Contents
Annam Lodhi
Personal is political for feminism in Pakistan ................................................................. Page 3
Dejan Jotanovic
The rising corporatisation of queer identity ........................................................................ Page 6
Irfan Yusuf
Delhi's spirit resists divisive ideology ................................................................................... Page 9
Andrew Hamilton
The ecology of words ............................................................................................................. Page 11
John Falzon
Solidarity in the face of a neoliberal inferno ...................................................................... Page 13
Fiona Katauskas
Lovesick .................................................................................................................................. Page 16
David James
Be wary of a cashless future ................................................................................................. Page 17
El Gibbs
Disability RC reveals important medical history ................................................................ Page 19
Chris Wallace-Crabbe
That pastoral edge ................................................................................................................ Page 22
Marnie Vinall
What does it mean to be a settler? ....................................................................................... Page 24
Susie Ray
We all need to know about endometriosis ...................................................................... Page 27
Celeste Liddle
Adam Goodes, in retrospectives ......................................................................................... Page 30
Tim Robertson
Dawkins delusion: the legacy of New Atheism ................................................................ Page 33
Andrew Hamilton
Stop bombarding us with military metaphors ..................................................................... Page 35
Bree Alexander
Economic stimulus to fight poverty ...................................................................................... Page 37
Fiona Katauskas
A monumental error .............................................................................................................. Page 39
John Warhurst
Church governance needs to walk the walk ..................................................................... Page 40
John Lochowiak
Embracing First Nations voices in the Church ................................................................ Page 42
Earl Livings
No stranger now

Andrew Jackson
Climate justice includes secure public housing

Jeff Sparrow
The problem with taking politics out of climate change
Personal is political for feminism in Pakistan

INTERNATIONAL

Annam Lodhi

‘Oh, so you are the feminist type’, declared my editor while I made a point about not wanting to cover an event that objectified women in 2015. It felt like an accusation. Was being a feminist wrong? I didn’t understand what was so negative about being a feminist in a country where womxn’s rights, a vastly discussed topic, was hardly implemented. Where atrocities towards womxn have never decreased and where even social media has become an unsafe place for us.

Indeed, feminism is a foreign theory for Pakistanis. A theory most believe is anti-state and against Pakistan’s norms and culture. It is unfortunately normalised for Pakistani womxn to suffer.

But, in 2018, feminists of Pakistan were hit with a ray of hope. While still not very well understood the concept, feminism has now become a household topic. People are asking questions, and the youth were ready with some answers.

All it took was the courage of some womxn to gather like minded womxn and claim the streets of Pakistan’s largest metropolis, Karachi. At ‘Aurat March’, womxn chanted slogans, raised posters against patriarchy and spoke for the rights of the suppressed.

Aurat March is an annual mobilization arranged by independent organizations, mostly in the urban centers of the country like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. It is done to mark International Women’s Day.

This year will be the third consecutive gathering in large cities, with support from small cities, somewhere the march will be held for the first time.

‘This and many other posters from the march did what has not been possible for the longest time, which was to get everyone to talk about feminism in Pakistan’s context. How do we perceive feminism? What are our issues and how will we be dealing with them?’

While I was not in attendance during the first march, I vividly remember my social media feed being flooded with analysis of a poster which read in Urdu, ‘warm up your food yourself’ the very next day.

The poster, seemingly not harmful, sparked an unprecedented debate on social media and within households. ‘These women are running away from their tasks and want to sit
and eat off men,’ said one of the many comments I read. On the other hand, womxn felt heard for the first time in years in Pakistan. A household chore, never given a second thought, was indeed an inculcation of the patriarchal mindset.

Pakistani men largely do not help in household chores, the womxn of the house, however young, tired or annoyed they are, have to handle the kitchen and the chores. Their life revolves around pleasing the men in their house. Making tea is chore given to girls as young as ten. Would it harm anyone if men could carry their weight around the house? The poster, to date, sparks a debate in various forums. This and many other posters from the march did what has not been possible for the longest time, which was to get everyone to talk about feminism in Pakistan’s context. How do we perceive feminism? What are our issues and how will we be dealing with them?

The mobilisation is growing every year, but the hate for it, and for women supporting it, is also growing. In November 2019, a call for volunteers for the march was raided by young men, whom I like to call the ‘incels of Pakistan’. The post on Facebook received over 10,000 comments, most graphic in nature, calling for the murder and physical assault of womxn organising and attending the event.

More recently, to promote the Aurat March 2020, raise awareness and pay ode to the women of Pakistan, organizers, and volunteers were installing murals across the country. One such mural was being painted in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The 'Do Akeli Larkian' (two lone girls) mural was being made on the outer wall of private property, it depicted two women, one is a hijab the other without it, standing under a sky with eyes like stars and would have had an Urdu poetry couplet when complete. “…..mural envisions a Pakistani society where women are explorers, wanderers, and creators of a just and beautiful world,” said the Facebook post about the mural.

Three days into the painting, when the mural was almost complete, it was halted by 10 to 15 men from Lal Masjid (a nearby controversial mosque). The men were accompanied by the senior superintendent of the Islamabad police. The artists were threatened, the mural vandalized with slogans and the faces of the women on the walls were also blackened. They claimed that such a mural would spread obscenity in the city. Since February, a minimum of three petitions have been heard in Pakistan's high courts against the Aurat March congregations and calling for a ban on the march across the country.

One such petition was dismissed by the Lahore High Court on 3 March. The petitioner claimed that ‘various anti-state parties are funding the march with the sole purpose of spreading anarchy in public' and also termed the march ‘against the norms of Islam' with a 'hidden agenda' to spread 'vulgarity and hatred'. The court stated that marching was the right of every citizen of Pakistan and the march cannot be stopped.

To discuss the topic, a cleric, a senior journalist Marvi Sirmed, and a known writer and director Khalil-Ur-Rehman Qamar were called on a talk show. Qamar is known for his chauvinism. Qamar was agitated because of the viral slogan ‘Mera Jism Meri Marzi’ (My Body, My Choice) which was held at the Aurat March in 2019. Qamar was seen abusing Sirmed for chanting the slogan, body shaming and name calling her.

The snippet of the show went viral in minutes on social platforms and the hashtag #MeraJismMeriMarzi was seen trending. Celebrities, activists, and others came in support of Sirmed and against the vile comments from Qamar. Following the backlash, Pakistan’s biggest media group, GEO announced the suspension of Qamar’s contract until he apologizes to Sirmed.

Organisers of the march insist that the country’s mindset will change, slowly but surely. As feminist scholar Dr Rubina Saigol wrote, ‘feminism in Pakistan has come of age as it unabashedly asserts that the personal is political and that the patriarchal divide between
the public and the private is ultimately false.’

Annam Lodhi is an Islamabad-based digital journalist. Her interests lay in investigating and researching the dynamics of social and women's issues and the ever-changing world of social media in Pakistan. She is currently working on a research paper describing the incel culture of Pakistan. She tweets @AnnamLOdhi

Main image: Muslim woman raising fist in the air (Getty images)
The rising corporatisation of queer identity

AUSTRALIA

Dejan Jotanovic

Each year Mardi Gras shimmies onto the Sydney circuit. Aside from a mild shuffle in its entertainment schedule and a growing awareness of its environmental impacts, the formula remains relatively stable. A parade, an always surprising number of floats, awful EDM remixes of pop songs, a week’s rent in ticketed parties and angry online queers looking to mobilise around their own idea of proud authenticity.

Each year we debate all the same things. The history of Mardi Gras and the broader value of Pride. Should police get to march, and is it a march or a parade? Who invited the bankers and why does L’oreal have a float?
And each year I wonder why we keep having the same conversations. Perhaps it’s pointing to a loss of history in our community’s consciousness. Maybe the legislative gains and a creeping societal tolerance are creating an environment of political complacency. Do people just not care enough?
In her debut book, Queer Intentions, writer Amelia Abraham notes that these discussions reverberate into the global queer politic. London’s Pride sees several alternatives with UK Black Pride, Peckham Pride, Queer Picnic and the newly minted Trans Pride March, promising a more diverse, less sanitised day of resistance. New York City, the home place of Pride marches, saw a fierce competitor in 2019 with Reclaim Pride, ‘the annual Pride parade has become a bloated, over-policed circuit party, stuffed with 150 corporate floats. This does not represent the ‘spirit of Stonewall’ on this 50th anniversary year,’ wrote the organisers. Even Berlin, a city sweaty with kinks and politics, has the Dyke March, Radical Queer March and (the late) Kreuzberg Pride as distinct surrogates to the more commercial CSD Berlin.
Pride is politically messy. When you stir together an alphabet soup of people all of which have other intersecting identities (race, class, religion, political allegiance), you will invariably plate up a political mess.
And the 2020 Sydney Mardi Gras dished quite the menu.

‘While I can certainly empathise with the desire to feel proud in one’s identity against all odds, that inclusion shouldn’t come at the expense of the exclusion of the most marginalised. Pride shouldn’t come at the expense of another’s fear.'
The NSW Police Force arrested three members of the ‘Department of Homo Affairs’ after protesting against the Liberal Party Float. They tweeted that they were ‘disappointed with their actions, which did not comply with the conditions of the event or the spirit of the celebrations.’ Senior journalist Andrew Taylor in The Age reported that Mardi Gras ‘began in 1978 as a protest against discrimination.’ Both claims are laughably false. ‘The first #sydneymardigras in 1978 was not “a protest against discrimination”, it was a march in solidarity with victims of police violence. The main chant was “stop police attacks on gays, women and blacks.”’ tweeted activist and lawyer, Paul Kidd. Queer activist/author Sally Rugg also provides an excellent rundown.

Indeed, the first Sydney ‘mardi gras’ was organised as a protest to commemorate the NYC 1969 Stonewall Riots. Parallel events were observed in cities such as LA, Chicago, London, Stockholm, and West Berlin. Gay pride began from anti-police sentiment. It was with this logic that the Auckland Pride organisers banned police from marching in their uniforms at the 2019 event. ‘It became really apparent that there are members of our community that didn’t feel like they could be included in Pride while the police were marching in uniform because the uniform’s a symbol of an institution that has a long way to go by their own admission,’ said Pride chair, Cissy Rock. The decision looked to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable, those disproportionately targeted by police: M&amacr;ori and the trans community.

The decision splintered Auckland’s Rainbow community. Many maintain, like here in Australia, that Pride is about ‘inclusion’ and that queer police should have the right to feel proud in their uniform. It’s a pride hard fought for. In 2018 the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission reviewed the Victorian Police for workplace harm on LGBTI employees. The review found that gay men in Victoria Police were six times more likely to have been sexually harassed by a colleague, with homophobia, transphobia and a hypermasculine and heteronormative culture driving hostile behaviours.

