

Rhyme and ruin in Tony Abbott's court <i>Brian Matthews</i>	1
Cardinal Pell at the Royal Commission <i>Frank Brennan</i>	3
South African lessons about racial discrimination <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	6
You don't have to be a communist to stand up for the poor <i>John Warhurst</i>	8
Quiet rage against Saudi sexist cycle <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	10
Colouring the fading customs of a Greek Lent <i>Gillian Bouras</i>	12
Financial advisers can be more than bookies <i>David James</i>	14
Social injustice in international sport <i>Michael McVeigh</i>	16
Metaphysical selfie <i>Philip Salom</i>	18
Turnbull's bone for the News Corp behemoth <i>Ray Cassin</i>	24
Too soon for MH370 punchlines <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	27
Murky law in Crimea land grab <i>Justin Glyn</i>	29
Free speech! Well, sort of <i>Ellena Savage</i>	31
Faiths fight forced marriage <i>Ashleigh Green</i>	33
Asylum seeker ethics is simple <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	35
Sex, lies and political theory <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	37
Trials of a recalcitrant priest <i>Frank O'Shea</i>	39
Religious rebels rattle Big Coal's cage <i>Thea Ormerod</i>	41
Tony hates lefty shirkers <i>Various</i>	43
Australia's asylum seeker holocaust <i>Lyn Bender</i>	46
Bali fear beyond Rhonda and Ketut <i>Ali Winters</i>	48
Bullying artists and the art of conversation <i>Michael Mullins</i>	50



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Rhyme and ruin in Tony Abbott's court

AUSTRALIA

Brian Matthews

Thomas Wyatt (1503—1542) was a prominent figure in the court of King Henry VIII. He played an important ambassadorial role in representing the King's petition to Pope Clement VII to have Henry's marriage to Anne Boleyn annulled. Wyatt was also an innovative, accomplished poet, the power and complexity of whose work only became fully understood when revisited and studied in the early 20th century.

Even for the tall, handsome and brilliant Wyatt, however, life at the court of Henry VIII was a dangerous, knife-edged business. Wyatt had been an admirer but possibly lover of Boleyn before she caught the royal eye. In this he was not alone. When in 1536 he was imprisoned in the Tower for adultery with Boleyn, he was able to watch from his prison window the beheading of five other accused Boleyn adulterers and then the death of the queen herself. Wyatt survived and, having supporters within Henry's court, was subsequently released.

In his famous poem about his sexual passion, Wyatt disguises the pursuit of Anne Boleyn as a deer hunt:

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind
But as for me, *helas!* I may no more
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore
I am of them that furthest come behind.

The poem ends with a warning. This deer wears a diamond necklace on which is engraved:

Noli me tangere, [Do not touch me], for Caesar's I am
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.

This is a classic example, as are some other Wyatt poems, such as 'They flee from me that sometime did me seek', of the courtly poet's language being deliberately ambiguous. It was a matter of self protection.

Little wonder that Wyatt often found court life not only perilous but repugnant and dreamed of escape. Seneca's *Stet quicunque volet potens* from his tragedy *Thyestes* became the vehicle for a typically oblique, escapist translation: 'Stand whoso list upon the slipper top/Of court's estate,' Wyatt muses, but as for himself he would 'rejoice' to be 'unknown in court, that hath such brackish joys'.

That arresting word 'brackish' tells us this is no mere idle dreaming but a heartfelt wish. And if there were any doubts, the ferocity of the conclusion resolves them: the meretricious court life prevents self-knowledge — until the end,

when it's too late, when a suddenly implacable Death grabs the courtier by the throat:

For him death grippeth right hard by the crop
That is much known of other; and of himself alas
Doth die unknown, dazed with dreadful face.

A hundred years later, Andrew Marvell used the same lines from Seneca to dream of his own escape from the balancing act of living in Cromwell's Republic and either forgetting the regicide or pretending it didn't happen: 'Climb at court for me that will/Giddy favour's slippery hill' he begins and 'Who exposed to others' eyes/Into his own heart ne'er pries/Death to him's a strange surprise' is his equivalent of Wyatt's throat-grabbing Death.

Marvell's tone is less haunted than Wyatt's, but he still had to be very careful — avoiding punishment after the Restoration despite his ambiguously Cromwellian stance during the Republic. His care extended to complete anonymity when he launched some corrosive satires on the corruptions of the Court.

Abraham Cowley, a contemporary of Marvell but unlike him a committed royalist, spent 12 years in exile in France then retired to the country on his return. Unthreatened in the political clime of the Restoration, he wrote a calm and moralistic version of Seneca, imagining the man to whom: 'The face of Death ...| will terrible appear' because, though 'known to all the world beside/Does not himself, when he is dying know ... what he is, nor whither he's to go'.

