfolio, especially given he's also supposed to manage the bushfires that might bear some relationship to a warming planet. But apparently not.

What was more, in his refusal to link intensifying fires with climate change, he was backed by Bridget McKenzie, the Nationals deputy leader, Matt Canavan, the minister for resources and northern Australia, and Sussan Ley, all of whom, according to the *Guardian*, 'denied knowledge of or downplayed the link'.

The same phenomenon can be observed overseas. Trump, of course, calls climate change a Chinese plot, and appointed to his National Security Council the (now departing) physicist William Happer, who compared hostility to fossil fuels with 'the demonisation of the poor Jews under Hitler'. In the UK, the hapless Boris Johnson has
assembled what some environmentalists have called the 'most anti-climate action' cabinet ever, while Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro promotes denialism even as the Amazon burns. Why aren't the denialists confounded?

In the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud tells the story of a man who defends himself against accusations he had given back a borrowed kettle in a damaged state. Confronted by the aggrieved owner, the man sputters that, firstly, he had returned the kettle undamaged; secondly, it was already broken when he borrowed it; and thirdly, he had never borrowed it at all. 'A complicated defence,' Freud quips, 'but so much the better; if only one of these three lines of defence is recognised as valid must be acquitted.'

You'll find this 'kettle logic' in most of the denialist publications. In her new book, Naomi Klein writes of attending a conference of the Heartland Institute, in which the speakers regularly contradicted each other. She tries to puzzle out their arguments, asking sarcastically: 'Is there warming, or is there warming but it's not a problem? And if there's no warming, then what's all this talk about sunspots causing temperatures to rise?'

"Young people put no faith in flying saucers coming down to save the day. They recognise there's only one Earth - and they're determined to defend it."

Though the ideologues of denialism invariably declare themselves truthseekers wedded to facts and logic (so many invocations of Galileo!), the movement has always been more about politics than science. The fossil fuel companies that underwrite denialist thinktanks and conferences want to counter environmentalists and protect their profits. They don't care how they do so.

In an earlier period, in which the data wasn't as clear, the most effective technique involved a simple insistence that the temperature remained constant, that projections weren't accurate, that scientists fudged their results, and so on. But last July was the hottest month ever in human history. Under such circumstances, the old methods don't cut it and so the argument has changed.

The Littleproud position reflects that evolution. You'll note that the minister doesn't deny the rising temperature. Instead, he says we shouldn't be wasting time on airy-fairy scientific speculation about causes but must be 'making sure we give our people the tools to be able to go out and protect themselves in a changing climate'.

Expect to encounter this more often, in a number of slightly different guises. He could, for instance, have acknowledged human agency and still run more-or-less the same line. Climate change might be real, he might have said, and it might be caused by humans, but it's here now, and so rather than wringing our hands about carbon, we should just get down to the practical business of adjusting.

Barnaby Joyce used precisely that approach to denounce Richard Di Natale for 'politicising' the bushfires with talk of climate change. Rather than discussing energy, Joyce said, the Greens should be taking practical measures like enabling firefighters to take water from National Parks. That's not, strictly speaking, denialism, but it has the same political effect - it seeks to discomfort environmentalists and prevent any action to reduce emissions. Why, it's positively self-indulgent to worry about abstractions like...
carbon in the face of such an urgent threat!

Given the global emergency, why does any of this get a hearing? In respect of the die-hard audience for climate scepticism, that UFO cult provides a useful reference. The explanation in Why Prophecy Fails rests on the notion that the unsuccessful prediction caused a dissonance between belief and outcome, which many cultists sought to resolve in ways that maintained their beliefs. Having so publicly and seriously committed themselves to the UFO group, they found it easier to proclaim their faith with intensified fervour rather than to acknowledge any error, especially since new recruits helped them to believe they were right all along.

There's certainly something of this in the audience for climate denialism. Studies indicate that denialists find their core support among wealthy older white men, a demographic overwhelmingly represented at talks by Ian Plimer, Lord Monckton or other denialist stars. After long and successful careers, such people see attacks on fossil fuels as an assault on the business practices to which they devoted their lives. Their investment in the status quo leads to a public commitment to denialism (expressed through dinner party fulminations, the circulation of email chains, and subscriptions to the Australian).

Like the flying saucer people, they don't change their minds based on new material. Rather, the discomfort fresh edvidence causes them results in a renewed proclamation of their denialism, as they double down on their familiar identity. Where once they blamed environmentalists for not recognising the planet had been hotter during the Middle Ages, they now attack Greenies for preventing the adoption of carbon-free nuclear power. The rhetoric might change but the structure remains the same.

Yet it's important to recognise that the sceptics writing letters to Quadrant represent a small and declining minority. According to a recent report, 77 per cent of Australians believe climate change to be happening, and 81 per cent are concerned by the droughts and flooding they associate with it. A majority of Australians attribute extreme weather to climate change and two thirds want the government to stop opening new mines.

Furthermore, younger age groups show an overwhelming commitment to environmental action, as the remarkable school walkouts demonstrate. While the ranks of the denialists thin with every cold winter, the number of climate activists grows with each term's enrolment. There's no mystery there. Young people put no faith in flying saucers coming down to save the day. They recognise there's only one Earth - and they're determined to defend it.

Jeff Sparrow is a writer, editor and honorary fellow at Victoria University. Main image: Vintage style 3-D rendering of flying saucer (oorka / Getty)
Ban polar bears! Climate visuals that work

MEDIA
Greg Foyster

Climate change, wrote Fairfax columnist Waleed Aly, is the 'most beautiful apocalypse' you could imagine. Last month he looked at pictures of the melting Artic - the majesty of drifting icebergs, the fluorescent blue of a cracking glacier - and argued it was all too pretty to feel much concern. Our society's increasingly visual culture, he reasoned, makes it hard for us to come to grips with an abstract, long-term problem like climate change.

Nonsense. The issue isn't using pictures to communicate climate change, it's using the wrong ones. There are compelling images to convey the urgency of this crisis, and there's even peer-reviewed research showing that people find them convincing and emotionally engaging. Unfortunately most media outlets don't know this research and run the same old stock photos with every story.

The visual language of climate change has become predictable and stunted. In the 1980s activists used an image of a polar bear adrift on a floe of ice to tell the story of global warming and rising sea levels, and the cliché has stuck. It's become visual shorthand for the topic - useful for quick categorisation, but stale and easily dismissed.

The other two most common images used in climate change stories are pictures of politicians and protestors. This is a byproduct of reporting on UN climate conferences, when media coverage of the topic spikes. Photojournalists take pictures of politicians inside and protestors (usually white Westerners) outside, highlighting any conflict.

Research conducted in 2015 by UK charity Climate Outreach suggests these three common images - polar bears, politicians and protestors - are probably the worst pictures to communicate climate change.

Through discussion groups and a survey of 3000 people across Europe, they discovered that pictures of politicians were universally disliked, and had the lowest ranking in terms of motivating people to change their behaviour. Excluding politicians, the second lowest-scoring image was a protestor wearing blue face paint and holding a sign reading 'climate justice now'. Not even people concerned about climate change were favourable to this
photo. It only appealed to people who already saw themselves as activists.

But this is how the media often portrays the issue: as a 'contested' frame. It’s either a fight between two sides of politics, or between radical activists and politicians. Another study found Australian media is even more likely to use images of politicians in climate change stories than other countries.

"The combination of inner city protest imagery and stories of the melting Arctic/burning Amazon is a recipe for alienating many mainstream suburban voters."

Because Australia is on the opposite side of the world to the Arctic, pictures of polar bears are especially unhelpful here. The climate visuals research found these images of distant impacts might trigger a 'global justice' frame that appeals to people on the left of the political spectrum, but alienates those on the right. Images of local impacts have greater appeal across the political divide, as do images of real people.

The research also warns against using pictures of devasting global impacts - like houses flattened by hurricanes or swaths of the Amazon on fire - without a clear link to what action people can take. In discussion groups, these kinds of pictures prompted the response: yeah, but what can I do about it? Yet these kinds of images and stories dominate climate change coverage - just look at pictures of the burning Amazon as a recent example. Without any link to a tangible action people can take, these articles risk instilling a sense of hopelessness.

All of this is a warning against the media coverage Extinction Rebellion could generate in coming months. The combination of inner city protest imagery and stories of the melting Arctic/burning Amazon is a recipe for alienating many mainstream suburban voters. (Extinction Rebellion's political theory of change isn't aiming at these people, but environmental protests have been most effective when the broader public identifies with those getting arrested, and so the media portrayal matters.)

To build a broader base, climate images need to be local and relevant to diverse audiences (not just those already concerned). They should tell new stories about climate change, show real people not staged protests, and connect with viewers on an emotional level. Distressing pictures of climate impacts should be balanced by images of solutions or actions people can take that are commensurate with the scale of the problem.

A good example for Australia would be volunteer firefighters battling a blaze (see above), country communities installing renewable energy and photos of local impacts like drought or reef bleaching. Protest images should subvert the stereotype in some way - people in business suits, mums with prams, non-Caucasian faces, or conservative figures like farmers and war veterans.

The day of Aly's article, I wrote a short letter to the Age explaining the above and giving them a link to hundreds of free images that are more likely to increase concern about the climate crisis and motivate action, including many from Australia. You can see them for yourself at climatevisuals.org

The next morning I flicked to the letters page and saw they'd published a large picture of
a polar bear.

Greg Foyster is a Melbourne writer and the author of the book *Changing Gears*. Main image: For Australian audience, local climate impacts are more relevant than images of the melting Arctic. Including real people in the photo gives a powerful human perspective. Source: [Bushfire in Cessnock by Flickr User Quarrie Photography](https://www.flickr.com/photos/quarrie/).
The two Francises model climate justice

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

The Catholic Week for the Environment draws together movements that are not always seen as natural mates: the environmental movement and the Catholic Church. This week both are preaching the same message.

They share, too, the same challenge: to persuade people to take their message sufficiently seriously that they will demand and secure change. Both have a strong message about the crisis facing the world through global warming. The message, however, is not accepted urgently and broadly enough to lead to decisive action.