While I can certainly empathise with the desire to feel proud in one’s identity against all odds, that inclusion shouldn’t come at the expense of the exclusion of the most marginalised. Pride shouldn’t come at the expense of another’s fear. Institutionalised forms of power shouldn’t be privileged over those at the very fringe. But what disturbed me perhaps the most was this relentless and emotional bondage to one’s professional identity and a sense of pride. Why did our queer police want to march as police so damn badly? For that matter, why did bankers, lawyers, Uber employees feel so strongly about their corporate identity?

Much gets written about pink-washing and the corporatisation of Pride. Gay sandwiches and camp mouthwash are merely two examples in a growing suite of products marketed directly at queers by companies looking to exploit our identities for extra profit margins. They target us because they know we’re hungry for representation in a society that has long invisibilised our existence.

‘When we decide to march with corporate interest — flaunting our professional identities on the world’s gayest stage — we march as the foot soldiers of capitalism. We fundamentally define and reduce our worth as a community to our working lives and the conditions that our employers set for us.’

Yet not all representation is created equal. The private sector’s growing interest in diversity, inclusion and equality isn’t a result of understanding our human rights or an appeal to our humanity. No, it’s because they finally see value in us as both workers and consumers.

This year ANZ truly took the cake with their #lovespeech campaign: a Google chrome extension which replaced derogatory language with rainbow and unicorn emojis — called The Hurt Blocker, can you believe? — and a campaign video showing queer youth repeating all the stuff that gets yelled at us on the street.
When we decide to march with corporate interest — flaunting our professional identities on the world’s gayest stage — we march as the foot soldiers of capitalism. We fundamentally define and reduce our worth as a community to our working lives and the conditions that our employers set for us. This is at the antithesis of a liberation movement that spat in the face of respectability, looked to forge its own road, and found pride in identities as resistance to the state and its status quo.

The literal translation of Mardi Gras from French is ‘Fat Tuesday’, marked as the last opportunity to devour rich foods before the beginning of Lent. Pride is therefore a coming together of community, a breaking of bread to nourish ourselves and one another with that messy alphabet soup.

Yet, I fear that our hunger is being exploited, that our identity is conditional to our consumption and employment, and increasingly our Pride walk can only be done purse first.

Dejan Jotanovic is a freelance writer based in Melbourne, whose words spin around feminism, gender theory, queer history, policy and pop culture. Flick him at a tweet at @heydejan.

Main image credit: Sydney Mardi Gras 2020 person holds up sign with the colours of the Aboriginal flag reading, 'Our lives matter' (Getty Images/Brendon Thorne)
Delhi's spirit resists divisive ideology

INTERNATIONAL

Irфан Yusuf

In late February President Donald Trump visited India for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As he departed Delhi, India's capital, Trump praised Modi's India for its commitment to religious tolerance and freedom.

Officially India is a secular country. Indian secularism is not about excluding religion from public life. Instead, it seeks to ensure that as far as possible the State remains religiously neutral. Past presidents of India have included Hindus, Muslims and other denominations. A Sikh has held the post of Prime Minister. Independent India's first education minister was a Muslim cleric. One of its recent defence ministers, George Fernandes originally trained to be a priest before becoming a train unionist and spoke 10 languages.

Of all Indian cities, Delhi is perhaps the most multicultural and multi-confessional. Founded in around 730 AD, Delhi was the capital of empires of nominally Hindu and Muslim persuasion. The Mughal Muslim king Akbar had a Hindu wife who scandalised the Court by maintaining a small Hindu temple in her quarters. Akbar started his own religion, known as Deen-i-Ilahi, and conveniently appointed himself as prophet. Syncretism has always been the religious order of the day in India's capital, home to people from many ethnicities and faiths.

It is also my ancestral city. My family are known as Dilli-wala (Delhi native). So many of my elders in Sydney were also Dilli-wala's, regardless of their religion. No matter where they settle, whether Karachi or London or LA or Sydney, a Dilli-wala remains a Dilli-wala. My parents are both in this category even though one identifies as Pakistani and the other Indian.

Of course, Delhi is no utopia of religious tolerance. From time to time, conflict and violence do erupt. My father grew up in a district called Gurgaon during the 1940's. When rioting broke out following the 1947 Partition and the influx of distraught Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan into Delhi, my paternal grandfather decided to take his family to a town on the border of India and West Pakistan. I’ve heard stories of my young father and aunt travelling in a horse drawn carriage attempting to flee across town and avoid Hindu mobs. Their trusty driver, himself a Hindu, led them to safety and even lied to one mob that stopped the party that his passengers were Hindus.

'Syncretism has always been the religious order of the day in India's capital, home to
people from many ethnicities and faiths.'

In this case, as with so many others, it is outsiders who all too often initiate the trouble. Violent extremes don't sit comfortably with Delhi natives. The most recent violence was in response to a campaign of peaceful protest against changes to India's citizenship laws. These changes would grant citizenship to asylum seekers from neighbouring countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh) except Muslims. This could well affect ethnic or sectarian minorities such as Hazara Shia refugees fleeing violence and terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Such a blanket ban takes little account of the nuances of various intra-Muslim tensions, traces of which also exist in India itself. The laws are clearly designed to be an exercise in confessional engineering aimed at marginalising India's largest minority community.

The quiet peaceful protests were met with extremely hostile and provocative rhetoric from political leaders of Modi's party. The ideological leanings of this party are often referred to as Hindutva. This divisive ideology seeks to transform India into a Hindu theocracy. Among its early followers were the assassins of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi. Hindutva regards India's Abrahamic communities - Muslims, Christians and Jews - as a foreign cultural and religious force that must be kept in check. Christian communities, including those in southern India whose presence goes back over 1,700 years, are often targeted for their social service work among poor low caste Hindu communities.

It would be most inaccurate to imagine the recent Delhi pogrom to be a wire between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. A young Hindu boy tells of how his Muslim neighbours protected him and other Hindus from attack. A Sikh man and his son transported around 100 Muslim women and boys to the relative safety of a Sikh neighbourhood. Sikhs handed Muslim men Sikh turbans to wear so as to confuse Hindutva thugs. Meanwhile the Catholic Archbishop of Delhi called on all Christian churches to provide shelter to Muslim and other citizens fleeing the violence. The divisive and foreign Hindutva ideology goes against the culture and spirit of Delhi. Recently Modi’s party were trounced in local elections. Almost always the violence and hatred is caused by outsiders and resisted by the Dilli-walas. But with an openly sectarian government in power, the locals might yet become infected.

Irfan Yusuf is a Sydney based lawyer and blogger.
Main image: Protests against CAA in New Delhi (Wikimedia commons)
The ecology of words
ARTS AND CULTURE
Andrew Hamilton

Ecology is an expansive word. There is an ecology of just about everything. That is to be expected because ecology has to do with the relationships between things. The word itself is derived from the Greek oikos, meaning a house or home. In itself a house is a thing of wood or brick, with windows, doors and perhaps chimneys. A house becomes a home through the relationships that give it individuality. Of these the photos on the walls, the toys in the corridor, the books on the shelves and the cat fur on the rug are signs. Home is an ecological word.

To speak of the ecology of words can be illuminating because it evokes the wide range of relationships that words embody. It also invites us to ask broad questions about the healthy and unhealthy use of words in a society.

Words are most often judged by their relationship to truth and falsehood. Good words tell it as it is; lies deny what is real; weasel words draw attention away from it. The relationship between words and reality, of course, intersects with relationships between people. A society in which lies and evasions of truth dominate is by definition a sick and polluted society.

Words are also related to persuasion. If used attractively, words can confirm or change our view of reality. If used unattractively, they can prejudice people against truth. The political and church world, in which words are used mostly for exhortation, evocation and other forms of persuasion, offer good and bad examples of the use of words. The sermons of St Augustine and of Lancelot Andrewes and the speeches of Cicero, for example, are persuasive because their words are beautifully matched to the reality they evoke. You will be able to supply enough of your own examples of sermons and speeches that are delivered without conviction, hose the listener with superfluous information, rely on stale language and images and try to intimidate rather than attract assent.

In the public world words are often carefully deployed to persuade people to ascribe to brutal and destructive untruths. When referring to people who have sought protection from persecution, for example, politicians were able to prejudice the public against them. They made them accept the need to treat them brutally by associating them with criminality, cheating, infection, invasion, terrorism and threat. Similarly, in order to evade the responsibility of the State to people who are disadvantaged, they represent people who are unemployed and disadvantaged are portrayed as dole bludgers, loafers,
leaners and undeserving.

‘Words are not related only to rational truth and to persuasion but to the truths of the heart.’

The same crude and effective rhetorical skills can be seen in the framing of climate change. It is no accident that the people who damage the natural environment for personal profit and exploit the economic environment in order to protect their own wealth and further to impoverish people who are disadvantaged, should also ravage the ecology of words for their own ends. The exploitation of the natural and social worlds and the pollution of words run together.

Words are not related only to rational truth and to persuasion but to the truths of the heart. They carry associations with the world of the past, with similar sounds in the natural world, with music and with communities which use them. Poetry, which at its best is a filter and purifier of language, explores these relationships.

When comparing the way in which people use words we can easily miss the value of their musical ecology of words. The language of Central American subsistence farmers, for example, was often described as impoverished because it seemed to consist of a huge number of swear words liberally used and few abstract nouns. It is musical, however, rich in affective variety, has many discriminating words to describe the natural world and a wealth of diminutive and other forms to express one's perception of them. It is paradoxically rich in nonverbal communication. To return from poor rural communities to city conversation is to experience linguistic impoverishment, as well as enrichment.

Ecology is a relatively new word that has encouraged attention to the myriad of relationships that compose the natural world, an awareness of their fragility in the face of pollution and exploitation, and so to respect for them. If reflection on the ecology of words were to encourage broader attention to the variety of relationships that are embodied in words, to the fragility of language and civility in the face of manipulation and imposition, and to a treasuring of good words, it would be a happy coining.
Solidarity in the face of a neoliberal inferno

AUSTRALIA

John Falzon

In the wake of the Robodebt scandal the Coalition says it has no duty of care for the people it has unforgivably harmed instead of helping. The government’s disdain for ordinary people is not just a matter of meanness. It is a matter of class.

The Morrison government despises the working class. There is no other explanation for its behaviour. For all the 'lifters and leaners’ or 'workers and shirkers’ guff that we’ve seen over the years from this and past governments, the truth is that, according to the neoliberal worldview, whether you’re in paid work or on social security, you’re despised unless you belong to its own big money elite.