Wyatt, Marvell, Cowley and others like them — John Norris (1657—1711), Richard Polwhele (1760—1838) — though separated by centuries, all latched on to the lines of Seneca because these afforded each man an opportunity to express his disenchantment with life at court and at the centres of power. At a pinch, they could claim, if pressed, that they were not giving their own views on the corruption, deviousness, shallowness and self-delusion of contemporary courtiers but simply translating the words of long-departed Seneca (4BC—65AD).

Which brings us to the court of Tony Abbott. There is much here that Wyatt, for example, would recognise — the obsessive secrecy, the suspicion of foreigners, the cruelty, the ecclesiastical connections, the dames and knights, the aggressive Anglophilia.

But there would be one source of relief for Wyatt: he would not need to employ his considerable prosodic talents in order to encode his true meanings. He could come right out and — in the words of Attorney General Brandis — 'say things that other people find offensive or insulting or bigoted'. Or even racist, if you're smart about it.

So, whoso list to rant, rave, insult and bully, I know where is an place for you.
Just don't come here in an boat.

Cardinal Pell at the Royal Commission

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

Prior to Cardinal Pell's appearance before Justice McClellan at the Child Abuse Royal Commission, I wrote in the Fairfax press: 'The spotlight on the Ellis case should lead to better church administration for the good of everyone, especially those abused or wronged by those in authority. Together, Pell and McClellan can [provide us](#) with a better-lit path through the thickets of past abuse and maladministration.'

It has been an excruciating week or two. But there can be no doubt that the Australian Catholic Church with the forced scrutinies of the State has been assisted in getting back to its mission and basic values, espousing truth, justice, compassion and transparency.

As an institution, it has been dragged kicking and screaming. Pell has been put through the wringer, though admittedly nowhere near to the same extent as was John Ellis when the Church decided to unleash the legal attack dogs on him in litigation which was euphemistically described as vigorous and strenuous.

In his written statement to the Commission, Pell was upfront in apologising again for the sexual abuse which Ellis had undoubtedly suffered at the hands of a priest. Pell wrote, 'I acknowledge and apologise to Mr Ellis for the gross violation and abuse committed by Aidan Duggan, a now deceased priest of the Sydney Archdiocese. I deeply regret the pain, trauma and emotional damage that this abuse caused to Mr Ellis.'

Under cross examination on Wednesday, Pell had to admit that he, his advisers and his staff had fallen well short of the standards expected of a model litigant, let alone a Christian organisation. He finally admitted to the vast chasm between Christian decency and the tactics employed in pursuing Ellis in the courts.

Having blamed various members of his staff for earlier errors and omissions, Pell was anxious to exculpate his lawyers who had acted on instructions and perhaps with insufficient supervision. He said, 'I believe in a legal sense there was nothing done that was improper, and any reservations I might have about particular stands of our lawyers, I would not want to suggest that they did anything improper. But from my point of view, from a Christian point of view, leaving aside the legal dimension, I don't think we did deal fairly (with Ellis).'

According to the ABC, at the conclusion of this afternoon's hearing, Pell made a long awaited apology to Ellis, not just for the initial and sustained sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of a deviant priest but for the hurt which had been inflicted on him by the Church ever since he had sought compensation and closure. Pell said:

As former archbishop and speaking personally, I would want to say to Mr Ellis that we failed in many ways, some way inadvertently, in our moral and pastoral responsibilities to him. I want to acknowledge his suffering and the impact of this terrible affair on his life. As the then archbishop, I have to take ultimate responsibility, and this I do.

At the end of this gruelling appearance for both of us at this Royal Commission, I want publicly to say sorry to him for the hurt caused him by the mistakes made, admitted by me, and some of our archdiocesan personnel during the course of the Towards Healing process and litigation.

The Cardinal's long time critics found fault with his mode of delivery. But I am one Catholic and one Australian citizen who is mightily relieved that the Cardinal has been man enough and priest enough to apologise publicly for his failures and the failures of those under his supervision.

It is now clear that the Church like all right thinking people would view priests and church workers as employees of those those church leaders who appoint and supervise them.

To date in Australia, the victims of sexual abuse have been unlikely to succeed in court against anyone but the perpetrator or a callously negligent employer or supervisor who had little regard for the signs that there may be a sexual predator in their midst. There have been many hurdles for a victim wanting to sue anyone but the criminal perpetrator. The Royal Commission will need to give detailed consideration to these hurdles, making recommendations to governments about reforms which will impact on all employers and not just churches.

Until now, a victim like Ellis has faced an additional hurdle when suing for abuse by a priest or other church personnel. Often the alleged abuse occurred many years ago and now there is a new supervising bishop or superior. The previous bishop or superior will have long since died. Who is to be sued?

In 2007, the New South Wales Court of Appeal ruled that in the case of the Catholic Church, there was no point in trying to sue the 'Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church', the statutory trust corporation that holds title to all the church lands of a diocese. That corporation may hold the assets but it does not supervise, employ or oversee clergy or other church workers.