Churches have from their beginning struggled to communicate their message about salvation effectively to hearers weary of it. Their experience may also be pertinent to the challenges of addressing the environmental crisis. The approach of Pope Francis is of particular interest. He has insisted that the urgent need to care for the natural world of which we are part is not a disputed question but a Christian duty. He has appealed to the legacy of St Francis of Assisi, whose name he took when he became Pope. That link with a saint of the 13th century is worth pondering.

Francis of Assisi is popularly known best for his love of nature. It is embodied in early stories of his preaching to birds and winning over wild animals, and in the Canticle to the Sun in which delight in the beauty of the natural world is linked to his Christian faith.

His ecstatic wonder at the created world, however, was part of a broader and sharper-edged spiritual vision, expressed in his call to follow Jesus in a life of radical poverty. It led him to gather followers who shared his vision. They lived and travelled without possessions among ordinary people and so by their lifestyle commended the faith by which they lived. They spread their message primarily by a dedicated and radical communal life and only then through words.

Many Church authorities of the time saw Francis as no more than a romantic and potentially anarchic force. But Innocent III, the hard nut Pope of the time, saw in his movement possibilities of reaching the often disaffected rural poor whom the ordinary structures of the church failed to touch. The Gospel came alive when it was the Gospel
for the poor and embodied in a way of living and acting.

Pope Francis has certainly embodied respect for the environment and respect for people who endure great poverty. He lives simply and reaches out to people who are poor and disadvantaged, including people who seek protection, are imprisoned, suffer from mental and physical illness, and are in great poverty. He insists that these are the first people to be affected by climate change. His advocacy is centrally though symbolic gestures that draw their power from his authenticity.

"The danger both in the Catholic Church and in environmental movements is that they will ask only 'how' questions, without asking the deeper questions about what matters and who matters."

This Franciscan style is certainly pertinent to the challenges facing the Catholic Church today and perhaps also to environmental movements. One of the questions for discussion in the Plenary Council asks how God is calling Catholics to be a Christ-centred Church in Australia that is missionary and evangelising. Or, in simpler terms, how to share the faith they own.

The danger both in the Catholic Church and in environmental movements is that, in considering the communication of their message, they will ask only 'how' questions, without asking the deeper questions about what matters and who matters. They will then focus on the training of communicators, technologies of communication, distribution of resources and assessment of institutional priorities.

The people with whom they try to communicate will then be seen, not as faces of people with their own distinctive lives, gifts and longings, but as faceless audiences, categories and objects.

The alternative way, that of the two Francises, is to focus on the people who matter and to go out to them empty-handed as fellow human beings who matter and to trust that the unspoken power of one's message will communicate itself through the joy it gives us. In the Catholic Church that means reaching out to accompany people who are disrespected, disadvantaged and despised - people who seek protection, suffer from mental illness, are imprisoned and are unemployed, for example. These are the people to whom Jesus came and must be the Church's people too if preaching and teaching are to have any credibility.

This may have some pertinence for the environmental movement, too. When asking how to persuade people of the message they might first return to ask what matters and who matters. The answer is surely that the future of the world matters, and that all human beings matter, particularly the poorest who are the most at risk. The task will be to go out to accompany them so that their voice is heard.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.
Thinking big

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

The Jacqui Lambie conundrum
AUSTRALIA
John Warhurst

Serendipity is defined as the gift of finding valuable things in unexpected places by sheer luck. It is a good description of Tasmanian Senator Jacqui Lambie in Australian politics.

She is fortunate to be in the Senate and doubly fortunate to find herself in a position where she can influence the outcome of government legislation. We are fortunate that she has the personal character and history which makes her a welcome presence and that she possesses the values which she applies to the legislation which comes before her.

But there is a sting in the tail. The community is unfortunate that the outcome of crucial legislation, like Newstart, Medevac, cashless welfare cards and much more, is determined by serendipity or sheer luck. What if the deciding vote was held by someone else but Lambie, someone with different values? Should our system put so much power in the hands of one person?

Senator Lambie has had a roller-coaster ride as characterised by Fairfax journalist David Crowe in his portrait 'Lambie 3.0: Psych ward to Senator' (14-15September 2019). She was first elected in September 2013 with a start date of July 2014 as a member of Palmer United. She quickly became an Independent, was re-elected in 2016 and served until her eligibility for British citizenship meant Section 44 of the constitution forced her out of Parliament in November 2017. After 18 months she was re-elected in May 2019.

Her personal and family circumstances have been trying and her manner is unpolished. She calls on her past life experience in the Army and as a single mother with troubled children. She can be abrupt and sometimes even crude, but she is learning on the job. She is a distinctive presence among the many faceless senators representing the major parties. In the modern jargon she is authentic because she speaks her mind.

She is now one of six crossbench senators, with the others being the two One Nation senators from Queensland, led by Pauline Hanson, the two Centre Alliance senators from South Australia, Rex Patrick and Stirling Griff, and the conservative former Liberal from...
South Australia, Cory Bernardi. Notably all six come from three of the smaller states.

The dynamic varies among the six so others play a role too. The government needs four of these six votes to pass its legislation. One Nation and Bernardi tend to stick with the Morrison government, leaving Centre Alliance and Lambie to do the negotiations. Centre Alliance is a micro-political party, but while Lambie has a network she is much more like a lone independent.

"Some may see her as comparable, though a very different type of person, to her Tasmanian Independent predecessor, Brian Harradine."

Centre Alliance, as its name suggests, plays a negotiating middle-of-the-road role like the former Australian Democrats and the former Senator Nick Xenophon. They can also sometimes play the home state card to attract specific benefits for their own states. Lambie does too, but she is harder to categorise, always a strength because she can keep the government guessing and is harder to dismiss as just an Opposition Labor/Green figure in disguise.

In her first Senate term she supported the far-sighted Future of Financial Advice laws and helped save some of the remaining Clean Energy mechanisms from the rampaging Abbott government. In vain she tried to help children on Nauru but found herself in the minority.

In the current debates Lambie swings backwards and forwards on issues like random drug tests on welfare recipients (opposed without big concessions), cashless welfare cards (supports), Newstart (supports extending allowable hours of paid employment) and repealing the Medevac legislation (undeclared). This leaves Coalition government supporters grumbling, while Labor/Green supporters feel they are just getting crumbs from the table. In the wider community, opinion about her probably varies from irritant and upstart to voice of reason and compassion. Some may see her as comparable, though a very different type of person, to her Tasmanian Independent predecessor, Brian Harradine.

The role of the Senate crossbench is totally unpredictable. No one can predict just what it will throw up. That is the price we pay for a parliament not dominated by the four big parties: Liberal, Labor, Greens and Nationals.

While we may celebrate the presence and impact of someone like Lambie we should remember that a system which depends on serendipity potentially also has a big downside.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University.
Nuclear push is about ideology, not solutions

ENVIRONMENT

Tim Hutton

Australia is experiencing an energy crisis on multiple fronts. In the short-term we are facing skyrocketing power prices, and grid stability issues. In the long-but-getting-shorter-by-the-day-term Australia's disproportionate contribution to climate change is still a massive problem. Neither of these situations is sustainable.

Fortunately, the government has a brains trust - featuring former Deputy-PM Barnaby Joyce - who are on the case. Recent months have seen a push by Joyce and his allies to alter existing legislation and allow the use of nuclear power. Joyce has even been so keen on the idea that he suggested giving those who can see a nuclear power station from their house free or reduced energy prices. Capitulating to the powerful conservative arm of his party, energy minister Angus Taylor has commissioned a parliamentary inquiry into the feasibility of nuclear power.

The problem with the discussion about nuclear energy is that it is a distraction; an ideologically driven misdirection by those who are more concerned with opposing renewables and the 'green-left' than solving our country's energy problems. Nuclear just doesn't make sense for Australia at this stage of the game. To suggest it does reveals a view so blinkered by anti-green, anti-renewable ideology that it is devoid of all logic.

There are a few regular arguments made for the adoption of nuclear power: it is a high-yield, reliable and essentially carbon-neutral option for power production. Coupled with this are Australia's vast repositories of uranium, which - so the argument goes - will ensure Australia's energy independence. Yet, by any objective metric, nuclear cannot hold a (uranium-powered) candle up to renewables.

Firstly, while there is some initial carbon produced over the whole lifecycle of any form of energy, the total lifecycle emissions of renewables, for example wind power, are significantly smaller than nuclear.

Renewable energy is also considerably friendlier to the environment in other ways. For starters, nuclear power relies on uranium, which must be extracted by environmentally damaging mining. This is an ongoing process and even though uranium is currently abundant in Australia, it is a finite resource; the sun and wind, are not. (As an aside,
nuclear is less friendly to birdlife than wind farms, despite what you might hear from critics about turbines and their bird-blending properties.)

Moreover, we must consider the non-zero possibility of a catastrophic nuclear disaster. Though the reality of nuclear power is more often than not mundane, the phrase 'nuclear power' evokes a number of vivid images in the mind of the average punter. Perhaps it brings up memories of the recent Fukushima nuclear disaster, or the USSR's Chernobyl (which has dramatically and gruesomely been dragged back into the public consciousness by HBO's incredible show of the same name).

"Anyone currently arguing that nuclear is cheaper than renewables is either behind the times or lying to you."

Though most nuclear power plants function without explosions or meltdowns, these kinds of events are not entirely impossible. If one were to happen in Australia, it could affect our flora, fauna, agricultural industry, and make large areas of land uninhabitable for generations to come.

Additionally, the adoption of nuclear power creates the incredibly controversial problem of nuclear waste disposal. This waste is an issue not just for a generation or two, but for over 100,000 years. Nobody wants that in their yard! This has been a particular source of consternation for First Australians, whose traditional lands are being considered as disposal sites without proper consultation or consent.

The other key arguments for nuclear, those of price and reliability, also fall in the face of scrutiny. In short, anyone currently arguing that nuclear is cheaper than renewables is either behind the times or lying to you.

In the early 2000s it was true that nuclear was the more economically viable mode of energy production, but in the past decade the price of renewable energy has plummeted and its efficiency has skyrocketed. This trend is likely to continue as economies of scale increase the efficiency of production and the output of the technology itself. It may even soon be the case that building new renewables will be cheaper than keeping our existing coal-fired stations open.