The Howard government, with WorkChoices, did all it could to make life harder for workers. As did the Abbott-Turnbull governments with their attacks on penalty rates and assorted forays into union bashing.

But the Morrison government, with its so called Ensuring Integrity bill, makes an art-form out of despising working people. In a feat of doublespeak that would make Orwell’s Big Brother regime envious, this government claims it needs to rein in unions precisely because it is on the side of workers and unions are not. It hates unions because it despises workers and unions improve the wages and conditions of workers.

The word despise is not an exaggeration. It comes from the Latin de specere, 'to look down on’. This government looks down on workers. This is why it wants workers to see each other as the enemy instead of recognising and fighting against an agenda that seeks to divide them because it despises them.

If the government did not despise workers, how else could we explain why Attorney General Christian Porter is trying to undermine the rights of casual workers to sick leave? As things stand, Australia’s high rate of insecure and non-standard work is a symptom of the push by big business to further increase capital’s share of the pie at the expense of wages. When you are precariously employed, so the dismal theory goes, you are more likely to be grateful for what you’ve got instead of fighting for more, despite the Reserve Bank’s repeated warnings about the negative impact on the economy of wage stagnation.

'With so much contempt from the Coalition government, we need to resist the wedges it seeks to drive between us.'
Note the way the Attorney General has framed the issue of sick leave for casual workers (most of whom should, by rights, be in stable employment rather than subjected to this engineered precariousness). He calls it an issue of equity between employees, citing the argument that it is unfair that one group of workers might be seen as having greater rights than the other, completely turning the truth upside down about the employer’s deliberate actions in casualising employees and stripping them of employment security and stability.

And remember when we were instructed that penalty rates were an ‘equity’ issue and that workers in receipt of them were effectively stealing the bread out of the mouths of other workers, including those who are unemployed? We were promised a jobs windfall where penalty rates were removed. And what have we got? What we were always going to get. Nothing.

One of the greatest con jobs is the line that people receiving social security payments are doing so at the expense of other working people and that we should all begrudge this because it is ‘our’ taxes that go into ‘their’ pockets. It is a perverse and cruel notion to blame working people for being unemployed or underemployed, or for living with a disability, studying, engaging in the work of unpaid caring, being ill or being older, justifying cuts to the income that these sections of the working class need to survive. So well has this lie worked in the past that we have not seen an increase to the Newstart payment in real terms since 1994. The government’s treatment of people who are unable to find work, the roll-out of the degrading cashless welfare card as a recent example, and others who need income support is further evidence of how it despises working people, seeking to set them against each other.

Racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and ageism, these too are means by which working people are encouraged to see each other as the enemy instead of uniting against the common enemy of neoliberalism and the inequality it boosts and buttresses.

Italian author Italo Calvino writes: ‘...seek and learn to recognise who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space’. Late neoliberal capitalism is like that inferno, destroying everything in its path through low wage growth, irrational handouts to corporations, the prioritisation of profits over people, failure to invest in social and economic infrastructure (including research and innovation), obscene increases in CEO remuneration, a flattening of the tax system, and unrestrained inequality. What is ‘not inferno’ is precisely what the government despises and what it most despises is what it most fears: the ‘threat’ of ordinary working people uniting together to advocate for an alternative vision for our nation, a vision that is both equitable and sustainable.

With so much contempt from the Coalition government, we need to resist the wedges it seeks to drive between us. This government, and the interests it represents, despises working people regardless of the industries they work in or, for that matter, that they are unable to find work in.

The government’s Ensuring Integrity bill is an attempt to pit workers against each other by interfering in their right of association and their democratic organisation of their unions. In this fabricated narrative, unions are the enemy of working people and workers would be better off without them.

Nothing frightens the elite more than when the despised are organised.

---

Dr John Falzon is Senior Fellow, Inequality and Social Justice at Per Capita. He is a
sociologist, poet and social justice advocate and was national CEO of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia from 2006 to 2018. He is a member of the Australian Services Union.

Main image credit: Christian Porter during question time (Getty images/ Tracey Nearmy)
Lovesick

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Love in a Time of Coronavirus

HAVE YOU WASHED YOUR HANDS?

Be wary of a cashless future
ECONOMICS
David James

We live in an era of hyper-transactionalism, whereby most of what we do is subject to the exchange of money and market pricing. Whereas in the past much of humanity was bound to a political system, now most of us are bound to a globalised monetary system. That is why a proposed change in Australia to how we use cash should receive far more attention than it does. It is not just a technical matter; it is about how power is expressed.

There is a proposal to make Australia a cashless society. The Reserve Bank has declared that physical currency will become a 'niche payment' that may only end up being used in emergencies; cheques will be phased out all together. It is, inevitably, being touted as a good thing because it will improve 'productivity and efficiency' although there is, as ever, an element of circularity here. How do we measure efficiency and productivity? With money. What are we measuring? Money.

Another possible change being considered is a ban on any cash transactions above $10,000, which would have an interesting effect on those Chinese purchases in Australia’s property market where the buyers, literally, arrive with suitcases of cash. In one sense, going cashless seems more convenient. In another sense, it is disturbing, because it means it will be possible to monitor everything we do financially — an issue that will become increasingly important. This is the era of transactions, and nearly all of us are mired in it — although Papua New Guinea is an exception. Eighty five per cent of the population, mostly in the highlands, is not in the formal economy and does not earn money. At least there is one part of the world that has escaped for now.

The hyper-transactions have many levels, the biggest of which is the cross border capital flows, which, according to the Bank for International Settlements run at over $US4 trillion a day (annual global GDP is only about $US80 trillion). That is a staggering volume of transactions; the global capital markets sit atop the earth like a giant roulette wheel threatening to crush us all — as nearly happened with the global financial crisis in 2008.

'Transactions and reality are not the same — money is only something we create — but it is all too easy to allow transactionalism to take over.'
Another level is the encroachment of transactions into human activities that were not part of the pricing system. As the economist Mariana Mazzucato quips: ‘If you marry your babysitter, GDP will go down, so do not do it. Because an activity that perhaps was before being paid for is still being done but is no longer paid.’ A great deal of what we call ‘economic growth’ is really just the monetising of things that once did not involve any financial exchange. Mazzucato notes that up until 1970, most of the financial sector’s activity was not included in GDP. Now, finance dominates.

A similar dynamic occurs when government assets are privatised, especially physical assets. Usually this is done by loading up the private entity with debt. The effect is to produce transactions for the benefit of the privateers with little or no gain to anyone else, in fact, often losses.

Journalist John Pilger has documented how this was done in Britain with hospitals, for example. America’s health system takes up 16 per cent of GDP, double the level in Australia, while providing similar or worse actual care. That means that the profiteers have found ways to create more transactions to benefit themselves without improvements in the actual services. Transactions and reality are not the same — money is only something we create — but it is all too easy to allow transactionalism to take over.

It is through this prism that what seems an innocuous proposal to go cashless should be seen. For now, escaping from the transactional matrix seems all but impossible, but with physical money a person’s activity cannot easily be tracked. That is why it should be retained; it is a sliver of freedom.

Shoshana Zuboff outlines how what she calls ‘surveillance capitalism’ treats human experience as ‘free raw material for translation into behavioural data’ then turned into ‘prediction products’ and ‘behavioural futures markets.’

That is what is occurring in consumer product markets. The intrusion is even greater in finance markets and it is only likely to get worse. At least using physical currency represents some kind of resistance.

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.

Main image: Person handing over a debit card (Getty images/Westend61)
Disability RC reveals important medical history

AUSTRALIA

El Gibbs

Over and over the last two weeks, the same words echoed. They didn't listen to me. They didn't see me. They didn't think I was worth helping.

Disabled people, and those that love them, have told the latest hearing of the Disability Royal Commission about their experiences in the health system. Neglect, abuse, violence all featured, with medical people and systems often talked about, not as caring health professionals, but as callous and cruel.

The hearing opened with Commissioner Sackville, the Chair of the Disability Royal Commission, talking about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Australia signed up to in 2009, and in particular Article 25 which states that 'persons with disabilities have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability.'

As the hearing continued, the gulf between our rights in this Article, and the reality for many people with intellectual disability was stark. People with intellectual disability die decades before their non-disabled peers, and over 400 people with intellectual disability die every year in ways that could have been prevented.

People with intellectual disability don't get access to the same kinds of preventative screenings as non-disabled people, with a major study finding that people with intellectual disability are 'eight times more likely to die from cancer in a 10-year period.' People with intellectual disability have high rates of psychosocial disability, but don't get access to treatment, and are twice as likely to be admitted to hospital.

The people giving evidence this week, opening up about the hardest parts of their lives, had clear ideas about what needs to change to make the health system work for them. The key issues that were raised during this hearing included access to health care, communication, diagnostic overshadowing, restraint, substitute and supported decision making, along with attitudes and discrimination from health practitioners and systems.

'Each story told over the last two weeks is a thread in a wider picture of a medical system that won't change.'

Kylie Scott lives in a flat in Sydney, and is often consulted for her expertise about health care needs of people with intellectual disability, giving speeches and sitting on
representative committees. She told the Disability Royal Commission how important communication from health practitioners is, such as asking short questions in plain English and being patient. She raised the importance of having ‘more psychologists for people with intellectual disability with mental health problems’ as well as people with disability knowing how to ‘find their voice and to be heard and, of course, live in the independent living as much as they can.’

Ruth Oslington gave part of her evidence in the form of a video, as did other witnesses. In the video, she spoke about being restrained, given medication against her will and subjected to multiple ECT treatments she didn’t consent to. She told the Senior Counsel, Kate Eastman, how important it is to be able to trust health practitioners. She said she needs ‘time, enough time understand complicated problems and talk to me, talk to other doctors, talk family, talk support workers if try — yes, talk when needing to say, yes, me, yes.’

Ms Oslington also spoke about what she thinks could help improve the system. ‘Education important, people — work people, mental health, medical know — yes. I think involuntary treatment problem too much, ECT against will shouldn’t — yes, yes. I think good place to live, right support to live out of hospital, people not go into hospital because need lots of support, not there.’

Erin Sheehy, and her mum Christine Regan, told the Commission about what Ms Sheehy liked to do, and about having a stroke at 25. Ms Sheehy then left the Commission hearing, because she didn’t want to hear the story about how she had been treated in hospital and beyond. Ms Regan described how hard she and her partner had had to fight to ensure that Ms Sheehy got access to the same kind of rehabilitation and therapy as any other stroke survivor would have received. When questioned, the doctor had said ‘Oh, look, she has Down syndrome. How hard are you going to try?’ Ms Regan said she ‘felt like she had been punched in the gut.’