This week, everyone has come to accept that the Church should not give any appearance of hiding behind the corporate veil. Justice demands that present church leaders agree to satisfy any judgment debt against their predecessors or their deceased predecessors' estates when there is an allegation of past failure to supervise or adequately investigate a sexual predator in their ranks. Any damages should be paid from church assets.

For the moment, we should all be grateful that Pell apologised to Ellis ruling a line under hierarchical behaviour that does not pass the sunlight test, to say

nothing of the Sermon on the Mount. While Pell heads for Rome, McClellan is only starting to wrestle with the really difficult legal questions.

South African lessons about racial discrimination

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Last week marked the anniversary of the [Sharpeville massacre](#) which occurred during a protest against the pass laws. It ushered in increasingly discriminatory actions against Black South Africans, and can now be seen as the beginning of the end for the regime based on Apartheid.

The South African experience suggests racial discrimination begins with the appropriation of wealth and power by one racial group and its consequent suppression of other groups in order to extend its wealth and power.

The appropriation of power and wealth is naturally resisted by the existing inhabitants. In the course of struggle mutual incomprehension and fear grow, and the indigenous people are seen as strange, primitive, violent, childlike and less than fully human. This can be seen in the early pictorial representations of military or religious contact between native peoples and colonial representatives by Western artists. They leave no doubt which group has power and wealth, whether material or spiritual.

After the dominant group has made secure its appropriation of wealth and power, it comes to assume that its dominance in these respects indicates its inherent superior capacity for power and entitlement to wealth. So the relations between the races are regulated in a way that provide lasting security in power and possessions for the dominant race. It controls and decides the fate of others; the native peoples are controlled and decided for.

In South Africa the pass laws were designed to provide a reliable supply of cheap labour for industry, to ensure a homogeneous environment for white settlers in the cities, and security over the land they had occupied.

In time as the initial conflict lessens and people have time for reflection these unequal and discriminatory relationships need ideological justification. Apartheid was just one of the more explicit ideologies. White and black peoples were seen as equal but different. So should each group have its own space, right down to separate park benches. The subtext, of course, was that one group of people was more equal than others. It was entitled to better conditions and could decide under what conditions other groups might live.

Ideology usually leads to further discrimination because it allows people to act brutally with the shadow of a good conscience. In the name of apartheid millions of black people were forcibly moved from their homes into areas designated for them, pass laws were extended to cover women as well as men, and they lost what little rights they had to representation in Parliament.

Ideology also leads to resistance both physically and on the level of ideas.

Sharpeville is emblematic.

The South African example is one of the most radical modern examples of racial discrimination. But the link between power and wealth and racial discrimination is expressed in other ways, too.

Racial prejudice, for example, is fed by the fear of losing power and wealth to a new and apparently favoured group. Prejudice against immigrants and refugees, particularly if they are distinctive by race, colour or religion, is often expressed by people who feel themselves to struggle and lack control over their world. These feelings, which are also found among the affluent, can be manipulated by those who wish to maintain control over power and embodied in policies that are racially discriminatory.

It follows that if we are to address racial prejudice and discrimination we need to examine the way in which wealth and power are distributed and protected in society. In Australia, as in most Western societies, wealth and power are being concentrated increasingly in the hands of fewer people and corporations. It is defended by the ideology of competitive individualism in a free and unregulated market. The threat to the process and ideology does not come from minority racial, religious or ethnic groups but from public awareness and revulsion.

This threat is often met by directing popular frustration at powerlessness and inequality against minority groups, such as asylum seekers, Indigenous people and Muslims. A government can then act severely to control these perceived threats, so distracting attention from the ideology whose partiality creates frustration.

If this is so the response to racial discrimination must be primarily to build an economic and political framework based on respect for the human dignity of each person, and on the understanding that the economic order must serve the good of all, particularly the most disadvantaged.

You don't have to be a communist to stand up for the poor

AUSTRALIA

John Falzon

Helder Camara, the Archbishop of Recife in Brazil, famously said: 'When I give bread to the poor I am called a saint, but when I ask why they have no bread I am called a communist.'

The St Vincent de Paul Society has no ideological axe to grind but we have been in the habit, since 1833, of asking why a significant number of people, even in prosperous countries, don't get to enjoy the necessities of life. Our founder, Frederic Ozanam, a French university student, wrote: 'Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveller who has been attacked. It is the role of justice to prevent the attack.'

This is why we refuse to accept the dystopian vision of an Australia in which people experiencing poverty are made to shoulder the burden of expenditure cuts while the people who have the least need for assistance enjoy overly generous tax concessions. From time to time someone comes out of the woodwork and accuses us of being communists but that's the least of our worries.

What does worry us right now is the perpetuation of the myth that people living in poverty are to blame for their own situation. This position is ideological and it flies in the face of everything we see.

We see people desperate to make ends meet, people who are locked out of both the labour market and the housing market, often without even a place they can call home. We see a housing market that is notoriously bad at providing affordable housing for low income families and individuals.