Given that it would likely take more than a decade to open a new nuclear power station (and many fewer years to deploy comparable rapidly-decreasing-in-price-renewables), it is not a viable solution to our immediate problems and simply doesn't make sense in the long-term.

The main criticism of renewable energy is that it is unreliable; it supposedly cannot support baseload power. Though this might be one area where nuclear has some strengths, there are already plans to address this issue (like Tesla's highly effective giant battery in South Australia).

The reality is that a switch to renewables is going to require a complex reimagining of our power grid. This is not a bad thing, but it requires planning and forethought. Underlying this must be a forward-thinking vision, which our current government lacks.

Disposal of renewable technology at the end of its lifecycle is also a concern for some. This is, however, another distraction. We have the technology to recycle renewables.
governments and industry just need to invest in the infrastructure to facilitate this process.

Finally, there is an additional danger in adopting nuclear in that it could mask the inevitable need to transfer to renewable energy. Our world cannot afford to rely on fuel that comes from finite resources or that we have no real way to dispose of; nuclear is just another way to kick the can down the road for a future generation to deal with.

The insistence on adopting nuclear is another failure of imagination by conservative ideologues who are so opposed to any action on climate change (and by association renewable energy) that they would rather steer us to an outdated, expensive mode of power production instead of a safer, cleaner and more economically viable option. Switching to renewables should be on our government’s agenda simply by virtue of being the morally right thing to do in order to avoid climate catastrophe. What we lack is not the resources or technology, but the political will.

Tim Hutton is a teacher, masters student and freelance writer based in Brisbane. He writes on politics, education, media, societal issues, and the intersection of all of the above.

Main image: Steam emitting from nuclear reactors at a plant in Aachen, Germany (Credit: Classen Rafael / EyeEm / Getty)
The quiet assimilators

ARTS AND CULTURE

Denise O’Hagan

Selected poems

The quiet assimilators

Take almost any street, in any modern city
And we are there. We are the substrata of society
Ever-present, the unseen lining, the padding in the crowd.
We carry our backgrounds
Closer than our wallets, effortlessly
Yet they inform our every step, invisibly.

Because unlike our children, if we have them,
We were not born in this country we call home
But seduced by the vast air, the swaying gums
And the freedoms they implied, we chose to come.
We bought into the Australian Dream, packaging and all,
Shook off the reassuring, cloying familial ties
Jumped through immigration hoops
Applied for visas and lingered in alien passport queues
Later sealing our legitimacy in citizenship status
And all the while, getting used to new ways
Of doing things.

We have assimilated, oh God have we assimilated
Tailoring ourselves to blend in how we dress,
Our turns of speech, its intonation, and countless other ways
Or so we let ourselves believe
(Until a chance remark, 'And where is your accent from?' Undoes us in a second.)

So we try just that bit harder, and
Encourage our children, if we have them, just that bit more.

The big divide, you see, never was the traditional culprits Of language or religion (we've heard it all before),
But this: that we take nothing
For granted.

Yet a kernel of obstinance buds and grows inside us
And we feel, unaccountably and frustratingly,
Growing closer to the land we left behind

Acquiring a latent faithfulness to old ways, rituals and rhythms
Which fix themselves, like beacons in our penumbral minds,
The way we left them years, decades perhaps, ago.

And so the circle closes, leaving us
Respectable citizens of the establishment
Outside, but wavering inside

Daring, in our weaker moments, to wonder
If we ever should have come.

**A journey of sorts**

You didn't see me
But I turned back
And then for years
Every time I passed that place
I'd see your crumpled form
Wheelchaired across the courtyard
Plastic bracelet pale against your wrist,
Resistance in the set of your shoulders.

Did a lifetime spent abroad
Sliced up between three continents
And all the years of travel
(good luck *tiki* in your inner pocket)
With its attendant rituals
Of collars pressed and briefcases clicking
Inching forwards in countless check-in queues
Nodding acceptance of clunky hotel keys
Patient layers of rewritten drafts
Pencilled scribbles up and down the margin
Handshakes, boardrooms, coffee in plastic cups
Inhaling overblown officialdom
With cigarettes over too-long lunches
In that quiet way of yours - did all this
Stand you in good stead?
For this, too, was a journey of sorts.

The white gash of your hospital gown
The glow of multicolored monitors
Recording your vital functions
While nurses replenished, adjusted and tweaked
The spaghetti curls of drip lines and silver stands
With which my mother and I did hopeless battle
To ease your situation
Prompting a final, wry quip
And a chuckle from a nurse of stone:
Humour in extremis.

And on the last night
They gave you the last rites
And then we settled down
To wait.

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Messiness unleashed by the attack on Saudi oil

INTERNATIONAL
Binoy Kampmark

The Middle East is set for another murderous scrap, one boosted by the usual speculation, fear and rage that accompanies the next provocation. Saturday's attack on the world's largest oil processing facility at Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia, which was responsible for a daily output of some 5.7 million barrels, had its desired effect. There was talk about a constriction in the energy market. The commentariat on oil prices got into a tizz with a price rise of 20 per cent in Benchmark Brent crude.

Speculators got busy, concerned that a critical point in the energy supply chain had been assaulted. 'Saturday's attack on a critical Saudi oil facility,' broods the Wall Street Journal, 'will almost certainly rock the world energy market in the short term, but it also carries disturbing long-term implications.'

For one, it was audacious, executed by drones supposedly controlled by Iran-backed Houthi rebels based in Yemen. But Riyadh is also examining another possibility: that the attack was instigated by another group from Iraq using cruise missiles. What concerns the security fraternity is that, whichever group was responsible, a non-state actor has been involved in targeting vulnerable assets in the global energy chain.

Immediately, geopolitical presumptions were being made. Those responsible for the attack could not have been operating on their own volition. Some puppet mastery was involved. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo refused to swallow Iranian denials regarding the attack, or accept Houthi claims.

The forced departure of US national security advisor John Bolton, an individual not averse to retaliatory strikes on Iranian targets, had left matters uncertain. Optimists were hoping that the change would lead to a waiver of sanctions for some buyers of Iranian crude. Prospects of a discussion with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani later this month were also floated.

In all that fuss, it was conveniently forgotten that Pompeo remains a bellicose hawk of some determination. He might have been well on cue managing Trump's inconsistent scripts, but he remains a devotee of pre-emptive action and retaliation. In his view, there
is only one state responsible for the attacks. 'We call on all nations to publicly and unequivocally condemn Iran's attacks. The United States will work with our partners and allies to ensure that energy markets remain well supplied and Iran is held accountable for its aggression.'

In another tweet posted on Saturday, he accused Iran of being behind some 100 attacks on Saudi Arabia 'while Rouhani and [Iranian Foreign Minister] Javad Zarif pretend to engage in diplomacy'. He ruled out Yemen as a base for the assault. Iran had 'launched an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply.'

"The Houthis have always been seen by Washington as play dough companions of Teheran, never genuine rebels."

Even in the absence of being briefed with evidence, the Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, US Representative Adam Schiff, was already adamant on the hidden hand: 'I think it's safe to say that the Houthis don't have the capability to do a strike like this without Iranian assistance.'

All of this has the hallmarks of danger. Previous US administrations have been cavalier with using stretched, and in some cases doctored, evidence, to justify military action. The region still labours with the evidentiary fantasies that drove the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, one filled with extravagant assessments on Saddam Hussein's capabilities regarding weapons of mass destruction.

The dangers of misreading, actual or unwitting, also extend to the cognitive failings of US foreign policy in the Middle East. The Houthis have always been seen by Washington as play dough companions of Teheran, never genuine rebels, set on asserting Shiite control indigenous to Yemen. Similar errors of misreading have been made in Afghanistan regarding the Taliban, and the Viet Cong in Vietnam: local factors are discounted in favour of external, geopolitical interference.

The condemnation of Iran for the attacks also has the effect of deflecting from the atrocities and war crimes being perpetrated on the state by the Saudi-led coalition. (The Houthi rebels have not been averse to their own bloodletting in this regard, albeit lacking equivalent arms and material.)

The campaign has been well supported by western armaments, a point made in leaked documents from the French Directorate of Military Intelligence in April this year. The documentation also revealed assistance supplied by the US, France and the UK in targeting, a damming point in a conflict marked by the destruction of schools, mosques, hospitals and critical infrastructure. Such arms have also been transferred, in breach of agreements with Washington, to a range of factions fighting in Yemen distinctly opposed to Western states, including Salafi militias and al-Qaeda linked groups.

The signals from the White House remain erratic. White House adviser Kellyanne Conway claimed that the attacks may not have helped; nor did they spell an end to a potential meeting between Trump and Rouhani at the UN General Assembly. The fear here is that Trump might yield to the jingoistic advice of such figures as Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, who has openly suggested that the time has come 'to put on the table an attack
on Iranian oil refineries'.

Dr Binoy Kampmark is a former Commonwealth Scholar who lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne.

Main image: Stock photo of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Credit: 3dotsad / Getty)
Don't look away from climate change

MEDIA

Neve Mahoney

In my life and my work, I deal with deadlines. I need to write to deadline and I set deadlines for other writers. I joke (but it's very true) that I couldn't get anything done without a deadline. I love deadlines.

But when I read the expected deadlines for climate change to become catastrophic, these points of no return meant to frighten us into action, all I can feel is dread.

In the past few years, we've become more familiar with the concept of eco-anxiety (also known as climate anxiety or solastalgia). This is a sometimes debilitating anxiety people get when engaging with climate change, sometimes triggered by news articles about climate change. I'm pretty sure I have a low-level amount of it. I think in some ways it would be hard not to. I'm already an anxious person, and I have to engage with the most up-to-date information about climate change for my job.