Each story told over the last two weeks is a thread in a wider picture of a medical system that won’t change. Another witness, Professor Trollor, the UNSW Chair of Intellectual Disability Mental Health, told the hearing that these stories, these facts have been known for over 25 years.

The frustration of many giving evidence was palpable, as was the urgency. The Council on Intellectual Disability in NSW have campaigned for over 20 years for more attention to the health of people with intellectual disability. Their senior policy advocate, Jim Simpson, said ‘the fact that it has taken so long to get to that point, and the fact that there is so much more that needs to happen if we are going to address those preventable deaths, has been and continues to be a ‘national disgrace’’. For Aboriginal people with intellectual disability, the inequalities in the health system are multiplied. Dr Scott Avery, from First People’s Disability Network and Western Sydney University talked about how the language of intersectionality gave his community a vocabulary to describe something they knew all too well — ‘if you’re an Aboriginal person and you have experienced health inequalities, or a person with disability you experience health inequalities, if you bring those two things together, the inequalities that you experience are greater than either of those two larger groups if you traverse those two population groups.’

Narelle Reynolds told the Commission about the experiences of her sons, and their family, in trying to access the health care they needed. The family had experience homelessness and was trying to find support services through both the health system and the NDIS, but finding that difficult. Dr Avery’s research emphasised many of Ms Reynolds’ points — that disability isn’t separate from other parts of life, and that services for many Aboriginal people with disability are seriously deficient.

I wondered a great deal, listening to all these stories, about what it will take for the medical profession to think of us as whole humans with rights, and loves, and thoughts and wishes and hopes, instead of atomised bits and pieces they can apply their expertise to. I wondered how they can see our disabled selves as having value, when they are
taught with every lesson only to see us as broken.

‘The disability rights movement has long fought for a social model of disability to be at the heart of how we think about ourselves — what would a social model of health care look like?’

Saying the medical system runs on the medical model of disability seems self-evident, and yet that’s at the heart of much of what has been talked about in these latest hearings. The medical model locates the ‘problem’ of disability firmly in the disabled person, and the expertise to fix that ‘problem’ within the health professional and health system. The disability rights movement has long fought for a social model of disability to be at the heart of how we think about ourselves — what would a social model of health care look like?

As the formidable advocate Robert Strike AM said to close the hearings, each time we go and seek health care, we carry the trauma of our previous experiences with us. Each occasion of harm leaves scars that can dictate how we navigate the systems that have little room for how we are. That history is important, as important as the history that medical people love to take.

Different disabled people continue to work with different parts of the medical system to try to get that system to understand that we matter. People with psychosocial disability urge change, people with chronic illness talk with medical students, people with intellectual disability meet with health ministers.

Each time, they say similar things. Listen to us. Honour the way we communicate and what we know. Slow down and take the time. Believe that we matter.

El Gibbs is a freelance writer specialising in the area of disability and social services and has over 15 years experience in the community and NFP sector, as well as politics. Find her on Twitter @bluntshovels.

Main image: A woman on a hospital bed covers her face (Getty images/ Manop Phimsit)
That pastoral edge
ARTS AND CULTURE
Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Selected poems

Our testimony

Only
because
these
random
bold
friends
can

have
endured
worldcaust
poetry
will
prevent
extinction

despite
those
bodily
millions
missingly
rubbed
out

Only
because
scattery
scribbled
lines
persist
yes

we
triumph

That pastoral edge

From just up here
on the lip of mountain mileage
that pooling river mouth below, half salt but
also hill-fresh, could seem a lagoon.

On its low point, surmounting asphalt and breaking waters sits the verandaed pub, a focus once of holiday shorescape.

During the native forest fires decades of my sap ago, bluegum branches crackled and roared: like really bad melodrama.

Behind my previous bay, buried under musk and rot, there lie quaint remainders of an old woodcutters' railway,

little more now than a tangled indentation. This aromatic forest can just about swallow anything

but holidays - and December will flaunt over all that again. Kids will arrive at our sea-green seaside, garrulous as galahs.

Yes these are our saved summers, treetops noisy as perching galahs and small clouds taking it easy. No dark fin offshore today

by the grace of quaint Santa, who's hot though, in his whiskers. Is that no more than a heap of his own red clobber on the beach?

Chris Wallace-Crabbe is a Melbourne poet. His latest books are Rondo (London: Carcanet) and My Feet Are Hungry (Sydney: Pitt Street Poets)

Main image: Australian rainforest (Lisa Pratley/Pixabay)
What does it mean to be a settler?

AUSTRALIA

Marnie Vinall

In July of last year, Kurnai/Gunai, Gunditjmara, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta freelance writer Nayuka Gorrie asked on her Twitter account, 'For my non-mob followers - do you identify as a settler? If not, why?'.

At the time, I read the thread was curiosity and interest. Was I a settler? What did it mean to be a settler? I began asking my non-Indigenous friends around me what their thoughts were on the matter: did they identify as settlers? Some reacted with intrigue and were open to discussing it with me, and others reacted with strong distaste. 'No', they would say, 'I just don't like the word - it doesn't describe who I am'. More and more, I begun to see the term appear within my bubble, and understand that I, of English and Scottish ancestry, was in fact a settler too. Within my sphere, I saw the term used by non-Indigenous Australians, especially around Invasion Day.

On Invasion Day this year, Zambian-Australian singer-songwriter and rapper Sampa The Great tweeted, 'I stand in solidarity with First Nations peoples of Australia. As a settler on Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung Lands, I know the 26th of January marks the beginning of colonisation and genocide, not a day of celebration. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land!'

On the same day, Australian author and journalist Benjamin Law tweeted an image of the AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia with the caption, 'On this day, non-Indigenous folks celebrate our multicultural. Too few know Australia's always been this way. Fellow settlers: let's stop being defensive and instead use today as an opportunity to learn about the survival humanity's oldest civilisation. #AlwaysWasAlwaysWillBe'.

However, outside of the realms of Twitter, I didn't really hear the label much, as it still only seemed to be used by those in the progressive fringes of the mainstream. So, why were others rejecting it so quickly out of hand? Well, in answer to this, I believe it's due to the uncomfortable nature of the word, as it nods to the dark part of the British settlement that began in 1788, which saw genocide, massacres and the brutal treatment of Aboriginal peoples as a result. The term settler reminds us of this past, and many would prefer to ignore it than confront the shame and guilt associated with it.

'To me, the term settler acknowledges that we live in settler colonialism, which continues the systematic oppression of Indigenous and Aboriginal Australians. This is a system that
because of my ethnicity - the same as the invaders who breached the Australian shores in 1788 - I benefit from.'

Furthermore, a lot of rejection around the term settler comes from the idea that what's in the past is in the past, and all we can do is look to the future. I heard a lot of takes on the matter involving the notion that current Australians, and their parents and parents' parents, did not invade or settle here - they themselves are not settlers, simply just Australian.

There is also an argument that a lot of non-Indigenous Australians today are descendants from those who came to Australia many years after the original European settlement. But as Indigenous Canadian member of the Gwawaenuk Nation and author Bob Joseph explains in VICE, when asked how he defines settles in regards to the Canadian experience, he explained, 'When I think about settlers, there are those who came over here because their colonial governments back home said, 'Hey, there's all this free land over here if you wanna make a move, it's a land of opportunity, you can take it up for free or buy it.'

Many Australians are citizens of this nation as they, their parents or ancestors, came to Australia with the notion that the country was one of opportunity for them. All the while, the original custodians of the land were being oppressed. On my paternal side, my ancestors came to Australia in the 1800s, a time when massacres of Indigenous Australians were still extremely rife.

In fact, researchers have said that as many as 500 massacres of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples occurred well into the 20th century. Since the original settlement, the further colonisation spread, the further the massacres over the country did too. And it is colonisation that allowed my ancestors to be here whether they had a direct hand in the massacres or not.

Furthermore, the idea that the past is the past and we cannot change it continues the unrecognition in mainstream Australia of the brutality faced by Aboriginal people and the racism in which the nation is built. To me, the term settler acknowledges that we live in settler colonialism, which continues the systematic oppression of Indigenous and Aboriginal Australians. This is a system that because of my ethnicity - the same as the invaders who breached the Australian shores in 1788 - I benefit from.

Musical artist Lonelyspeck responded to Gorrie's original tweet with, 'I find it's basically always so much more productive to treat ~identity labels~ as describing processes and interactions as opposed to fixed states. verbs do so much more than nouns & adjectives'. This notion plays into how I view my own settler identity label; as not so much that I physically came onto Australian shores, invaded and settled, but rather that I am a product of the settler-colony of Australia. I live, work, form relationships, pay rent, and play on stolen land; land that always was, and always will, Aboriginal land.

Marnie Vinall is a freelance writer and copywriter in Melbourne, Australia.
She is a regular contributor of Beat Magazine and Concrete Playground, and has bylines in ABC News, Mumbrella, B&T and Globo Hobo.
Main image: Illustration by Chris Johnston
We all need to know about endometriosis

AUSTRALIA

Susie Ray

This March is endometriosis awareness month. My eight year journey to receiving diagnosis was a road paved with misdiagnoses, misinformed doctors, medical professionals disregarding my pain (some being outright rude) and poor education of gynaecological health. No one should suffer this road and, most importantly, no one should suffer it alone. Statistics show that endometriosis is very common, so chances are you know someone with endometriosis.

I have struggled to be heard by the media, by doctors and simply in everyday life when I try to talk about gynaecological health issues. I couldn't count how many times I have been shut down and told every menstruator has period pain so 'just live with it'. Endometriosis is an inflammatory disease where tissue, 'similar to which normally lines the uterus, grows in other parts of the body.'

I experienced painful periods from day one and was told by doctors it was 'normal'. But what is normal? I was unable to get of bed for about three to seven days each period. I missed weeks off school. I was prescribed higher than the recommended doses of period pain medications as well as the pill but I still struggled. A major issue with misdiagnosis of endometriosis is the normalisation of period pain. The fact that we are discouraged from talking about menstruation meant that I didn't realise what I was suffering was abnormal.

So, why can't we talk about gynaecological health openly and freely? There needs to be more accessible information and open conversations. These are lives being dismissed just because it makes some people uncomfortable.

'I felt lost, confused and mistreated for so many years. Unfortunately, my story is not unique. Studies show the average time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis is seven to twelve years.'