Our members recently met a mum with three boys under the age of ten, who had to sleep on the floor in the lounge area because the bedroom regularly flooded. There was no written lease agreement and no hot water for six months. It's easy to sit back and blame the mother for moving her children into a hovel, but there's the rub. When income is severely constrained and choices are non-existent, it's often a matter of accepting grossly inappropriate and insecure housing or sleeping in a car.

Instead of gleefully bagging the National Rental Affordability Scheme let's do something to ensure that people don't have to choose between a hovel and a Holden as the place they call home.

By all means, let's improve the NRAS where improvements are to be made, but if we are serious about ensuring that housing is enjoyed as a human right by all, and not a matter of luck for some, then we actually need to invest more in the NRAS and in other means of increasing the supply of social and affordable housing.

We also need to increase Rent Assistance, indexing it to changes in the average private rental costs, which, over the last five years, have seen increases 12.3 per cent higher than the CPI. And we need to look seriously at the current structure of negative gearing so that rather than increasing speculative investment we actually increase the supply of affordable housing.

The Government's silence on the future of homelessness funding is a disturbing sign. This Government has the opportunity to demonstrate a strong commitment to halving homelessness by 2020. This means consolidating and improving on gains rather than creating uncertainty even over the funding status quo. It is homelessness itself that we must cut, not the spending on homelessness. Everyone has the right to a place to call home. The housing market fails to deliver on this basic human right. Governments must therefore do what markets cannot.

Quiet rage against Saudi sexist cycle

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Wadjda* (PG). Director: Haifaa al-Mansour. Starring: Reem Abdullah, Waad Mohammed, Abdullrahman Algothani, Sultan Al Assaf, Ahd Kamel. 97 minutes**

Wadjda is the first feature shot entirely in Saudi Arabia, and the first to be made by a female Saudi director. For al-Mansour to have achieved this in a country where the rights and dignity of women are subjugated to patriarchal norms is remarkable. Consider this in light of the fact that the film concerns itself with the pressures women experience in this rigidly patriarchal society and it is fair to say that *Wadjda* is an innately political work.

But this assessment sells it short. *Wadjda* is primarily a film not about politics but about humanity. It is a charming, well-written and entertaining coming-of-age story whose characters find self-empowerment and connection not in rabble-rousing but in small acts of rebellion. Central among them is the 11-year-old title character (Waad), whose defiance of oppressive social norms crystalises in an ambition to purchase a bicycle.

Waad's performance is wonderful, by turns earnest and impish. At first *Wadjda* attempts to raise money selling homemade braided bracelets and mix-tapes to students at her school. When the headmistress Ms Husa (Kamel) puts an end to these endeavours, she turns instead to training for a Quran recitation contest with a cash prize. Her apparent newfound devotion impresses her teachers, who don't suspect her material objective.

Wadjda's experiences are woven with those of her mother (Abdullah), who is impatient with her daughter's two-wheeled ambitions (for a woman to ride a bike is 'dishonourable') but also distracted by her certainty that her husband (Al Assaf) is searching for a second wife. *Wadjda* herself adores and is adored by her father, but has to contend with the heartbreaking realisation that as a daughter, not a son, she is inadequate in his eyes.

This is a small film that captures the mundane details of daily life of Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. But it also contains touches of wonder, borderline mysticism, which make it loom large in the imagination, despite its small scale. *Wadjda*'s coveted bicycle first appears as a vision, speeding of its own volition along the top of a wall. It's an illusion — the bike is propped on the bed of a truck that is driving past on the other side of the wall. But mundane reality doesn't kill the magic of that first sighting, for either *Wadjda* or the audience.

The film's touching final scene (without giving too much away) finds mother and daughter standing on the roof of their house, backs turned to a sky lit by fireworks — the pyrotechnic climax to a celebration from which they have been deliberately

excluded, and which represents the worst of patriarchal indifference. Although *Wadjda* deals sweetly with a pre-teen romance between Wadjda and her friend, Abdullah (Alghohani), ultimately the film implies a fine, fierce hope that Wadjda's fate will not be dictated by her relationships to the men in her life.

Colouring the fading customs of a Greek Lent

INTERNATIONAL

Gillian Bouras

Life is a learning curve, if you ask me, and even if you don't, I'm here to tell you that the ageing process is a great teacher of lessons related to time, change, and the transmission of culture. Migration accelerates the process — three decades after an unexpected emigration from Australia to Greece, I'm still learning.

I recently visited my grandsons, and was consequently taught various lessons. Carnival had been enjoyed, and Lent had started. Orthodox and Western Easter coincide this year, as happens every four years.

Their mother, my daughter-in-law Katerina, led the way, with the result that I am now wearing the red and white cotton plaited bracelet that most Greeks don on 1 March. Katerina became a virtual plaiting factory, and supplied bracelets for all of us, and added to my small knowledge of folklore as well.