Every time I need to read an article that deals with climate change, I can feel a tightness in my body. It's a physical response, the churning in my stomach and my shoulders hunching over, as though I'm trying to protect myself from the information. I read it anyway, focusing on the quality of the writing and the strength of the argument. Sitting in my office chair, I feel a little like the dog meme who says to himself, 'this is fine'. The overwhelming temptation is to not think about it too hard. I'm an avoider and procrastinator by nature, so this falls straight into my bad habits. But climate change is also, for all my privilege, becoming difficult to avoid, at least without employing some serious cognitive dissonance. It creeps in when I walk through my suburb and notice that each year the wild freesias are coming a bit earlier. I think about it when I am at an airport, and instead of wondering about where all the people are going, I think about all the jet fuel that those planes will be using.

There are, of course, many people who don't have the privilege of thinking about climate change selectively. The real people who are, or soon will be, directly and adversely affected by climate change and the ways we pollute our planet: the people who don't have enough food and water, the people who live in smoggy cities, the people who live in cities or countries threatened by natural disasters, melting ice and rising water levels. Climate change is already disproportionately affecting the most marginalised. Australians are becoming more worried about climate change, but can still be stuck in a Western tendency to separate the environment from humanity, and by extension, see climate activism as less important or pertinent. But in many ways, environmental justice
is social justice - we are all coexisting and implicated.

"It is hard to keep confronting the realities of climate change. Our minds are literally fighting against us to do so."

From 16 of September, media organisations from around the world will be participating in Covering Climate Now, an initiative started by Columbia Journalism Review and The Nation to emphasise the emergent nature of climate change in the lead up to the United Nations Climate Action summit on the 23rd of September. Eureka Street will also be taking part, publishing a week’s worth of climate change coverage. We will have articles that talk about nuclear power and politics, explore what sovereignty might mean when countries no longer exist, list ways we deny climate change is happening, and how consumerism factors into all of it. The writing we have commissioned is in different styles and tones, but underlying in all of the works is a sense of urgency.

The word deadline has a brutal history. The term comes from the American Civil War, and according to Merriam-Webster, it meant a ‘line drawn within or around a prison that a prisoner passes at the risk of being shot’. There's a stark literalness to the word - cross over this point, and you are dead.

It is hard to keep confronting the realities of climate change. Our minds are literally fighting against us to do so, and it's important to check in with ourselves about our mental health, take steps to manage our own self care and talk to others about how we're feeling.

We do, however, still need to keep engaging with it. It could look like taking part of the Climate Strike on the 20th of September. It could be learning how to fix things you would normally throw away or join your local climate action group. Maybe it'll be reading Covering Climate Now stories. The learning and talking and protesting is all part of getting through this. We have a deadline to work to.

Neve Mahoney is Assistant Editor of Eureka Street and a student at RMIT university. She has also contributed to Australian Catholics and The Big Issue.

Image: Woman looking at her phone screen with a worried expression (pxhere)
A rogues gallery of casual climate denial
ENVIRONMENT
Vivienne Cowburn

From overly sheltered baby boomers to millennials too fatigued with the state of the world to care if another glacier dies, the reality of climate change can be a lot to handle. Sometimes ignorance is the more appealing option. Here's a snapshot of the people living with their heads in the sand, employing tactics including pessimism, cognitive dissonance and deflections to stay where they are.

Brett the Small: It's understandable that Brett feels powerless. He'd always thought that by 2030, he'd have kids, a spouse and a mortgage. In addition to his nuclear family, Brett also gets to look forward to climate catastrophe - not that he feels he has a say in the matter. 'Climate change isn't really something the average person can do something about. It's really up to other people to fix it, like scientists, corporations and the government. There's not really a lot I can do.' Even though he's right that reducing carbon emissions genuinely requires work on an intertwined corporate and political level, Brett has never heard of activism or completely underestimates what it can achieve.

Alice the Glossy: Unlike Brett, Alice understands that successfully reducing carbon emissions is something that everyone can work towards. While she understands that everyone can get involved in the fight against climate change, she misinterprets the real priority for reducing carbon. 'Look, I'm not really prepared to go zero-waste to reduce my carbon footprint. Or go vegan. It's just too hard for the average person to commit to.' Alice has illustrated a problem (e.g. how consumers are blamed for corporate misdeeds) but glossed over the problem.

Brenda the Meteorologist: Brenda sees all of these bizarre weather events and has a rational explanation: 'The climate is meant to change. It's natural for there to be increased cyclones, increased frequency and duration of droughts as well as losing entire glaciers. This kind of change is normal. That's what the weather does.' Maybe it's self-deception, maybe it's not understanding the difference between climate and weather.

Derek the Doorstep: While he finds it bewildering that the summers have been hotter than usual, Derek's not completely convinced that the climate is changing on an unprecedented scale. All the scary things about climate change that pop up in his
Facebook feed (e.g. news of dead glaciers, melting ice sheets and starving polar bears) seem to be happening in another part of the world. The Arctic is a long way away from Derek’s house, so it doesn't seem like climate change is on his doorstep - until it is.

Debbie the Radioactive Straw Man: In the face of calls for sustainability and reducing carbon emissions on a national scale, Debbie is gobsmacked that lefties don't tolerate the idea of nuclear power. 'You've got nuclear power all wrong, it's nothing like Chernobyl or Fukushima! Aside from all the toxic waste and radiation, there is truly no better low-carbon energy source!' You can keep dreaming if you think that Debbie also approves of wind and solar being decent low-carbon energy alternatives.

Rupert the Clean: Rupert thinks that the solution to all the carbon generated by burning coal is simple. 'Ever heard of clean coal?' Rupert reckons that clean coal has a reduced carbon footprint and that it's actually healthier for humans. While he’d never spread it on his toast (or live near places where it's burning), he's happy to parrot how great clean coal is until he's blue in the face.

"Undaunted by the words of a 'deeply disturbed messiah', Andrew spends more time criticising a teenage girl than listening to actual scientific experts."

Jenny the Canary: Jenny has a bone to pick with renewable energy, more specifically the people who would see it supplant the use of coal-fired power. 'It's not like the alternatives are any better,' she scoffs. 'Look at wind turbines: loud, ugly, and they're only effective at killing birds!' Her interest in avian welfare stops at black-throated finches or the droves of birds that die in heatwaves.

Andrew the Belligerent: When it comes to our changing climate, Andrew feels that the issue doesn't lie with the planet being on fire, but rather with Greta Thunberg's approach to confronting the people best equipped to take action. 'She should shut up and stay in school. Why should we listen to her? She's no scientific expert.' Undaunted by the words of a 'deeply disturbed messiah', Andrew spends more time criticising a teenage girl than listening to actual scientific experts.

Isabelle the Distracted: Rather than remember that she's not personally responsible for most of the carbon, Isabelle channels her ecological guilt into a range of deflections. Her life is a constant cycle of deflecting unnecessary guilt ('At least I'm not as bad as those people who drive a Hummer or people who eat red meat every day') and pondering over it a bit too much ('I left my metal straw at home today, I'm the worst person in the world!')

Scott the Working Class Hero: Despite never having worked in a coal mine or having any friends that went to public school, Scott is adamant that lowering carbon emissions by cutting coal power isn't worth compromising the economy. 'It'll financially ruin regional communities if we don't support coal mining. I know it looks like global warming is doing some crazy stuff, but it's not worth cutting jobs and growth for the working class because you don't like coal.' Even though Scott only interacts with the working class when he gets his Mercedes serviced, it's nice to know that he's thinking of others.

Peter the Joyful Pessimist: Peter likes to deflect any relevant discussion of his problems and insecurities with enthusiastic nihilism. 'Ate a smashed avo today, guess who won't be able to afford a house deposit!' His cynicism is unwavering and at times
endearing, but Peter's not willing to hold an in-depth discussion of the reality of climate change. 'Yeah, the polar bears are starving, but what a mood, am I right? The Reef's getting pretty messed up by the rising temperatures, but I'm definitely more dead on the inside, lmao!'

Vivienne Coburn is an eclectic writer and ardent coffee snob from Brisbane. Her work has been featured in Junkee, Ibis House, PASTEL Magazine and on her mum's fridge. She is also the host of 'Spookzzz' on 4ZZZ (102.1 FM). You can follow her on Twitter @pearandivy

Image credit: Getty Images
Green consumerism is part of the problem

ENVIRONMENT

Jacinta Bowler

With climate change an ever-looming anxiety, whole industries have sprung up dedicated to help alleviate the stress. Tote bags. Metal straws. Existing companies are trying their best too: clothing retailer Zara has announced that 100 per cent of the fabrics it uses will be sustainable by 2025 while Apple has said it has plans to eventually stop mining.

All of this looks great on the surface, but it doesn't help the underlying issue: We are still buying way too much stuff.

Australia - as a rich, developed nation - buys a huge amount of product. In 2016, Australian households spent AUD$666 billion on general living costs, including AUD$20.4 billion on clothes and fashion alone.

The UN Alliance has estimated that the average consumer is buying 60 per cent more clothes than 15 years ago, but those clothes are only kept for half the time. This is mirrored in a number of other industries including electronics - we are buying more, and using it less. And at the end of these products' life, most of this isn't recycled or reused - instead it ends up in landfill, and we dig up more resources to create more products.

So, how do we lower our resource footprint? And will doing so crash the whole economy?

Dr Ed Morgan, a policy and environmental researcher at Griffith University, explained to me over email that it's possible, if hard, to imagine a sustainable society, because it means a shift of lifestyle and economic systems, which we are currently so stuck in we can't imagine any alternatives. 'But no one in a monarchy could imagine being in a democracy!'  

The first step is buying less stuff, and what we do buy needs to be used many times. Think a well-used mug instead of a disposable coffee cup.

"Businesses - even those pushing more 'sustainable' products - have no incentive to sell
less, and therefore are always inherently part of the problem."

The second step is significantly harder. Experts call for the creation of a circular economy. This is a system where everything we make and use can be reused, repaired, remade, and recycled. No products are 'new' so much as remade from other products. This would heavily reduce waste, and use significantly less resources to produce these 'new' products.

To do this, our phones, clothes, and even our buildings would be designed to be easily repairable and recyclable at the end of their life.

Despite all the talk of sustainable fashion, electronics, and products, we are still far away from making this a reality. Our products are made to have a short lifespan. Every year there's a new model of phone, and even one that is a few years old is seemingly obsolete. The rare earth metals inside them are ending up in the trash instead of being reused or remade.