About a year after my first period I sought help from a gynaecologist. But she had old information on the illness and informed me that 'if you have bad periods from day one, then you can't possibly have endometriosis because that grows over time'. But this is wrong. Research on endometriosis has found that it can start during all hormonal stages: premenarcheal (pre-menstruation), reproductive and postmenopausal.
At the time I was relieved and I took this expert doctor's word as gospel truth. Unfortunately, this led to suffering another seven years before I received my diagnosis. During these seven years I continued to tell doctors how I was still struggling every month and the pill wasn't stopping the pain. All they did was shrug their shoulders, increase my dose and tell me 'sorry, that is just how it is'. I felt I was weak. Everyone else had periods but managed - why not me?

Endometriosis is an invisible illness which can only officially be diagnosed through invasive and expensive laparoscopic surgery. Diagnosis can be very difficult as most of us experience different symptoms and types of pain. Thus, it is commonly misdiagnosed as other conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, bladder issues, pelvic issues or sexually transmitted diseases. These conditions along with hypothyroidism, autoimmune diseases, allergies and asthma have been found to be significantly more common in people with endometriosis. Therefore, many people with these conditions may think they have found the root cause of their problem, when in fact there can be another underlying health issue, endometriosis, which is being overlooked.

A few years after my periods began, I was told I had chronic fatigue syndrome and I eventually became bed bound at 18. In 2019, I insisted on a referral to another gynaecologist as I realised the way I was suffering was not normal. Enough was enough. Within less than 30 minutes of discussing my symptoms and my health story with the gynaecologist, he stated that he was 99 per cent sure I had endometriosis. Hearing those words I felt my world crash down. I felt lost, confused and mistreated for so many years. Unfortunately, my story is not unique. Studies show the average time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis is seven to twelve years. Long periods between onset of symptoms and diagnosis can lead to major long term effects. Not only on people's bodies, minds and fertility, but also economic costs of healthcare and lost work productivity. Studies have found the average cost to someone with endometriosis is over $12,000 AUD per year.

Endometriosis does not have a cure, but there are treatments that can ease pain and symptoms. However, treatments are limited and can become quite costly on the patients, as the healthcare system doesn't greatly assist. Treatments include drug therapy for pain relief, surgery (excision surgery is regarded the best but is the most expensive), physiotherapy, acupuncture and lifestyle changes such as exercising, diet and reducing stress.

I was never taught about gynaecological health and menstruation in school or by doctors. When I was finally exposed to endometriosis, I was misinformed by a specialist. We need to start educating everyone on endometriosis, not just those who experience it. Raising awareness is essential to reduce the wait to finally receive a diagnosis.

Susie Ray is a psychology student, writer and blogger from Brisbane. She
is passionate about encouraging people to find their own hope and advocating for chronic and invisible illnesses. You can find her at findyourownhope.com and IG:@findyourownhope.

Main image: Stylised fact sheet on endometriosis with figures discussing it (Getty images)
Adam Goodes, in retrospectives

MEDIA

Celeste Liddle

Last year, two documentaries regarding the Adam Goodes booing fiasco were released mere weeks apart: Shark Island Productions’ The Final Quarter and Madman Films’ The Australian Dream, anchored by Stan Grant. These two films took different tactics reflecting on this public example of racialised harassment and how it manifested using the power of retrospect. While The Final Quarter relied entirely on archival footage to construct the narrative, The Australian Dream primarily relied upon interviews and talking heads to set the scene.

Both have now aired on Australian television, leading to heightened discussion on racism and the role it plays within the sporting world. Given the topic and timing of both of the films, I couldn’t help but compare the two films as an Aboriginal viewer who spends a lot of time dissecting Australia’s racism in her own analysis. As I watched both of them, my reaction to each was markedly different. The Australian Dream, through its use of interviews, set the scene with regards to Goodes’ backstory. It gave viewers an insight into how Goodes, a man of humble beginnings, came to be one of the greatest players on the ground. It is inspirational both to watch Goodes’ skills grow but also to see him come into his own identity as an Aboriginal man.

The film also features interviews from past players such as Nicky Winmar and Gilbert McAdam, giving some insight into how racism has manifested on the ground over the years. This was valuable as it showed the ‘it’s just because Goodes is a flog; other Aboriginal players didn’t face racism’ argument for the complete fallacy it was. These interviews were then interspersed with other talking heads such as family members, conservative commentators and fellow Indigenous sports people.

Rather than gaining insight, however, I found myself perturbed by the interviews. A lot of my reaction has to do with who Stan Grant chose to interview for the film and just how entry level some of the discussion around racism was. It was correctly pointed out to me on social media that as an Aboriginal woman with demonstrated progressive politics, I was not the film’s intended audience, rather it was made to appeal to those who aren’t across the Black history of this country, who don’t find their humanity questioned on a daily basis, and who don’t understand that collectively acting against an Aboriginal man because he dares to not put up with racial slurs is indeed vilification.
That being said though, I don’t think understandings of racism are gained by listening to Andrew Bolt reframe his countless columns demonising Goodes so they look perfectly reasonable. I don’t believe giving Eddie McGuire another opportunity to state that his racist comment about King Kong was a ‘mistake’ assists. I wondered why these white men, who still have strong media careers long after Goodes retired from AFL, got so much airtime yet the Aboriginal people who documented this at the time, or the allies who took a stand on the ground, hardly got space.

'Seeing an Aboriginal man like Goodes treated that way was deeply confronting. I had always seen Goodes as the role model type who, through his focus on collaboration and individual achievement was less threatening to the mainstream than our other activists.'

Perhaps that’s why I personally found *The Final Quarter* the more powerful documentary. Through its use of archival footage, it was able to show how this saga was constructed, brick-by-brick, in a way that was impossible to deny. We saw how the voices trying to highlight racism were consistently drowned out by those insisting it was not. From the commentators misrepresenting Goodes’ statement after he was called an ‘ape’, to them cowering in a corner over a war dance, to them lying about him ‘staging for free kicks’ — they were rabid and constant. And how an unthinking public absorbed, then projected this. *The Final Quarter* also highlighted the many failures to identify and deal with racism as it was playing out on the field. Far from individuals failing to identify that their choice to boo might, in fact, have racist tones, I was left wondering why it was that the AFL consistently failed to do something or even name it. I wondered why the AFL Players Association didn’t take measures to ensure their members were working in a safe environment. The film showed me just how hard the mainstream media works to reinforce the status quo and promote those voices who ensure Aboriginal people don’t get too uppity. Racism is so much more than calling someone bad names, it’s the structures which work together to exclude Aboriginal people from society.

One of my own headlines from an article I wrote responding to this vilification was featured in *The Final Quarter* and seeing it again, in the context of both these films, caused me to reflect on what had driven me to write that piece in the first place. I remember when I wrote it, I was shocked at how bad things had gotten because only a couple of years prior, I felt that the AFL had done a lot more to counteract racism than they had sexism, and I wrote as such.

Seeing an Aboriginal man like Goodes treated that way was deeply confronting. I had always seen Goodes as the role model type who, through his focus on collaboration and individual achievement was less threatening to the mainstream than our other activists. Goodes, for example, was promoting the government’s Recognise campaign at a time other Indigenous activists were rejecting this in favour of treaties and recognition of Indigenous sovereignty.

Goodes did everything right by the mainstream. He educated and called for calm when he was racially vilified. He played on when he was being booed and kept holding his head high. Yet Goodes was still treated this way. If an Aboriginal man who is this respectable, this dedicated and this much of a role model can be vilified this badly, what chance do other Aboriginal people who reside more on the margins of mainstream society have? Let’s hope the next chapter documented is one of acceptance and an Australia actually working to ensure this never happens again. It’s a nice dream.

Celeste Liddle is a trade unionist, a freelance opinion writer and social commentator. She
blogs at Rantings of an Aboriginal Feminist.
Main image: Adam Goodes farewelling crowd at the SCG (Matt King/Getty Images)
Dawkins delusion: the legacy of New Atheism

RELIGION
Tim Robertson

Contrary to their claims, the New Atheists do have a creation myth. It goes something like this: emerging from darkness into the light, Enlightenment thinkers cast off the shackles of religion and, in so doing, ushered in an age of reason. For the likes of Richard Dawkins, a founding member of the movement, this is an article of faith, and he's spent recent years casting himself not just as an heir of this tradition, but also as its modern day guardian.

When Dawkins speaks of the Enlightenment one knows what he means - he is talking about Locke and Hume and Newton and the triumph of the scientific method. He is not talking about the Enlightenment of Isaiah Berlin and its legacy of monism, which, he argued, tends to authoritarianism; nor is he talking about the Enlightenment of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, with its scientific racism and state absolutism and from which, they claimed, a direct line could be drawn to the Holocaust.
Blissfully unaware and lacking even an iota of self-doubt, it's become something of a periodic rite for Dawkins to take to Twitter to demonstrate that he is far more a custodian of the Enlightenment he rejects than the one he accepts. His latest flirtation with the merits of eugenics is a case in point:
'It's one thing to deplore eugenics on ideological, political, moral grounds. It's quite another to conclude that it wouldn't work in practice. Of course it would. It works for cows, horses, pigs, dogs & roses. Why on earth wouldn't it work for humans? Facts ignore ideology.'
Science and ethics, in this formulation, occupy two distinct spheres. For Dawkins, unethical science is not ipso facto bad science.
One sees many of these same shortcomings in his atheism, which is fundamentalist at its core. Instead of dealing with theological questions in a serious or meaningful way, he relies almost exclusively on literalist readings of religious texts. It is fideism dressed up as rationalism. Those who believe such fantasies, in the worldview of the New Atheists, are unenlightened idiots, not yet liberated from God.

'God didn't die - he was superseded by the god of materialism. Capitalism has atomised societies, undermined meaningful communities and left people feeling alienated and alone.'
Their model of freedom is based on an ethics of choice - belief is simply a matter of weighing up the evidence and making a decision accordingly. This notion shares some striking similarities with rightwing libertarian notions of free will and, specifically, the idea that the freedom of choice is the highest form of freedom. In contemporary politics this manifests itself in a reductive biologism that's dismissive of structural inequalities (we are all masters of our own destiny, etc.) and an unwavering commitment to the free market (regulations being unjust restrictions on the choices available to individuals).

In a recent piece for Overland, Jeff Sparrow pointed out that Dawkins - 'the dreary boor regularly popping up in your social media feed with yet another drunken uncle tweet about gender or race' - hasn't changed in recent years; rather, the world has. But Sparrow doesn't cover all the monumental forms that change has taken. The God Delusion was published in 2006, two years prior the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. For many, the GFC dashed any sense of optimism and laid bare the fundamental immorality of the market. While the financial institutions were bailed out, those who'd lost everything because of the reckless and dishonest conduct of bankers were left destitute.