Long ago my late mother-in-law told me the bracelet was meant to protect wearers from the sun. But Katerina, who is from Thessaly, tells a more charming tale, as told by her Yiayia/Granny. You wear the bracelet from the first day of spring, but the minute you see your first swallow, you cut the bracelet off and hang it on a branch of the nearest tree, so that the swallow will have something with which to start building its nest.

While his mother was weaving, five-year-old Maximus, temporarily suspending gladiatorial combat with his big brother, was concentrating hard on colouring in a picture. It was of a rather strange woman. Katerina came to the rescue again: the picture was of Kyra Sarakosti. Which might be translated, loosely, as Lenten Lady.

In the days before calendars and diaries, Katerina explained, Greek housewives would draw themselves a picture of Kyra Sarakosti as a way of keeping track of the weeks of Lent. Kyra was pictured without a mouth, because Lent is not a time for eating, certainly not a time for eating things one likes. Her hands are demurely crossed on her breast, for Lent is a time for prayer and self-examination. And she has seven feet.

Every Saturday, with one week elapsed, housewives would cut one foot off the picture. The last foot was cut off on Holy Saturday, Easter Eve. Then it would be tucked into a dried fig, which would be placed among many others. Whoever selected the special fig with its odd addition, was assured of good luck.

This custom is reportedly very old, and supposedly Greece-wide, but my Peloponnesian children did not know of it, and neither did my Cretan daughter-in-law. Folklore is often specific to regions, but everywhere it is under threat. The haste and high technology of modern life render customs such as Kyra

Sarakosti quaint at best and out of mind at worst. I often wonder how long it will be before many customs and practices disappear entirely.

As is the case with many traditional occupations: in my time in Greece I have noted the disappearance of the saddlers, the blacksmiths, the coopers, the cobblers and the cabinet-makers from the village scene. The knife-grinders and the tinkers have also gone.

In my long time here, I've also seen Greece's painful divorce from its Levantine and Eastern heritage, and its reluctant espousal of Western Europe. There was a brief honeymoon, followed by a long period of adjustment. With the advent of the economic *krisi*, the rot of disillusionment set in. As might be imagined and understood, for reasons past and present, Germany has been a particular target of resentment for at least five years.

But life, politics, and economics are unpredictable. The picture Maximus was colouring in came from a German-controlled supermarket, part of a chain that operates throughout Greece. Ironically, it was the supermarket magazine that introduced my grandson and me to a fading Greek tradition, and linked us to the life of previous generations, to the fabric of a culture. And thus to more understanding of the way we were and are.

Financial advisers can be more than bookies

ECONOMICS

David James

The controversial decision by the Federal Government to water down the Future of Financial Advice (FOFA) legislation highlights a series of misunderstandings about finance.

At first glance, the proposed wind-backs seem extraordinary. As Peter Martin commented in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the Government is proposing to remove the catch-all requirement that advisers act in the best interest of their clients. He adds that the changes 'will also re-allow sales commissions and other forms of conflicted remuneration where advice is general in nature'.

The major banks will be the beneficiaries. Four out of five of Australia's 18,000 financial planners are owned by a bank or insurance company. In effect, they are salespeople for the banks' wealth management platforms. Making this explicit to the clients, and requiring financial planners to act in the interests of those clients rather than of the platform provider, is apparently a step too far.

The fact that the industry's lobbyists are pushing for these changes, and will probably get them, demonstrates that this is not a profession. Imagine if a doctor wanted the right to act in the interests of pharmaceutical companies rather than patients. It would be grounds for sacking. For lawyers, not acting in a client's interests is grounds for disbarment. Accountants have similar legal requirements to do what is right for their clients.

This action confirms that financial advisers, like stockbrokers, are just bookies in nice suits. They are spruikers rather than people possessing any special knowledge. There is no point establishing a professional code of conduct for them. They are not professionals.

In a sense, that is a welcome revelation. Perhaps the best thing to come out of the current controversy would be for clients to understand that they are not receiving 'advice', but a sales pitch cloaked as advice. Much of the problem derives from people believing that their financial advisers have some privileged knowledge about the markets and investments. Financial advisers are only too happy to promote the fiction, using complexity to create the illusion. Clients are gulled into believing that because the advice sounds technical, it must be right.

It's worth asking what kind of service financial advice is. Financial advice falls into two very different categories. One is the administrative requirement, mainly tax and accounting law. This kind of advice is black and white, either right or wrong. Financial advisers may be able to give sound directions to clients, but it is really a role for accountants. And accountants are legally required to get it right, so there is a higher level of protection.

The second category is investment advice, and this is anything but black and white. There is no reason whatsoever to believe that financial advisers have any special knowledge. Indeed, if they did, they would not be financial advisers, they would be making a living as investors.

They can introduce clients to important investment principles like the need for diversification, or the need to match the type of investments with the client's expectations and tolerance for risk. But these principles are no guarantee of investment success, they are just principles.

Advisers can also provide information, such as how dividend imputation works or what are the financial metrics on particular stocks, but this again is no guarantee of success. What they cannot do is provide a degree of security for a client's savings, which is essentially what clients want. Especially when they are not even required to act in the client's interests.