Despite companies like Apple saying otherwise, once the latest product is broken (or we've moved onto the next thing), it's still likely destined for the rubbish heap.

And on top of that, according to geologist Oliver Taherzadeh and environmental researcher Benedict Probst, the idea of 'green growth' is a red herring. They argue that green consumption is still consumption, and while we can make a small difference as individuals, the big difference will be through government regulation.

Businesses - even those pushing more 'sustainable' products - have no incentive to sell less, and therefore are always inherently part of the problem.

So unfortunately, as good as a metal straw or reusable cup might look, it's part of the problem unless it's encouraging us to buy less, and reuse, repair, and recycle the products we currently have.

Jacinta Bowler is a science journalist and fact checker living in Melbourne. Main image credit: olindana/Getty
Australian unis failing Hong Kong students

INTERNATIONAL

Sangeetha Thanapal

On 31 March 2019, protests in Hong Kong began over an extradition bill that would severely limit Hong Kong's freedoms and civil liberties. The city has been in a state of turmoil for months and some of that unrest has spilt over into other countries that host a large number of Chinese students.

Australia has about 17,000 international students from Hong Kong. Many of these students share the same political views as their brethren back home, which was clear by the number of student protests in universities in Brisbane and Sydney as well as by the general Hong Kong (HK) public in the Melbourne CBD over the last few weeks.

Each of these protests has been met with violence and anger by international students and Chinese nationalists from the People's Republic of China (PRC). At the University of Queensland (UQ), the HK students were attacked. At the University of Sydney, its Lennon wall - which has long been a symbol of HK's pro-democracy Umbrella Movement - was torn down. More troubling is the accusation by the editor of student newspaper Sin Hoyt that these actions were taken not just by Chinese students, but specifically Chinese students within the students union - whose job is to protect student freedoms.

This is a story that is repeating itself in other parts of the world. At the pro-HK protests in Toronto, Chinese nationalists blockaded traffic with their luxury cars, sending an unsubtle message about Chinese wealth and power. In Vancouver, mainlanders called the HK protestors 'useless teens all raised by prostitutes' and again used luxury cars to signal their superiority over HK. In New Zealand, a HK student was shoved to the ground by mainland students. The Lennon walls in both UQ and at the University of Tasmania were torn down - in the middle of the night by masked men.

There has been little to no reaction from Australian universities in dealing with this besides the usual platitudes. HK students might not have many rights back home, but they do have rights in the Western democracies they are living in. The violence against peaceful protestors not just in HK but in other countries where HK students are exercising their basic rights is unsettling. Yet the response by universities all over
Australia has been taciturn at best.

Chinese money is a large reason for the reticence of these universities to take decisive action against those who would violently trample over the rights of other students. At a time where funding for public universities is dropping, many universities here depend upon international students to keep the lights on. A whopping one third of these students are from the PRC. It is understandable that universities are unwilling to threaten their cash cows by angering current and possible future students.

There is also the problem of how to deal with this issue without descending into Sinophobia. Australia has a long history with anti-Chinese sentiment and it is difficult to address these issues without adding to them, especially in a climate where international students are often scapegoats for all the problems within our education system. At the same time, respected researchers who write about the Chinese state and its growing influence on our politics are accused of racism, even though their research has been validated in recent months.

"The attack on Hong Kong students and the intimidation of protestors are all tactics straight out of the CCP's handbook, but carried out on international soil."

Any measures to hold these students responsible cannot play into the hands of xenophobes, but universities also cannot allow racism to be weaponised as a tool for PRC students, whose actions are openly supported by the Chinese government, to elide accountability. This is clearly a heightened situation where extreme sensitivity is required.

The violence and refusal of Chinese students from the PRC to even allow a different viewpoint to flourish reveals the same ideologies and behavior of the Chinese state. The PRC students and other Chinese nationalists seem to be a microcosmic reflection of the larger PRC state, obsessed with 'One China' and unwilling to allow for any narrative that challenges the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

But what is most worrying is that these students behave as if they are back in China. The attack on HK students, the intimidation of protestors etc. are all tactics straight out of the CCP's handbook, but carried out on international soil. That Australia (and Canada, and other Western countries where this is playing out) are democracies where people have rights does not seem to matter to mainlanders.

These thugs - for what else are we to call them? - show no respect for the countries they live in, or the fact that they are guests here. Their money, and the knowledge that the universities they attend depend on this money, has allowed them to think they can do as they wish with no consequences.

This has serious implications for our democracy. If students and other nationalists from the PRC think their money allows them to get away with disrespecting democratic standards of behavior, what is next?

HK students and their rights to protest need to be protected, a thought echoed by Greens leader Richard Di Natale when he called on the government to give them safe haven, but at a time when even children born on Australian soil are in danger of being deported, it
seems unlikely that HK students will be extended special protections.

We are seeing an unprecedented flex of muscle from the Chinese state, a warning not just to HK but to people all over the world who dare to challenge Chinese hegemony. This threat is aimed at all of us but universities seem to be ground zero for it. How these universities deal with PRC students - and how willing they are to do the right thing despite the threat of financial drain - may very well set the stage for how countries deal with China itself in the future.

Sangeetha Thanapal is a writer and social media activist engaged in anti-racism work in Singapore and Australia. She is the originator of the term 'Chinese Privilege', which situates institutionalised racism in Singapore. She can be found at @kaliandkalki
Robodebt at the vanguard of government power grab

AUSTRALIA
Kate Galloway

As the government plans to roll out cashless welfare cards beyond the trial locations, and attempts to garner support for drug testing of welfare recipients, a Monash University report reveals that those on Newstart have significantly poorer health outcomes than the general population. Although the government proclaims its policy objectives are to get Australians off Newstart and into work, those who do move off Newstart and into work are relentlessly pursued under the government’s discredited robodebt policy.

Despite the Prime Minister’s invocation that those who ‘have a go will get a go’, robodebt shows no such idealism. The program, operating since mid-2016, matches Centrelink data with data from the Tax Office to reveal 'inconsistencies' between income declared to Centrelink with that declared for tax. However, Centrelink is paid fortnightly, and tax is declared as an annual sum. The program therefore averages annual taxable income to compare against Centrelink payments. The effect is that even if you earned nothing for six months while correctly collecting Newstart, the amount you earned in the next six months is averaged over the entire period to make it look as though you were collecting Newstart payments to which you were not entitled. The department automatically generates letters demanding that the former social security recipient prove the calculation to be incorrect. As these calculations span back as far as nine years, it is usually all but impossible to prove the calculation wrong. A debt notice then issues, followed by pursuit of debt collectors, and ultimately tax returns are garnisheed putting alleged debtors in a position where they just cannot win. Tragically, over 2030 deaths have been reported following the issue of debt notices to recipients who simply cannot cope with the often false accusation. The government affirms this dystopian program, claiming that it is ‘working as intended’.

Early in 2019, Madeleine Masterton, a robodebt recipient, brought an action against the government, challenging the validity of the program. That matter settled before going to trial when the government waived the debt. A second challenge has since been mounted by Deanna Amato. Miraculously, and just before the matter was due to be heard last Friday, the government discovered that the debt of $2,754 was incorrectly calculated. The correct calculation of debt was under $2.
You read that correctly - two dollars.
The government has agreed to refund the money it garnisheed from Amato’s tax return but has refused to pay interest. Further, and in contrast to the first action, the
government has agreed that the matter can still be heard. This will therefore be the first time that robodebt will be tested in the courts.

"The misapplication of government power affects us all, whether we are personally in the firing line or not. Once government power advances unchecked, society itself becomes out of balance and government exists solely to uphold its own power."

It would be surprising that anyone would condone fraud against the government. However, the government's staunch defence of the robodebt system is disproportionate in myriad ways.

There is little evidence that there is overpayment anywhere near the extent 'uncovered' by robodebt. The fundamental - and deliberate - flaw in its calculation makes it impossible to determine whether the program has uncovered overpayment or not. Additionally, job seeker allowance amounts to only approximately 6 per cent of total government expenditure on welfare and social security - a relatively insignificant part of the Australian budget. It is somewhat puzzling that the government expend so much energy pursuing dubious 'debts' when it could be tackling far greater financial burdens. Welfare fraud is also not the rampant problem it is made out to be, and social security fraud prosecutions have reduced in recent years. The robodebt system, however, operates outside the framework of fraud offences, by manufacturing a debt, using unconscionable, and likely unlawful, means to do so. Of particular concern are allegations of Centrelink employee daily targets that remove the notion of 'human services' from the work of this government department. The department head denies the whistleblower allegations.

The government's persistent mantra of 'have a go, get a go' pitting 'lifters' against 'leaners' turns into a lie when government effectively punishes those who move from Newstart into employment. A policy genuinely in support of moving into employment would not seek to capitalise on the ambiguity of accounting in the year of transition from welfare to work - which is effectively what robodebt does.

And the government is misapplying its power in multiple ways. Instead of proving that a recipient owes a debt, it has reversed the onus of proof so that recipients need to prove that they were not entitled to payments - often many years down the track. In an attempt to defend itself, the Department of Human Services (DHS) released personal information about one recipient who publicly criticised the program. And it can hardly be said to be behaving as a model litigant in the two legal challenges: the first, in settling before trial and doing so again.

While all of these factors are examples of an erosion of government responsibilities to promote civil society and good governance, it is perhaps the last of these that causes most concern. The misapplication of government power affects us all, whether we are personally in the firing line or not. Once government power advances unchecked, society itself becomes out of balance and government exists solely to uphold its own power.

Yet the government is aware of its power grab, shown by recent revelations that robodebt could be used to target 'pensioners and other sensitive groups'. It is obviously weighing up the political cost of going beyond the vulnerable and relatively powerless groups it has already targeted. If we do not stand up to this erosion of due process, it will eventually reclaim us all.
Kate Galloway is a legal academic with an interest in social justice. 
Main image credit: Outside of a Centrelink office (Scott Barbour/Getty images)
Harris statue marks a turning point for AFLW

ARTS AND CULTURE

Erin Riley

The photo has it all: the outstretched leg, the eyes looking up, the arm across her body. Her braid and her ponytail. Her tattoo, her taping, her orange boots. Grace and poise and ferocity and talent and work. If only for these things, it would have been a perfect way to reflect the messy, complicated beauty of the first few years of the AFLW.