Since then, developed economies have shown little interest in making the necessary reforms to address inequality and prevent another crisis. Naturally, many people who've come of age in the shadow the GFC have begun to question the neoliberal consensus that's been in place since the 1970s, expressed most obviously in support among young voters for unapologetically anti-capitalist politicians like Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Significant mass movements have developed around these figures not simply because they are committed to fighting the structural inequalities imposed from above, but because they also provide an alternative to the nihilism of unbridled capitalism and commodification. God didn't die - he was superseded by the god of materialism. Capitalism has atomised societies, undermined meaningful communities and left people feeling alienated and alone. 'Anti-capitalism,' wrote Mark Fisher, 'must oppose Capital's globalism with its own, authentic, universality.'

The New Atheists - partly because they derive their identity from what they oppose, rather than what they believe - have never provided convincing remedies to the nihilism Nietzsche sensed with uncommon acuteness, nor do they offer the promise of a universal project. The Hindu in rural India is no less of a dupe than the Baptist in America or the Muslim in Libya. But if atheism is a precondition of your supposedly progressive movement, then it's going to exclude most of the world's population.

Dawkins the biologist brought the wonder and splendour of the natural world to mainstream audiences, but for Dawkins the atheist that complexity and nuance doesn't seem to extend to the realm of human thought. He would do well to heed the warning of one of the Enlightenment's most important thinkers: 'Doubt is an uncomfortable position,' wrote Voltaire, 'but certainty is a ridiculous one.'

---

Tim Robertson is an independent journalist and writer. He tweets @timrobertson12

Main image: Richard Dawkins in Sydney promoting his book (Getty Images/Don Arnold)
Stop bombarding us with military metaphors
ARTS AND CULTURE
Andrew Hamilton

When you are listening to proposals it pays to attend to the metaphors being used. These often shape the argument and the proposals made. When voters are described as punters, for example, the gambling metaphor suggests that the political system is like a horse race in which the politicians are trained owned and trained by others and the well-heeled bookies always win. We would naturally ask whose interests proposals made by the speaker will support. They are not likely to further the cause of an informed democracy.

One of the most popular, and largely counterproductive, metaphors in public conversation is the military one. It suggests that the project commended is a war in which there is an enemy, a campaign to be begun, forces to be mobilised, a public whose support is to be won, and weapons to be used. As in a war, too, the stakes are high matters of life and death. They commit us to do whatever it takes to win the war. Proper wars, of course, are between nations. But the military metaphor is often used to describe other aspects of international relations: trade and sport, for example. It is almost always unhelpful because in these relationships negotiation and a level of mutual trust are essential to secure national interests. If we see our negotiating partners as enemies to be defeated, we are less likely to advance our interest than if our guiding metaphor were that of a market in which we bartered.

In sport, too, the military metaphor is rife. Winning at all costs, taking one for the team, dying for the flag, shedding the last drop of blood, winning each battle are gold coinage in sporting rhetoric. Its effects on the behaviour of sports persons are evident. The military metaphor, too, corrodes its military origins. The distasteful association of football games with Anzac Day, with its array of sportsperson's warrior images, trivialises the commemoration of the death of soldiers in war.

The military metaphor is often used, too, when speaking of health. People are described as fighting cancer and other life threatening illnesses, winning or losing battles with sickness. Chemotherapy and other intrusive treatments are described as weapons, and people are praised for never surrendering in the fight against disease, for being valiant warriors to the last. We all deal with life-threatening illness as we can death as we can, of course, and it is unfair to criticise people for adopting this approach. But there are better metaphors for describing illness. The image of war ignores the central fact that
illness takes place within and not outside ourselves, and even cancerous growths are part of us. Death, too, is a necessary end of life. Certainly we struggle when faced by serious illness, owing to the illness itself, to the effects of its treatment, and to our desire to live as fully as possible. We may also face a spiritual struggle to accept the fact of illness and of our mortality, and still to live as fully and freely as we can in hope of cure and in acceptance of death. The military metaphor sees weakness and acceptance as purely negative, and sets an indomitable will in conflict with a sick body. It is alienating because it separates spirit from body.

'A better metaphor for responding to bushfires may be that of public health, with its emphasis on the causes of illness, the social context in which it flourishes, and the variety of relationships that need to be addressed in its care. In public health the dominant metaphor is one of nurturing.'

In speaking of facing serious illness, we might find a better metaphor in gardening, with its times of germination, growth, pruning, digging, lying fallow, shedding leaves and dying. It can hold the whole of human life in an integrated view without focusing narrowly on one aspect of it. The military metaphor is also much loved by political leaders, most recently in the response to the bushfires. It diverts people from the larger context of the crisis, encourages the belief that military leaders must enjoy the privilege of secrecy, and focuses attention on the powerful and ritzy technology that will win the war. These political advantages are at the expense of participative democracy and responsible decision making that takes into account the larger context. In the case of bushfires, the military metaphor is particularly inappropriate. It suggests that the deep challenges of global warming, which can be addressed only by strong leadership and by the mobilisation of local communities, will be solved by a centralised command and control model based on the adaptation of sophisticated technology. The fact that a major Canberra fire was started by an air force plane is a parable of the inadequacy of such an approach.

A better metaphor for responding to bushfires may be that of public health, with its emphasis on the causes of illness, the social context in which it flourishes, and the variety of relationships that need to be addressed in its care. In public health the dominant metaphor is one of nurturing. Clinical intervention is set within a policy of sustaining health and preventing illness.

Even in meeting the public health challenge of responding to addiction, however, governments have preferred at heavy cost to adopt the metaphor of waging war on drugs. That preference itself is a sign of addiction.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street.*

Main image: Two toy soldiers pointing guns at each other (Getty images/Jorg Greuel)
Economic stimulus to fight poverty

ECONOMICS

Bree Alexander

On Friday 21 February, part one of Poverty in Australia 2020, a joint study by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and University of New South Wales (UNSW) was released. After taking account of housing costs, it is estimated that 3.24 million people, equating to more than one in eight people, are estimated to be living below the poverty line in Australia. For children, it is estimated to be one in six. The subsequent parts of the report detailing the profiles of those in poverty and trends in poverty among these groups will be released during this year.

The data, from 2017-18, defines the poverty line (50 per cent of median income, before deducting housing costs) for a single adult as $457 per week, also stipulating figures for couples, sole parents with two children and couples with two children. The report also highlighted that in Australia, there is no plan in place to reduce poverty, nor is there an agreed definition on what poverty is at the national level.

According to the study, in March 2018, Newstart and Youth Allowance (for students and the unemployed up to the age of twenty-one) were respectively $117 per week and $186 per week below the poverty line. Thanks to the increase in 2009, those receiving the age pension, disability support pension and carer payment were found to be relatively better off at $10 per week below the poverty line.

The Australian poverty figures sit above the OECD average level and are high despite being among the wealthier OECD nations.

The study found that the twenty-five-year freeze on Newstart Allowance (after inflation) along with the transfer of many sole parents to Newstart from 2007 increased poverty and the depth of poverty among the population receiving those payments. The payment has remained the same despite considerable rises in the cost of living, including housing costs by an average of four per cent per year between 2007 and 2017.

The transfer of sole parents to Newstart Allowance from 2007, meaning they did not benefit from the 2009 increase in the pensions, was found to be a contributor to the increase in child poverty. Further, family tax benefits for low income families were indexed to consumer prices rather than the movement in wages, effectively countering the Hawke government’s policy to reduce child poverty. In fact, the consistently noted problem with Newstart, Youth and Austudy allowances has been the indexing to consumer prices rather than wages, leading to greater disadvantage.
'In effect, decontextualised budget surplus is nothing more than rhetoric and not in itself indicative of a successful economy, despite it being constantly put forward by the government to the public as the deciding factor.'

The need to raise the rate of these allowances is paramount. While sceptics argue that increasing Newstart Allowance will decrease incentives for the unemployed to look for a job, research has found that in fact, the current low rate itself is a barrier to work. There are also misconceptions about who the average Newstart recipient is; they are likely to be middle-aged and living outside urban centers.

The adequacy of Newstart and related payments is the subject of a Senate inquiry which is due to make its report by 27 March 2020. A report released by ACOSS and Deloitte in 2018 argued the case for an increase of $75 per week for such payments and more recently, ACOSS has recommended an increase of $95 per week. An increase was found to be supported by voters across party lines. Meanwhile, the government is looking at cost-cutting to meet its budget surplus in light of the devastating fires and the economic impacts of COVID-19 (the coronavirus epidemic) whether or not it is actually good for the economy or not in the long term. One proposal is another attempt at cutting back on welfare spending through the use of online payroll data.

Yet the focus on surplus and disregard for the basic needs of the most financially disadvantaged in the country raises grave concerns. In effect, decontextualised budget surplus is nothing more than rhetoric and not in itself indicative of a successful economy, despite it being constantly put forward by the government to the public as the deciding factor.

As Dr Richard Denniss, Chief Economist at The Australia Institute stated in September 2019, 'Australia needs a budget deficit. Even the governor of the Reserve Bank is calling on government to be more active with fiscal policy. For now, Scott Morrison remains more concerned with the symbolism of a surplus than cyclical fiscal policy'. With the recent blows to the economy, which is now having a bit of a stumble, it is the perfect time for the government to take action on economic stimulus and increase spending beyond the bushfire responses. Economic stimulus that includes an increase to vital social security payments could certainly make a positive contribution to the fight against poverty.

Bree Alexander's words have appeared with Enchanting Verses, Westerly Magazine and Australian Multilingual Writing Project. Under pseudonym Lika Posamari, she was shortlisted for the Overland Fair Australia Prize 2018 (NTEU category) and published a poetry chapbook The Eye as it Inhales Onions.

Main image: Centrelink sign (Getty Images)
A monumental error

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Church governance needs to walk the walk

RELIGION

John Warhurst

Catholic church governance suffers considerable dilemmas. The clue to its problems comes from the challenging recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to review 'the governance and management structures of dioceses and parishes, including in relation to issues of transparency, accountability, consultation and the participation of lay men and women'. In doing so the RC noted with some approval the approaches to governance of largely lay-led Catholic health, community services and education agencies.

Approaches to governance are in flux within church agencies, sectors, dioceses and at the national level, either driven by the demands of state regulations or in response to the challenging new situation the church finds itself in. There is so much change going on that it is difficult to follow.