The counter argument, justifying the wind-back of FOFA, is that it will remove 'red tape'. Prime Minister Abbott declaimed: 'We're working for you today, by creating the biggest bonfire of regulations in our country's history.' This is the standard attack of the deceptive metaphor, which occurs repeatedly in the finance industry. As Ross Gittins commented in *The Age*, it is a mendacious use of language:

In the process, of course, we'll have changed the meaning of 'red tape'. It's meant to mean bureaucratic requirements that waste people's time without delivering any public benefit. In the hands of the spin doctors, however, it's being used to encompass everything from removing dead statutes to the supposed deregulation of industries.

Such duplicitousness is bad enough in any industry, but it is especially pernicious in the finance sector. Finance is not like other businesses, where the red tape is external. Finance *consists* of rules, whose iteration is red tape. What matters is that those rules work well, especially for clients. As we saw in the global financial crisis, when the finance sector is allowed to make up the rules and 'self-regulate' the results can be catastrophic.

The only protection against this kind of excess is governments doing the job of governing. These proposed changes to FOFA reveal, in a small way, that governments have learned nothing.

Social injustice in international sport

INTERNATIONAL

Michael McVeigh

Where once an event like the Olympics or the World Cup may have been seen as a triumph of corporate and athletic enterprise, today's world counts the cost of games much more carefully. Previous events have left countries with decaying venues and huge bills that take years to pay off. Local communities are increasingly unhappy that a large portion of their government's funds are directed towards events that might line the pockets of corporations, but do little to support local industry.

The \$51 billion Sochi Winter Olympic Games — believed to be the most expensive Olympics in history — may have showcased modern Russia to the world, but it also shone a spotlight into the darker corners of the country's society: its treatment of LGBT people, the crackdowns on free speech of groups like Pussy Riot, and the corruption among the country's elite.

The spotlight will soon turn on Brazil, with the World Cup kicking off in June. Here too, the event has brought world attention to the country's issues. Hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest the enormous financial costs, the forced evictions of communities, and the exploitation of construction workers.

Marginalised people bear the brunt of costs for these global events. A new report from Caritas Australia [estimates](#) that around 200,000 people have been forced out of their homes in *favelas* in Brazil to make way for the construction of venues for the World Cup — that's one in every 1000 people. More than 1.25 million people were displaced due to the urban development in the lead-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Even the London Olympics resulted in the forcible eviction of 1000 people from their homes and businesses.

Caritas says the Olympics have caused the evictions of more than two million people over the past two decades.

A Caritas Australia petition to FIFA and the IOC [asks](#) them to ensure the human rights of people living in host countries are protected in the preparation of these global events, and ensure that the events are run sustainably. They call for the marginalised to be invited into the decision making, and for contractually binding minimum standards to be put in place to mitigate the impact on local communities.

It's time for us to re-think what these international events are actually trying to achieve. We live in an era of unprecedented global connection, but also an era where we are facing unprecedented challenges internationally. As well as the continuing gap in wealth between the haves and the have-nots, there is the challenge of climate change, and finding a way to sustain our growing populations with finite resources. Increasing ease of travel has led to developed countries

facing an influx of refugees from conflict and resource stricken parts of the world.

These are issues of a global nature, and global collaboration is required.

The Olympics and the World Cup are events of global collaboration, but to date, that collaboration has been purely on the sporting and commercial fields.

FIFA and the IOC have the power to reimagine international sporting events as engines of economic development and prosperity for developing countries around the world. What if, instead of drawing billions of dollars from host countries, these events were an opportunity for the wealthy countries around the world to pump those billions of dollars into areas of great need? What if for every dollar that a country invested in their Olympic program, a dollar had to be provided to the host country in aid?

Australia pumps an [estimated](#) \$588 million into its Olympic sports programs. Even a fraction of that funding could provide an enormous boost for development programs in host regions.

Similarly, both the IOC and FIFA have the power to draw up better guidelines for host nations. What if, for each dollar invested in Olympics or World Cup facilities, a dollar also had to be spent on building infrastructure in the country's most disadvantaged communities? With the aid from other competing nations, local industries could be given a kick-start, local jobs could be created, and vital skills could be developed across the country.

Instead of placing a burden on countries, the Olympics and World Cup could become engines for an international 'backyard blitz', bringing the resources of the world's wealthiest countries to the service of the world's poorest.

It's a pipe-dream. But the events of the 21st century require a new mantra beyond 'faster, higher, stronger'. Our world will not be made better by the superhuman efforts of individuals, but by the collaborative sacrifice and generosity of nations. A mantra of 'solidarity, sustainability and subsidiarity' might not have the same ring to it, but it's much more in the spirit of what 21st century sport should stand for.