But it was the response to the photo of Tayla Harris that elevated that moment from the representative to the iconic. While fans of the women's game praised Harris' skill and little girls looked at it and thought 'that could be me someday', an army of online commenters decided to make derogatory comments about Harris and her body. Many of the comments were sexually explicit. Harris herself later likened some of the comments to sexual abuse.

Instead of removing the comments, the 7AFL Twitter account removed the photo. The reaction from the women's sport community was swift and strong. The problem was not the photo; it was the comments. The photo went back up. The point was made. It felt like a turning point. Female athletes and their supporters were saying no, we will not stand by while this happens. That sexual harassment has no place in our game. That female athletes should be able to do their jobs without abuse. Speaking days later, Harris said that the response made her feel empowered. She went on to reflect on the significance of the moment: 'It's not about me now, it's about a much bigger picture,' she told RSN Radio's Breakfast Club.

So when NAB commissioned an artist to create a statue to display in Federation Square during this year's AFL finals series, it shouldn't have been a surprise that they picked this moment. The 3.3m statue was unveiled by Harris herself this week. And yet, the decision was mocked and questioned by many.

AFL Hall of Fame legend Malcolm Blight said the decision to display the statue was 'ludicrous'. He went on to comment that it was 'the most mystifying decision I've seen in my life thus far. Mystifying! She is getting a statue for being trolled online... One of the most mystifying things I've ever heard of."

Blight's comments were reflected by other football fans. Those who argued that Harris should not have been honoured at all, and those who argued there was a long line of those who should have come before her.

"The statue was commissioned to represent a significant era in the history of Australian
rules football: when the women's game emerged from the margins it had been confined to for a century and took its place firmly in the spotlight."

These types of comments overlook an obvious point, and speak to something more profound about the place of women's sport in our cultural space. The point is that the statue was not erected to honour Tayla Harris herself of her achievements. Harris herself made this very clear when she spoke on the unveiling. The statue is symbolic of the seismic shift that has happened in the last five years as women's professional Australian rules football has established its place, as well as the importance of the photo and its aftermath. Harris said, 'it's more than me just kicking football, it's a message, it's a turning point in Australian society, so it's something I can be personally proud of.'

By framing the statue as being about Harris 'being trolled', Blight has cast Harris as a victim who is being honoured for her victimhood. It is not the fact Harris received this abuse that is worth remembering; it is the fact that she and the community around her stood up and said no more.

The statue was commissioned to represent a significant era in the history of Australian rules football: when the women's game emerged from the margins it had been confined to for a century and took its place firmly in the spotlight.

It is the significance of this that Blight and his fellow critics fail to understand. For a century, women have been relegated to places on the margins in sport in Australia, and particularly in its oval-ball codes. The AFLW isn't just a fun way to spend a couple of hours on a late summer weekend (though it certainly is that too). It is the next step in a generations-long struggle. It is women asserting their right to be in this space and refusing to let that right be conditional on being abused and harassed.

That change is more significant than the contributions of any 300-game player. It's more important than any Brownlow medal or premiership. It's so much more than any single on field achievement, or any career-worth of them. These women didn't just excel in a competition: they worked to make the world a fairer place, a place where all kids can grow up with the dream of playing footy for their favourite team.

If that's not worth a statue, I don't know what is.

Erin Riley is a sports writer and historian from Sydney. Her writing is focused on understanding the role sport and its institutions play in Australian life.

Main image: Tayla Harris unveiling the statue of her kick in Federation Square (Wayne Taylor/Getty Images)
The lattes have been had
ARTS AND CULTURE
Geoff Page

Selected poems

The Misanthrope's Sonnets
1.
I'm not too fussed about the news
or panellists with stupid views.
I've been around. I've paid my dues.
I like the sound of cockatoos.

I like a band that plays the blues
but not the ones you ply with booze.
I like straight ales, not boutique brews.
There are some drinks that I'll refuse.

Don't book me on a boating cruise
unless it's on the River Ouse.
I'm not a fan of blue tattoos.
They say I'm deaf as Billy Hughes.

These days I don't get billets-doux.
Why is it all my wives were shrews?

2.
I've done some things I don't excuse
but feel no need to grace the pews.
I don't like damsels and debuts.
My name's no longer in Who's Whose.

I'm told these days I don't amuse.
It's true, at times, I've done a fuse.
I'd rather talk in ones than twos.
By three p.m. I need a snooze.

And, yes, I've broken some taboos.
My mother told me: 'Don't use youse'.
Love 's not a word I'm prone to choose.
My car's a brute on kangaroos.

A man should need what he pursues.
I don't read books. I read reviews.

Teenagers
Not unlike the teenagers
they were so long ago
they feel a shyness and a fear
taking off their clothes.

Gravity has had its say
regarding shape and size.

Their bodies are a narrative
permitting no disguise.

There's been no rush - or just a bit -
the lattes have been had.

They're caring less each minute should
the children think them mad.

No longer shy between the sheets
their craziness makes sense.

The universe proved complex but
they've found the present tense.

**Half-decent**
You're well away if you are born
in some half-decent age and country

half-decent parents too
a chromosomic Y of course

half-decent stretch of education
a few small early disappointments

to stop your being smug
while swimming in the larger pool

rejoicing in your genes
a kid or two with someone who

is not too short on humour
recurrent gigs or sweet career

with something extra done quite well
and recognised as such

four score years of this and more
with nothing too drawn-out or dreadful

waiting at the end
quietly off to bed one night

and stone-cold in the morning
not long undiscovered
the send-off you don't live to see
fairly well attended

your few half-decent anecdotes
tellingly re-told

and maybe some half-decent god
to check you off the roll

**Imperial**
The bakery is Vietnamese.
A little shy and smiling,
the woman at the counter
tells us later she
has recently flown in to help her
hard-pressed aunt and uncle.

She doesn't quite let on from where
(Hanoi? Old Saigon?)
I think about the French and how

all empires in their lazy turn
contrive without intent
the one small thing that locals take to.

And so in Kandos, New South Wales,
this half-deserted morning,
we're ordering a warm escargot

and risk the cappuccino.
From all that talk about *la gloire*,
a taste for well-made pastry

and fairly decent coffee.

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Geoff Page is based in Canberra and has published 22 collections of poetry, two novels and five verse novels. His recent books include *Gods and Uncles* and *PLEVNA: A Verse Biography*. 
A different approach needed for youth justice

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

The Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass has published a damning report of the use of isolation for children in Victorian justice centres. It draws attention to the loose regulation and opaque practices of isolation as a response to disturbance, to the vulnerability of the young persons against whom it is used, the high proportion of Indigenous children among its victims, and to its proven harmful impact on children. Those acquainted with the administration of juvenile justice in Australia will find nothing new in the report. Therein lies its scandal.

The use of isolation, however, is only one expression of a more fundamental and enduring attitude governing the response of the public and of governments to misbehaviour by children and young men. It is the emphasis on control and punishment, whose preferred form is imprisonment. This has harmful effects not only on children but on young men between 18 to 25. The forthcoming National Justice Symposium will examine more effective ways of responding to this group.

At present, the proportion of young men from 18 to 25 imprisoned is higher than that of the general population. Indigenous young men between those ages far more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous. Over half the young men held in prison in Victoria reoffended within two years. This proportion is higher than the national average. These numbers suggest that the focus on imprisonment is a tried and failed solution. It is always difficult, however, to think beyond what has always been done. In boys schools when corporal punishment for misbehaviour was routine, teachers and parents who had known only that system feared that the boys would be uncontrollable if that sanction was removed. Control and punishment shaped the way people imagined the relationship between teachers and pupils.

When the relationships within schools changed and misbehaviour was treated through engaging with boys in other ways, however the schools became a better environment for learning and boys could be held accountable for their actions in ways that helped their growth into adults. Cooperative and therapeutic relationships are more effective than punitive relationships.

Many factors urge removing young men from the adult justice system and providing special procedures for dealing with them. In the first place, studies of brain development have shown consistently that our brains do not develop fully until the age of 25. Before that young men have less understanding of the consequences of their actions and are
more influenced by their peer group and less independent in making decisions. Today, too, young men are older when they make stable commitments through long term partnership or marriage. It is more common for them to live at home with their parents into their mid twenties. They have deeper connections to the community and have proved to respond better to programs of rehabilitation than older men.

"Young adults are distinctive, and they need to be treated distinctively."

The emphasis on control by punishment has failed. It does not control offending or reoffending, but only increases the level of public anxiety about offending. It is a vicious circle. There are better options which are designed around rehabilitation. They respect the physical and psychological development of young men and build on their changing conditions in society. They recognise young men from 18 to 25 as a distinctive group of emerging adults, so distinguishing them from other adults. Because they are distinctive, and they need to be treated distinctively. Experience and reflection has led many nations to treat emerging adults under juvenile law with their own distinctive judicial processes. The goal of such processes is rehabilitation, so building on the relationships with families, good role models and work places in the community, and complementing them by strengthening connections with society through education. Through these experiences emerging adults can be accountable for their actions to the people whom they have hurt and contribute to the community.

The current plethora of news reports about the catastrophic effects of the treatment of prisoners considered normal by those administering it are testimony to a wrongheaded penal philosophy. New directions are needed, not least in the treatment of emerging adults.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.
Main image: Prison wall barbed wire fence with blue sky background (Photo by josefkubes/Getty Images)
The Unquiet Australian

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.
Australia's true relationship with Timor-Leste

INTERNATIONAL

Sophie Raynor

Scott Morrison posted a selfie on Facebook this week. A goofy, grinning snap, showing the prime minister leaning in together with Taur Matan Ruak, his Timorese counterpart. The pair were celebrating the 20th anniversary of Timor-Leste's vote for independence: an occasion for which Morrison made Australia's first prime ministerial visit to Timor-Leste in 12 years, and during which he publicly trumpeted a 'great friendship' between the neighbouring countries. If you'd been casually scrolling through Facebook or listening to news headlines, you'd have absolutely believed him.