Some big national agencies, like Caritas Australia and Catholic Social Services Australia, are rethinking their governance structures. Incorporation is now common. The governance of diocesan Catholic education across Australia is being reshaped significantly. Some dioceses have embarked upon new approaches to consultative governance, like synods and assemblies, leading into the Plenary Council 2020. The Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons, with eleven members, has emerged as a potentially strong third peak body in the church alongside the bishops and Catholic Religious Australia.

Catholic Professional Standards Ltd, set up in 2017, has taken responsibility for oversight of new child safety systems. Simultaneously the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has undertaken an enormous restructure of its staffing, funding and governance. Most recently a new body, Catholic Emergency Relief Agency, has emerged to play a potential 'whole of church' agency coordinating role in response to the bushfire emergency.

'The church must not just talk 'good governance' talk but walk the walk. That is the responsibility of individuals with leadership roles across the church. In dioceses and parishes those individuals exercising formal authority are bishops and priests.'

The acceptance in 2018 by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic
Religious Australia leadership of the RC recommendation was significant in the setting up of the Implementation Advisory Group and its subsidiary, the Governance Review Project Team (GRPT). The test will come when the GRPT report is considered by those holding church authority and later discussed by the Plenary Council 2020. Action rather than just words is required.

The lessons of secular good governance are clear and long-standing. They include the introduction and monitoring of mechanisms for accountability, transparency and inclusiveness. The GRPT report will likely reiterate the desirability of such civic standards in diocesan and parish governance. Yet these are often absent and/or resisted by some bishops and priests in charge.

Making a strong theological case for good governance principles is crucial to their acceptance. That case is based on high levels of overlap between civic and canonical governance. Perhaps the one civic principle seemingly most absent in ecclesial thinking and practice is transparency, though there are some hints in Canon Law.

The relevant ecclesial principles include subsidiarity, highlighted by Pope Francis in his address to the People of God in August 2018, and stewardship, a strong element of the Pope’s encyclical, Laudato Si.

Another essential principle, synodality, encourages the active participation of all members of the Church in the processes of discernment, reflection, consultation and cooperation at every level of decision-making and mission.

The church must not just talk ‘good governance’ talk but walk the walk. That is the responsibility of individuals with leadership roles across the church. In dioceses and parishes those individuals exercising formal authority are bishops and priests.

My own experience has taught me that church governance is complex and varied. There are diverse structures and memberships, although, with exceptions like some elected CSSA directors from member agencies, most are appointed and dismissed by bishops or religious superiors. The leadership style of board chairpersons can vary from highly consultative to autocratic.

Board members are challenged to be aware of and true to their responsibilities. The senior leadership team, led by the CEO, is crucial to good governance and must be allowed to lead. The board must balance its trust in the management of the CEO with judicious criticism. The same applies to relations with other senior leaders responsible for mission, programs, human resources, finance, audit and risk. The board must independently make it their business to know what is going on deep within the organisation in accordance with good governance principles while not interfering in daily administration.

Within the church the board must support the CEO in their dealings with church hierarchy in a way which is respectful to it without being unduly deferential. The culture of the church, in its day to day practice, is crucial to allowing such good governance to flourish by going beyond mere adherence to church and state rules and regulations.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and Chair of Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn. He has submitted an expression of interest in being a PC 2020 delegate from the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn. John will be speaking at a workshop on ‘Governance for Mission’ at the National Catholic Social Services conference, 26-28 February in Melbourne.

Main image: The Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Mother of God in Sydney (Getty Images/kldlife)
Embracing First Nations voices in the Church
RELIGION
John Lochowiak

Pope Francis' 'Querida Amazonia' (Beloved Amazonia) has been warmly received by many members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic community. The tone of the exhortation is reflective of the position that underpins our vision for the Church in Australia - a Church that is open to the gifts of First Nations Catholics, honest to the past and embracing of a new way of thinking that utilizes the principle of subsidiarity.

It will take some time to digest and fully understand the implications of 'Beloved Amazonia', but the synod and accompanying document are all leading us to a pivotal time in the global Catholic Church and particularly the Australian Catholic Church. The Church in our Great Southern Land is currently undertaking a plenary process that carries the hopes and dreams of the 130,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics.

Many had expected 'Beloved Amazonia' to include a definitive statement on the issue of accepting married men into the priesthood to address the needs of remote Amazonian Indigenous communities, drawing obvious parallels to the needs of our communities in Australia. Instead the Pontiff espoused 'a specific and courageous response is required of the Church' to meet the needs of Catholics. Some have seen this statement as an attempt to obviate further difficult discussions, however, those of us involved in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) feel it is reflective of the need to take a wider perspective and consider options and avenues that have not yet been fully explored.

As an aside, a point that is often lost in these discussions is to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the priests and religious that are currently working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban, regional and remote settings. Everyday these priests work tirelessly in communities with very little respite. They are owed a debt of gratitude.

Undoubtedly, having Aboriginal clergy would embody Catholic Social Teaching's Principle of Subsidiarity, a teaching that NATSICC and the Catholic Church subscribes to and strives to bring to life. Subsidiarity advocates that those closest to the community and the issues faced should be empowered to make decisions and become leaders. In doing so we embrace the value and the transcendent worth that comes from God in each and every individual. But it cannot be seen as the only way to empower our people.
This single course of action alone ignores and minimises the important roles of women in our communities, families and Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Ministries (AICMs) in Australia. Just as cultural responsibilities may deter some Aboriginal men from becoming priests in some communities (but not all), we are culturally and morally bound to respect and revere our matriarchs. Additionally, Aboriginal deacons have long been revered and integral to Aboriginal Catholic Communities alongside our young people that culturally become leaders within families. The empowerment of women and youth is a 'courageous response' to subsidiarity.

'It is this concept that we need to nurture in 'a specific and courageous' way - the concept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the capacity to lead and possess gifts of faith, perseverance and culture that will enhance and strengthen an authentic Australian Catholic church.'

While we encourage and would welcome Aboriginal priests, the ordination of married Aboriginal men alone will not make the 'Church fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be', as per St. John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 1986.

Standing alongside thousands of others in Blatherskite Park in 1986, I witnessed and absorbed the then Pope's words and was filled with hope and joy for a united future. We waited upon his every word that day and the bus back to Adelaide was filled to the brim with discussions of the possibilities that lay before us. As we barreled through the desolate bush back home, we concocted plans for what was to become the new home of First Nations Catholics in South Australia - the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Adelaide. We didn't need a roadmap or strategic plan laid before us, all we needed was hope and a sense that our culture and point of view was valued and respected.

A living example of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in communities was recently shared at the Catholic Youth Gathering. The parish priest of a remote Aboriginal community was trying, unsuccessfully, to get young people to attend Mass. Many initiatives were attempted, resulting in only one young Aboriginal leader accepting the invitation and becoming a Mass regular. He began 'dressing up' for Mass and changing his route to the Church so that he would walk past his mates on the way. One by one, and week by week, a new 'pilgrim' would join the procession to Mass. Witnessing a peer, friend and respected member of the community showing leadership through action planted a seed of hope in the community. It is this concept that we need to nurture in 'a specific and courageous' way - the concept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the capacity to lead and possess gifts of faith, perseverance and culture that will enhance and strengthen an authentic Australian Catholic church.

We need to see all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as leaders and role models in our Church. We need to look beyond the obvious because, as Pope Francis writes 'the real response to the challenges of evangelization lies in transcending the two approaches and finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined.' There is not simply 'Aboriginal way' and 'Catholic way', there is something in between where each strengthens and lifts the other. This is the Church that we imagine.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference support of NATSICC is emblematic of that concept. We are working together to strengthen the roles of women in leadership, support our young people in their struggles of faith and survival and include First Nations people in decision making. Collectively, one of our greatest challenges is to inform and educate the mainstream church of our gifts and our readiness to share those gifts. The discussions following 'Beloved Amazonia' should focus on 'specific and courageous' ways that Australia can be home to a more authentic Australian church, augmented and enriched by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The 2020 Plenary is an opportunity to discuss and explore the opportunities that we have as a nation to embrace all voices within the Church.
All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics in Australia are echoing Pope Francis and asking all Catholics to be courageous, be governed by the Holy Spirit and be present to support us on our journey with the Australian Catholic church.

John is a Wadi (initiated Man) who has strong ties to many language groups throughout Australia including but not limited to Pitjantatjara, Kurna, Ramindjeri and Arerrnte. He is currently head of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) in Adelaide, and Chairperson of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council. John will be presenting in the 'Towards Treaties' workshop at the Catholic Social Services Conference, 26-28 February 2020 in Melbourne.

Main image: Aboriginal girl holds up a prayer candle in vigil (Getty Images/Luis Ascui)
No stranger now
ARTS AND CULTURE
Earl Livings

Selected poems

On First Viewing 2001: A Space Odyssey

Unlike my siblings and cousins
who stand outside a Melbourne cinema
in May 1968 complaining about confusion,
I am silent.

The psychedelic racing, sliding, tilting
tilting kaleidoscopic shafts of light, blossoming,
melting galaxies, auroras, filaments, globules,
many-coloured landscapes, frozen
screams and blinking eyes
all makes sense.

The stargate journey ending in a hotel suite
of French architecture and austere lighting,
the alien zoo-laboratory where Dave Bowman
puzzles perspective from age to advancing age
as he settles into solitary luxury
all makes sense.

The fourth appearance of the monolith, a dying
Bowman stretching out his hand towards it,
the birth of the Starchild, its enigmatic gaze
as it floats vast above our Earth
all makes sense.

I know nothing of Michelangelo's Adam and God,
of Homer's Odyssey, and this doesn't matter.
The film opens me to origins, purpose, mystery,
a gaping monolith teeming with stars,
a silence I can plunge into,
no stranger now.

A Shadow Less

Each day towards death
I try to discard at least
one cage of thought:

books hoarded to help
riddle knowledge, time,
the trap of mastery
knickknacks and clothing
that no longer quicken
the face I always hide

how I carry the past
like a shield, a cross,
an accusation

how ageing aches and flaws
of mind and body rage
against themselves

how I plunge the future
into a deepening light
or a searing dark

why each day can't blossom
without gain or loss
why each day can't blossom

Stone Appeal
Clochmabenstane, Scotland, 17 October 2016

I circle the huge granite standing stone sunwise
three times, as my ancestors did long before
the designs of cranes and coins, of theory.

'Tell me how and what they thought.'
No answer but the wheeling murmuration
of a thousand starlings. A stubble field.

'Tell me what their gods showed them.'
The western wind eddies and shivers.
Sun sheen on distant water.

'Tell me what to do next.'
Yellow moss creeps across three sides.
Rock warms to my embrace. A new vow.