Metaphysical selfie

CREATIVE

Philip Salom

A cannoli maker's second-person selfie metaphysic

Post-God voices of you complained: there were so many of you there were none. And, pre-God, there was less than one of you. That's a hard call. That's a stern said. Back off in the beginning colloids of an all-or-nothing exploded you. How scary are you? The Dough-maker's hand was poised, unseen in the shadows. Then in tactile, alarmingly, quarkily, scrolling and shaping you. A life-hand a touch. Retreating into the dark. But you became a baker, the endless maker of same things. Of all people, you! Your life was repeatedly you. By which of yours it must be said: you meant as the many, these infinite and brittle shells of you. But you nightmared. Where the hand was clenched like a fist of axiom. Deep in Freudian, nature-nurturing, spacey-lost, you. Still, shells with wet insides. The ultra-sounds show three times a pattern, a tireless hand, your genome-own of replicating you. At night after dinner you'd lean towards your wife and lick her warm cannoli. (And if she smiled yours, the stars lit up in you.) Adrogynous, cannoli spin in space. The male, the female, the embryonic (i.e. undecided) meta of the many and a single you. This poem a Kubrick not a Rubick spin. It needs your name, your seal in the dough. Your all of us. Our un-youing of you.

The parcels arriving

The parcels arriving. There are now in sequences a week.

If they're a problem I'll get rid of them. Drowning.

They keep coming, parcels arriving in brown wrapping, in silent boxes.

Parcels are utterly dumb.
I will not open them.
Perhaps they're a parcel club and I'm their guardian.
They are closed, and neat as a guest at a wedding.
They have come alone, nervous, not yet drunk.
Is it a symptom of mania to buy online a want
you then forget?
They are as dumb
as poor decisions,
humiliations, kept in Limbo refusing to die.
They are gormless, they are repeating zombie cubes
(to drive that road, that corner, again and again)
filled with flying space for moths.
There are several white boxes stacked up like a hospital
building, with fleuros, white walls and help! help! in-
side them, people in white coats and frames.
They have nothing
to say about all
the recent deaths.
I must consider this: parcels that arrive may not be gifts.
They sit there, waiting, like poems, like probabilities.
If I open them I must decide, this, not that, then
from one revelation good or bad my day will flow.
Contingent. I am
alive, choosing
will change me.
Someone has a big square gun and keeps
shooting big square bullets of cardboard at me.
Something sick and skinny inside them. All ribs.
Or the slow rustle of huge shoulder-wings.

I have ordered angels? Foolish I may be but I would
remember ordering angels, turning back
months of these
parcels arriving.

I will not open them.

Three never-dreams

The last key of Marienbad

My grandmother stood arm in arm with old Egypt.
The sand, stone, her favourite polka dot clothing.
Her manner, knowing, was the doubtless manner
of one who is right like a pharaoh's leopard
is right.

A dreamer is a reader of the insides of dreams.
There's something dreaming-Egypt outlives us
like bad interior design, and sarcophagi, but she
was very still:

an authority that is a quiet half-love/
half-aloneness, of the one who is never alone.
She brought a weird scenery: a temple, a bas-relief
of side-on faces leaning pike-nosed to right or left.
But the pink granite of the temple looked more
like a multinational insurance building,
its side-on faces
more of a board directors' meeting after the GFC.
Until she lifted that irksome thing of dreams, a key.
Of course I told myself she held up the possibility
of wisdom. And perhaps she did: the key, the wall,
codes and nudges.

She was dead by then and dead-
expert as a muse who couldn't have said any of it

when alive.

It was happiness and hope done quiet,
not the sort of thing a poet gets amazed at: don't
write a poem about it,
she advised, only Seamus
could, perhaps, do it justice. Heaney, and a key?
It was an old-fashioned dream, after all, and she
was a hundred and three.

When slotted in the wall
it turned my poor amnesia. But this was twenty
years ago and I break my word only now, and let
her 'wise old woman' turn to me, and turn in me.
I was the temple and the key. And I didn't like it.
If I got tired of fighting life — to turn it. Is that me?
The day was sunny, glary even, against the granite.
There were no phoney long bodies in short skirts,
the men and women, no whacky lace-up sandals but
I was frozen into that stillness like the garden scenes
of The Last Year in Marienbad.

No longer Egypt at all
it was a black and white film.
It was lit by reflector boards.
It was almost ah-and-gothic
music, repetitious phrases and reversals,
and the arch
hesitations like (but not) an effing TV cheffing series.
Buckets of fake chords, grimaces over undercooked
unconscious ... But its walls made patterns like silent
instruments, and after so much silence,
it felt like the muse of geometrics.

The key fell from the wall like a battery from a torch.

She spoke and I knew what her words meant but nothing of her words came through the light into the morning.

Revelation is never a line of words if out of context. Had she been embalmed too hard? Had they hooked her brains out through a nostril and left her wandering half-stoned in the desert mythologies? Older than her Old Testament. More opaque even than that film of Marienbad. The sun rose like a blob in a lava lamp. I waited for it to fall. Side-face is po-face, after all. I saw a bandaid on her wrist, and her goitre as it had: grown into a melon on her throat.