But in sunny Dili, it was a different story. Two days before Morrison's cheery selfies, a hundred Timorese students and activists had marched behind white banners, littered with signatures, proclaiming, 'Solidarity with Witness K and Bernard Collaery', referring to the former ASIS agent and his lawyer, who remain trapped in a drawn-out, obfuscated and unpopular prosecution for revealing information of Australia's spying on Timor-Leste in 2004 for oil wealth gain. Shirley Shackleton, the 87-year-old widow of murdered Balibo Five journalist Greg, sidestepped security guards at Morrison's airport arrival in an attempt to hand him a 4,000-signature-strong petition calling for the charges to be dropped. The Timorese activist group, Movimento Kontra Okupasaun Tasi Timor, or the Movement Against the Occupation of the Timor Sea, MKOTT, were handing out white T-shirts adorned with Collaery's face; you saw them worn days later on the streets of Dili. Just five months into government, Morrison's attorney-general Christian Porter greenlit the Witness K prosecution - a unique charge requiring his approval, and one which Timorese activists told me in Dili he could easily withdraw. 'It's not his fault,' explained Tomas Freitas, an organiser with MKOTT. '[The bugging] happened under the previous government. Christian Porter can withdraw these charges. And we're calling on him to drop the charges.'

Sympathy from tolerant activists, grinning ministerial selfies and neat soundbites about a great new chapter belie the cruel and harrowing history of Australia's turbulent relationship with Timor-Leste: one which stretches decades beyond the 20 years celebrated by the Australian government in its cheeky '20 together' branding for Morrison's anniversary trip, and one which continues to disadvantage Timor-Leste to this day.

However, Australia's relationship of espionage in Timor-Leste starts long before Witness K. In the late 1930s, a nervous Australian government held secret meetings to discuss...
Japanese activities in the region with then-Portuguese Timor governor, Alutarro Neves da Fontoura. In 1940, the governor - a quiet ally and sympathiser to the British, despite Portugal's neutrality during World War II - granted Qantas permission to make fortnightly stops in Dili on two of its routes, and conceded similar permission to the Japanese to trial flights between Dili and Palau. Australia openly used the flight authority to spy on the Japanese: in early 1941, Qantas managing director Hudson Fysh told the airline's Dili-based agent to 'make it [your] special duty to watch and report on Japanese activities'.

"Soundbites and selfies belie the cruel and harrowing history of Australia's turbulent relationship with Timor-Leste."

The arrival of Australian troops to Timor to counter the Japanese in February 1942 technically constituted an invasion of a neutral territory - one which resulted in a Japanese victory and the deaths of between 40,000 and 60,000 Timorese bystanders. As Australian troops were evacuated out of the ravaged territory, they dropped leaflets reading, 'Your friends do not forget you'.

Timor-Leste, which had not previously been of interest to the Japanese, was thrust into the war by Australia's intrusion and remained under militant Japanese occupation until 1945. Former Timor-Leste president, prime minister and resistance leader Xanana Gusmão has accused Australia of 'sacrificing' Timorese lives during the war and has attributed Timor-Leste's suffering to Australia's act of self-protection.

Australia's priority was clear: self-protection at all costs, no matter the sacrifice required of Timor-Leste. And it's a theme that continues today. Whether using the island as a base for open espionage, inciting the Japanese invasion and flying to freedom leaving the Timorese behind, or shamelessly prosecuting the men who told the truth about oil spying for commercial gain from a fragile new nation in the early weeks of independence - Australia's neighbourly relationship with Timor-Leste remains one of taking anything it can, not of sharing like friends.

Australia's seemingly unquenchable oil thirst similarly shows a different side to the grinning face Morrison put on at his Dili events.

The seeds of that Witness K prosecution were buried decades earlier, when oil was first discovered in the Timor Sea in the 1960s. Woodside hit the jackpot in 1974 when it discovered the Greater Sunrise oil and gas fields, about 450 kilometres north-west of Darwin - confirming the region's riches, and first arousing Australia's curiosity about the ownership of the multi-billion-dollar resources buried beneath the seabed - and then a desire to get all they could.

In Dili on Friday, Morrison stool squinting in the hot sun outside Timor-Leste's government palace - the very building his predecessors authorised the bugging of, in order to learn more about Timor-Leste's negotiating position and strategy - to announce the formal ratification of a permanent maritime boundary treaty between Australia and Timor-Leste in the Timor Sea.

The treaty is the result of a previously untested mandatory conciliation process brought to the Hauge by Timor-Leste after Witness K's spying revelation, and permanently closes the Timor Gap. A small hole in a 1972 boundary treaty between Australia and Indonesia that agreed a boundary following Australia's generous continental shelf. This treaty left a crucial gap right near Greater Sunrise, because Timor-Leste's then-colonial power Portugal - a proponent of a median line boundary, not the seabed line that would have delivered Greater Sunrise to Australia - wasn't invited to negotiate.

The gap, Australia's then-ambassador to Indonesia, Richard Woolcott, said in August 1975, 'Could be much more readily negotiated with Indonesia... than with Portugal or an independent Portuguese Timor'.

Four months later, Indonesia invaded Timor-Leste, commencing a brutal and bloody 24-year-long occupation that declassified Australian diplomatic cables prove Australia knew about in advance, but did nothing to stop. Between 100,000 and 300,000 Timorese
people died during the occupation - which was tacitly endorsed by Australia's diplomatic silence - and the country suffers the effects of brutality and over-exploitation today. Indonesia did indeed prove easier to negotiate with, and Australia gleefully arranged a series of resource-use agreements for the disputed area - unlocking the wealth of the Timor Sea. But no money flowed to Timor-Leste.

'We are committed to your sovereignty and prosperity, and today open a new chapter in our great partnership,' Morrison said on Friday at his government palace press conference - addressing all of Timor-Leste, and a host of flown-in Australian journalists. 'One founded on trust. On shared respect. On shared values. One strengthened by talking together, walking together, working to solve problems together.'

The polished lines mark a clear departure from the actions of previous Australian governments - and an inconsistency with the Morrison government's own work. It remains responsible for Australia's continued inaction, manipulation and deceit with regard to Timor-Leste.

Australian parliament took 16 months from the boundary treaty's ratification to sign, receiving approximately $6 million per month from a 10 per cent share in an oil field now found by the treaty to belong to Timor-Leste. The government has said it won't repay the money.

Morrison sidestepped the Witness K question, saying it was a domestic matter before the courts. Shackleton, the petitioner, told the AAP in Dili: 'What is it that the Australian government is so afraid of? If Collaery goes to jail we will lose our freedom, we will lose our democracy.'

While the deployment of the Australian-led peacekeeping force to Timor-Leste in 1999 secured the country from militia violence and helped start a process of rebuilding, Australia capitalised on Indonesia's invasion and prioritised oil greed over Timor-Leste's sovereignty. For all Morrison's claims of a 'great friendship' and his government's celebration of '20 years together', the truth is that Australia's history with Timor-Leste is far longer and more fraught that he'd have you believe. It's an unjust, manipulative and exploitative relationship characterised by Australia's greed and short-sightedness. And it's a truth Australia must wake up to, lest it suffocate in its own stories.

Sophie Raynor is a freelance writer just returned home to Perth after two years living in Dili.
Main image: Protesters hold up signs during Anti-Australia protests on December 6, 2013 in Dili, Timor-Leste. (Photo: Pamela Martin/Getty Images).
Day inquest highlights threat of police profiling

AUSTRALIA

Celeste Liddle

For years, within feminist circles, I have seen countless memes and articles about the measures women allegedly take to make themselves feel safe while being out at night. How women keep to well-lit areas. How we hold our phones constantly or pretend to speak on them while walking so that potential attackers think we're connected to someone. How we lace our keys between our fingers just in case we need a weapon at a second's notice.

I've never been able to relate to this for two reasons. The first is that statistically, I know the least safe place for me as a woman is at home. The domestic and family violence studies point this out time and time again, yet still the social messaging to women is that we need to be at home with our male 'protectors', living half-lives. I also know that I am statistically less likely to become the victim of a public attack than any sole male walking around the streets.

The second reason is this: as an Aboriginal woman walking the streets at night, I am significantly more concerned about being brutalised by those charged to keep our streets safe - the police - than I am about any fellow lone wanderer on the streets. Particularly if I am protesting on the streets. Or if I have had a few beers and I cross their path while trying to make my way home. I have felt this way for years. The case of Tanya Day reinforced to me that my fears were well-founded.

The inquest into Day's death in police custody has been going on while I have been overseas, but it has not been hard to follow news coverage of the courtroom proceedings and feel incredibly distressed and disturbed by what has been coming out of it. It appears a lot of people with power made disastrous and uncaring decisions, yet not a single one of them believes they made the wrong call. Even though their decisions, their potential racial profiling of an Aboriginal woman on a train, led to them locking her up in a police cell, which in turn led to injuries from which she passed away 17 days later.

Take, for example, the V/Line conductor who called police after encountering Day sleeping on the train. Shaun Irvine described her as 'unruly' even though on his arrival, the arresting police officer confirmed she was asleep and made little fuss. Irvine noted Day failed to produce a ticket even though she did, in fact, have one. So how exactly was
a sleeping woman with a ticket considered 'unruly' enough to warrant police intervention, rather than perhaps medical attention or even just a watchful and caring eye for the rest of the two hour train journey? She did, after all, have family waiting to collect her at the end of the journey and take her home safely.

Irvine didn't believe he had shown unconscious bias based on race and didn't recall whether he had identified Day as an 'Aboriginal woman' in his call to police despite the police confirming that he had identified her as such. As his final line of defence, Irvine stated that he'd had childhood Aboriginal friends and therefore did not believe that he held any bias against Aboriginal people.

If I had a dollar for every time I'd heard the 'Aboriginal friend' defence, I would have been able to retire 15 years ago. Indeed, I am certain that at least one, or possibly 100, racist people who have encountered me in the span of my lifetime would have invoked me as their 'Aboriginal friend' in a bid to deflect their racism. Yet despite their alleged proximity to me, all - from distant relations to passing acquaintances - have still managed to be pretty damn racist.