Losing Weight
Most had eaten less, and healthier, food and exercised regularly
Jane Fritsch

Ten per cent of people who try
to lose weight succeed, usually
after multiple attempts,

the threat of stroke, heart attack,
degenerative diseases and the lure
of quality of life doing their thing
But now, and in the future,  
bigger health threats: extreme weather,  
crop failures, water greed, plagues  

Assuming 100 per cent of us even try  
to lose our weight of car fumes,  
air conditioners, plastics,  

comfort food and goods,  
will a success rate of 10 per cent  
be enough for future quality of life:  

our grandchildren breathing clean air,  
drinking fresh water, living long enough  
to provide for their grandchildren?  

Earth thrives on multiple attempts  
yet cares less for success or failure:  
dinosaurs, Neanderthals, now us...  

Spelling the Piper  

There are no pied pipers in this city  
To lead us to our promised land  
Where a man with his brown bag bottle  
Need not sleep in the gutter.  
Where a bruised woman can gather  
Thin children about the roast  
And not fear an opening front door.  
Where any child can play hide-and-seek  
Anywhere outside the parental home  
And know it's safe to come out again.  

No piper, but ever the piping comes  
From behind shut eyes when the alarm rings  
(Like the high thrumming of electricity),  
To resonate with whine of traffic,  
Clink of coin in slot, lunchtime whistle,  
Scratch of pen on lined paper  
Or clatter of keyboard and dishes,  
Dying static of radio or TV station  
(That daily perogative of the couch).  

Is heard within the twisting rope  
Holding the silent church bell  
Or the empty children's swing.  
Heard within all straining fingers,  
All intonations of strangled metal,  
Steam hissing out of every pore.  
Heard within the key's turning  
At any door into uncertainty.  

Swells like relief after a mugging.
Swells with raucous cheer
of children thumping a ball.
Swells with tremble of skin and eye
As mortar tumbles into rising steel.
Swells with any orgasmic cry,
Any stunned proliferation of song,
Any open incarnation of thanks,
To fossick every niche of sound,
Extract every nuance of itself
Like strings of unequal length
Vibrating to the one chord.

And this one vast spinning hum
Throughout this city making more of itself
Gathers every note of our piping,
Every melody of unborn dream,
Every counter-rhythm of need,
All intersections of sound with sound,
To a roar that embraces the sun.

Earl Livings is an award-winning poet and fiction writer who has been widely published in Australia and overseas. His work focuses on nature, mythology, science, history and the sacred. His latest poetry collection, *Libation* (Ginninderra Press), appeared in late 2018 and he is currently finalising the draft of a dark ages novel.

Main image: Ring of Brodgar standing stones in Scotland (Getty Images/lucentius)
Climate justice includes secure public housing

ENVIRONMENT

Andrew Jackson

As homes burned down and memories were reduced to rubble, Australia banded together. But what about those who, in some cases, had already lost everything?

Climate change is here and our homeless population are already feeling the effects. The public housing system is not keeping up. First, there's the quality on the housing. On the 18th of December last year, Australia experienced its hottest day on record with the national average temperature reaching a high of 40.9 degrees celsius.

As the bushfires raged and air quality worsened, we were constantly told to stay indoors, keep cool and be alert for emergency orders on our phones. But with each public service announcement, we continued to leave some of our most vulnerable behind.

'It's a real risk... even death,' Kate Colvin, Acting CEO of Council to Homeless Persons said, speaking of the dangers climate change pose to people living in low-quality housing. 'If people have housing that can be cooled with air conditioning then they are better able to close the house up and be better protected. We're hoping the State Government improves that because this summer has shown how important it is to be living in homes that are well insulated and have cooling.'

There is currently no national policy requiring public housing to provide cooling systems. Rather, it is a state issue but they are only permitted to provide tenants with housing that is 'fit for habitation.'

A report from Mallee Family Care and the University of Sydney studied the Victorian town of Mildura and found rental and public housing 'is often substandard and unsafe and poorly adapted to high temperatures.' It also concluded these added stresses increase incidents of family violence, substance abuse and have a deep impact on the mental health of occupants.

'We've seen bushfires, heatwaves, floods and hail in Australia since the new year. Climate action needs to happen. But we also need to ask whether the public housing system is sustainable for the future.'

Then there is the fact that most of us are already aware of - there is a housing shortage in Australia. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, nationwide there were 140,600 applicants on the waiting list for public housing in June 2018.
And if the uncertainty of waiting for housing isn’t enough, once you are granted housing the only guarantee of having air conditioning is if you have a proven medical condition. We’ve seen bushfires, heatwaves, floods and hail in Australia since the new year. Climate action needs to happen. But we also need to ask whether the public housing system is sustainable for the future.

With our climate becoming more unpredictable, it makes sense to combat both the housing and climate crises at the same time. Upgrading existing and building future housing with renewable energy would make public housing both more affordable and better suited for the changing climate.

I volunteer for Orange Sky Australia, a mobile shower and laundry service for the homeless, with services across 24 locations nationwide. I spoke with one woman at our service, who had been on the streets for six years. She recently secured housing but shuddered at the thought of sleeping rough the past weekend, recalling long nights spent riding the train from Central to Kiama just to have somewhere protected from the elements.

Homelessness is so much more than whether you have a roof over your head. It is a sense of powerlessness and a lack of security, waiting up for the last train to anywhere, as long as the trip is long.

At least all of Sydney’s trains are air conditioned. If we want to help more people get off the streets public housing should be too.

Andrew is a third-year journalism student studying at the University of Technology Sydney. He works as a producer at Fox Sports Australia and volunteers for Orange Sky Australia, a non-for-profit organisation which provides shower and laundry services for the homeless.

Main image: Children on a train with their mother look at children in a house. Illustration by Chris Johnston
The problem with taking politics out of climate change

AUSTRALIA

Jeff Sparrow

'Get the politics out of climate change.' It's a slogan heard almost inevitably whenever discussion turns to the looming environmental catastrophe.

You can understand why, given the paralysis gripping both major parties. If politicians can't - or won't - do anything as the natural world falls apart, it's scarcely surprising that people seek an alternative to them and their politics.

Yet the common-sense enthusiasm for depoliticising environmentalism - voiced most recently in relation to the bill proposed by the conservative independent Zali Steggall - pushes in entirely the wrong direction.

In part, the complexity of carbon modelling encourages a faith in apolitical solutions. Because most of us struggle to read dense mathematical papers about ice flows and atmospheric temperatures, calls to 'listen to the scientists' rather than the politicians make sense.

If we wouldn't want our surgeon to have learnt her doctoring from YouTube, we shouldn't take assessments about carbon levels and temperature patterns from rightwing bloggers - and yet, of course, many of our leaders do.

Yet a respect for expertise should also mean a recognition of its limits. While physics explains the processes heating the atmosphere, it doesn't - and can't - provide direction as to how we should respond to those processes. On the contrary, because climate change follows from our relationship with nature, it forces us to consider how we should live - the central question for the political sphere.

'To put it bluntly, there's no historical parallel for a social change comparable to that required to decarbonise the developed world without massive political polarisation.'

Unfortunately, a conflation between science and politics runs throughout even the respectable literature on climate change, since much of the research makes assumptions about economic activity and social life that naively extrapolate from the status quo.

That's particularly important because, while the 'apolitical' approach gets touted as a way of winning over the public, in practice it's invariably defended as a way of wooing parliamentarians. A rhetoric stripped of politics will, we're told, allow MPs of goodwill from both parties to abandon their silly culture wars and come together for the benefit of
the planet.
Of course, the divide over climate change bears less relationship to will (whether good or bad) than to power. Specifically, the power of those individuals and corporations enriched beyond measure by fossil fuels. Both major parties now contain sizeable groupings tied politically, organisationally and financially to the carbon lobby. It's those factions that give rise to culture war, not the other way around.
Because the support for business-as-usual rests on material interests rather than ideas, the pro-carbon politicians won't be swayed by clever framings or conciliatory messaging. In the unlikely event they can be induced to sign up to the Stegall project, they'll do so only to surreptitiously wreck it.
After all, throughout parliament the enemies of climate action masquerade as its friends. Last week, for instance, we discovered the existence of the so-called Otis Group, a semi-organised faction of pro-coal Labor MPs. In public, many of those people mouthed along about the importance of fighting global warming; in private, they came together to buttress fossil fuel interests.
Similarly, Canberra's now blessed with a Parliamentary Friends of Climate Action, described as an 'attempt to take partisan politics out of the nation's climate policies'. The member of that august body include Tim Wilson, whom you may remember as the former Human Rights Commissioner who thought protesters should be water cannoned. In a previous life, Wilson worked for the Institute for Public Affairs - specifically, as 'Director of Climate Change Policy'. Yes, that's right. For many years, our pro-climate change guy ran the IPA's campaign to foster climate denialism (you can watch him denouncing Labor's carbon tax here).
Now, you might believe that Tim Wilson's undergone a Damascene conversion since realising where electoral sentiment lay, or you might wonder as to the kind of 'climate action' that attracts such friends. The example illustrates the urgent need not for consensus but for its opposite, the kind of polarisation that might unmask the pro-carbon politicians and drive them out of respectable political life.
To put it bluntly, there's no historical parallel for a social change comparable to that required to decarbonise the developed world without massive political polarisation. Think of the defence of discriminatory marriage laws mounted by reactionaries only a few years ago. The passage of equal love legislation did not require any significant economic changes and yet conservatives fought tooth and nail against it for years.
By contrast, the prevention of catastrophic climate change threatens the billion-dollar assets of corporations whose tendrils run all through society. Is it sensible to pretend all that wealth and power will shrug its shoulders and exit the stage of history, simply because its asked nicely? Or would it be less utopian to expect a struggle and prepare accordingly?
One of the biggest obstacles in responding to the environmental emergency lies in the understandable suspicion by ordinary people that economic reform - which is what decarbonisation involves - means they're about to get screwed over by technocrats once again. The revolt by the Yellow Vests (Gilets Jaunes) in France against a carbon tax penalising drivers illustrates what happens when climate action doesn't feel to the public like something they do, but instead becomes something done to them.
That's why, rather than proclaiming their indifference to politics, environmentalists need to articulate a program that links a defence of the planet to a defence of the working class - not as an optional extra but out of a recognition that, without popular support, decarbonisation simply won't happen.

Jeff Sparrow is a writer, editor and honorary fellow at Victoria University.
Main image: Independent MP Zali Steggall leaves the House of Representatives after a division at Parliament House on February 11, 2020 in Canberra. (Photo by Tracey Nearmy/Getty Images)