"It is through their actions in the most awful circumstances that all Victorians, not just Aboriginal people, will have the chance to arrive home safe to their loved ones without fear of criminal prosecution just because they've had a drink."

The footage of Day's time in that Castlemaine police cell was played at the inquest. Day's family fought to have this footage released to the public so they could themselves see the truth of Day's final moments. It is harrowing viewing.

A news report following the court viewing noted Day had fallen after getting up to get herself some water. It made me wonder why the ticket conductor hadn't simply just brought her a bottle of water and then come back to her when she was more able to communicate effectively. Once, on a beach in Thailand, after I'd stupidly decided that a bucket of Thai whiskey and Coke was a great idea, a kindly British woman saw me looking worse for wear and gave me a bottle of water. I drank it thankfully and then retired to my hotel room when I was ready to do so. Being an Aboriginal woman, I have to wonder if a similar kindness would be shown to me here in Victoria, or would bystanders have called the police and allowed me to be arrested and carted away like they did Tanya Day?

Then there are the police actions. Such as the police not telling Day she had been arrested. Such as them choosing to arrest her in the first place rather than taking her to the hospital for medical monitoring. Such as them failing to conduct proper periodic checks on her welfare despite knowing she had injured herself and essentially engaging in victim blaming by stating that she was in 'an undignified position for a lady'. Such as them telling her son that she'd had a simple 'knock to the noggin' whilst they allowed her to haemorrhage for three hours. Finally, such as them stating that they would do nothing different. Really? They believe their actions were correct and they are fine living with this entirely preventable outcome?

Just prior to the inquest, Premier Dan Andrews took to his social media page to announce his government's commitment to repeal the criminalisation of public intoxication. While I found it commendable that this commitment has been made, and made with reference to both Tanya Day's inquest and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, it
is appalling that it's been nearly 30 years since the royal commission recommended these laws be abolished and the government is only acting on it now - after a grieving family used their grief to take to the streets with petitions in the hope of preventing other Aboriginal families from going through the same.

In those 30 years, how many other Aboriginal people have been locked up purely for intoxication in Victoria? How many Aboriginal people have criminal records simply because they had a drink one night? How many others have lost their lives in police cells across the country under similar circumstances? Why has it taken nearly 30 years for a Victorian government to admit that Aboriginal people have been disproportionately targeted by public drunkenness laws?

To watch the footage of Day's family fronting the media to explain what happened to their mother and what they hope will come out of this inquest is both inspiring and heartbreaking. It is through their actions in the most awful circumstances that all Victorians, not just Aboriginal people, will have the chance to arrive home safe to their loved ones without fear of criminal prosecution just because they've had a drink. I hope that at the end of the day, Tanya's beloved family receive some sort of justice from these proceedings. They, and Aunty Tanya Day, deserved so much better, yet through their activism they have left a legacy in the name of their mother which we all should acknowledge and be proud of.

Celeste Liddle is a trade unionist, a freelance opinion writer and social commentator. She blogs at Rantings of an Aboriginal Feminist.
Inside US and China's dodgy economies
ECONOMICS
David James

One of the ironies of the intensifying tariff war between America and China is that neither of the two giants seems to have a viable economic model. Both countries' systems are based on dodgy financial engineering and printing money, or just inventing new types of money out of thin air.

First, China's problems. There are two currencies in China: the yuan and the renminbi. The latter is the domestic currency, for internal use, and the former is the external currency, which is pegged (fixed) to the US dollar, and creates the 'hard' currency that allows China to trade with the rest of the world.

Since 2002 the internal supply of money, renminbi, in China (called M2) has increased from $US1 trillion to about $US30 trillion, in an economy of about $US12.5 trillion. That is an unprecedented printing of money, without parallel. It was mostly poured into investment, especially infrastructure. About 40 per cent of China's GDP is investment, compared with less than ten per cent in most developed economies.

It has led to an extreme level of debt. Loans in China are estimated to be a staggering 400 per cent of GDP, with about 45 per cent thought to be bad. China's banking system, in other words, is insolvent, at least in conventional capitalist terms.

The extraordinary printing of renminbi has been largely masked by China's stockpiling of yuan (US dollars) as it ran large trade and current account surpluses. But that is beginning to dry up. China just recorded its first current account deficit for 17 years. This writer was surprised to hear at a recent webinar that China does not have the money to fund its much-publicised Belt and Road initiative, and will be turning to multilateral organisations for funding. China's stock of yuan, hard currency, could be drying up.

Ordinarily, the banking crisis would mean imminent economic collapse, and it may yet have that result. But China has one big advantage: the government owns most of the land. That has been crucial for China's strategy of de-industrialising the West, especially in heavy industry. In the West, businesses have to pay for the land, or pay rent (which is often more important than lower labour costs). In China, the land, and often the
electricity, has come free, so it has been a no-contest.

China's public ownership of land is a once only, get out of jail free card for the ailing banks. The property can be sold and used to recapitalise the banks' balance sheets. But it can only be done once.

"The price of the China bargain is now clear and many will be rethinking their strategy, to the extent that they can."

America is just as dodgy. Money supply (M2) is more modest at $US14.87 trillion, but there has also been a ludicrous level of money printing. When the global financial crisis hit in 2007-2008 the balance sheet of the US Federal Reserve was $US779 billion; when President Trump took office it was $US4.5 trillion. That printing of money made anyone who owned assets rich, while wage earners became poorer: it destroyed America's middle class and has greatly weakened its economic resilience. There is also the absurd $US500 trillion in derivatives (gambles derived from conventional transactions like shares, currency trades and bonds), which continues to distort America's entire financial system. Wasting almost $US1 trillion on the military also does not help.

The future of capitalism, in other words, is looking pretty grim, especially when it is considered that Europe is moribund and Japan has been in recession for almost three decades.

At the heart of the problem is a trend that is yet to be dealt with, and which requires a new way of thinking about economics: the massive increases in efficiency of the production of goods because of technology and better management systems. It has resulted in massive oversupply in many primary and secondary industries. At the same time, the global fertility rate has halved, which means much fewer new consumers coming through.

It has changed the demand-supply balance globally. Companies have been desperately searching for new sources of consumption as their home markets age. That is why they were so keen to get into China, with its large consumer markets. China has used that, skilfully drawing Western companies in by enticing them with access to their customers and then stealing their intellectual property.

That game is over. Foreign companies in China cannot take profits out of the country; the capital account is completely closed. The price of the China bargain is now clear and many will be rethinking their strategy, to the extent that they can.

It is why the intensifying tariff war between America and China is not just about some taxes on traded goods, it is about turning global supply chains away from China. It represents the beginning of a split of the world into two spheres: the West (North America, Japan and Korea, Europe, Australia) and the East (China, Russia, Central Asia and Africa).

The problem is that neither of these 'sides' will have a way to deal with the imbalances between supply and demand; the dearth of new consumers. In the end, it has not been a competing alternative ideology that is bringing down capitalism, whose rationale is that supply and demand can always be mediated by the price system. It has been
technological advances.

David James is the managing editor of businessadvantagepng.com. He has a PhD in English literature and is author of the musical comedy The Bard Bites Back, which is about Shakespeare's ghost.
Donor discrimination comes down to trust

AUSTRALIA

Wilson Huang

In 2017, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service began a review on its sexual activity deferrals. You would not be alone if you have not heard much since. As of June 2019, the Blood Service announced that it received the report from its external committee and would consider different options before its submission to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

Currently, the Blood Service's guideline defers people for 12 months based on its list of risky sexual activity. This includes men who have had sex with men (MSM) including anal or oral sex with or without a condom. This policy, however, has been accused of being discriminatory, an assessment with which I would agree.

The general principle behind blood donation deferrals is to either protect patients from infectious diseases or to protect potential donors from any possible complications. In the case of sexual activity deferrals, it is the former. In order to protect patients, the Blood Service tests all blood donations for HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. Syphilis and HTLV are also tested for, unless a donation is only being used to create plasma products.

The primary argument for the MSM deferral is that gay and bisexual men have higher levels of HIV transmission and therefore pose a risk to patients. In a FAQ on the MSM deferral, the Blood Service suggests HIV as being the primary reason for this deferral. However, there is one point where the FAQ is somewhat misleading.

The Blood Service mentions that while it tests all donations for HIV, it cannot rely on testing alone. This is due to its window period, the time when a recent infection cannot be detected. However, what is not mentioned is the length of the window period for HIV.

Both HIV and Hepatitis C are normally considered to have maximum window periods of three months. In particular, fourth generation antigen/antibody HIV tests detect infections in 95 per cent of people by four weeks. However, these are nowhere near the 12-month deferral period the Blood Service has in place.
By this understanding, it would not make sense to have a deferral period of more than three months, or four months if you were being very cautious. If you could be certain of the accuracy of these tests, then regardless of the number of positive results, there would not be any increased risk to the blood supply.

"This not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but ignores current HIV trends."

However, the issue seems to be with trust. A shorter deferral period or even an individual risk assessment would not negatively impact blood supply if risks were managed correctly and potential donors gave accurate information. If everyone who donated blood correctly identified when their last sexual contact was, and it was at least three months ago, then you could be sure that their test results were accurate.

Yet, it seems that gay and bisexual men cannot be trusted to give accurate information about their sexual history or to understand their sexual risk. This not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but ignores current HIV trends. Rates of HIV infection between gay and bisexual men have decreased 30 per cent over the last five years.

Blood donations are regularly needed, and the Blood Service frequently asks for more donors. Given this, it makes no sense to keep the current 12-month sexual activity deferral or any deferral based on infection risk such as recreational drug use for longer than their actual window periods.

Instead, the Blood Service should strive to educate potential donors on the importance of giving accurate information and testing for infections beforehand. This, in turn, could ensure the safety of the blood supply while increasing the number of donors. These discriminatory policies do nothing for anyone, and their change is long overdue. The Blood Service and TGA have ample opportunity to do end this discrimination.

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