After hope, the sub-text.

Journey back to the father

Sometimes I help him balance along the endless platform. I note he has wet trouser cuffs and his right knee is damp. He keeps walking into the CBD from inner suburbs along a platform which repeats its stairs its signs its bench seats but never reaches the city and never meets the schedules and trains screech and scream and lay our ears back, as if scouring the air like Raptor 44s, but stopping hours ahead somewhere. He stumbles, my father (and I catch him), old now but not as old as when he died, and in greater health, now, it must be said:

- God, it's hot. Is it still summer? Christ, I'd love a cold beer.
- OK. Let's find a pub or a bar along the platform and stop.
- Nah, they only sell coffee. It's like bloody Melbourne.
- You don't like coffee?

- When did I ever like coffee? I want a beer but every time I walk to the train, it's like this, it's just coffee shops. This is what happens here. It happens all the time.

We stumble past its fleuro-lit, and brown-fronted shops all selling coffee, not cafes, just awnings sagging over counters.

This a first time helping him, his damp and baggy trousers, his black shoes scuffed from the daily platform, a slow-walk marathon, the endlessness of it. And trains that never stop.

Coffee Coffee Coffee Newspapers Coffee

We arrive on a platform opening out into sunlight the rails stained from piss, and unhappy passengers on the benches under the sign: NO TRAINS TODAY! NO SERVICES RUNNING!

My father is not a swearing man but right now he growls like graffiti, front-bar ugly, but no beer, no train, nothing.

Nothing. Then we start walking back, shoes, stumbling, the brown coffee shops and their brown shutters down.

Stumbling, shuffling, leaning forward, all the way back.

Closed Closed Closed Closed Closed

The present

I enter the world again and all its words
turn towards me with their faces

blotched. They mean what they mean.
And what they might and what they don't.

Me, I am the foolish. Of We. Of Now.

Turnbull's bone for the News Corp behemoth

MEDIA

Ray Cassin

In the closing decade of the 20th century, that distant era when intelligent people could still be heard arguing about whether newspapers would survive the rise of the internet, a departing editor of *The Age* sent me a handwritten note. After saying the usual things — thank you for your contribution to the paper, I've enjoyed working with you, etc. — he concluded with 'And I wish you the best of luck in these uncertain times'.

The line is etched in my memory because there hasn't been a day since when it didn't accurately characterise the plight of those who work in Australia's media.

The same editor also used to remind people that this age of uncertainty had not begun with the arrival of the internet, but with a short-sighted political decision.

In 1987 the Hawke Government allowed Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd to buy the Herald and Weekly Times, which then controlled most of the nation's daily newspapers outside Sydney. The consequence was that ownership of the metropolitan dailies, which had already been dangerously over-concentrated with three dominant players, was now, in all states except WA, in the hands of only two: the News Ltd behemoth, and an increasingly nervous Fairfax, proprietor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and the *Australian Financial Review*.

The nervousness soon turned to panic as Warwick Fairfax — 'young Warwick' — took on massive debt to buy back shares in the company, thus restoring it to his family and thereby hoping to protect it from the acquisitive Murdoch. The debt was to be repaid by earnings from Fairfax's flourishing and newly secured business. Or at least that was the plan. But it did not work as intended because 1987 was also the year of a global share market crash that slashed company valuations, making young Warwick's debt unsustainable.

The would-be saviour left the country, Fairfax was briefly placed in receivership, and since then has staggered and faltered under a revolving-door succession of managements. Like their counterparts vainly trying to save other newspaper empires around the world, none has found a way of replacing the classified-advertising revenues that have steadily been lost to stand-alone internet sites.

And so Fairfax, once the standard-bearer of quality journalism in Australia, now offers its readers ever-thinner papers and ever more dumbed-down websites, produced by ever-shrinking staffs. Meanwhile News Ltd wields ever-greater political influence through its dominance of the nation's media.

Why rehearse this history? Because the communications revolution wrought by the internet has been so dazzling that people too easily view all problems of media

policy through the frame of that revolution.

Yes, the internet has destroyed the newspaper business model. Yes, the different delivery platforms that distinguish print from broadcast media merge in digital media. And yes, the interactivity of the internet, especially through social media, is transforming the relationship between journalists and their audience.

But while all that has been going on the excessive concentration of ownership created by the Hawke Government's stupidity has not gone away. And it matters that it hasn't gone away because most people — including the contributors and readers of digital sites such as *Crikey*, *New Matilda*, *The Conversation*, *Inside Story* and, indeed, *Eureka Street* — still depend on so-called 'legacy' media for most of their information.

Some of these sites sometimes break news. But on at least three days out of five, and in some weeks on five days out of five, they are essentially purveyors of commentary. That is no bad thing, of course, because together they offer a greater range and depth of commentary than is available in mainstream media. But they are not primarily bearers of news: apart from anything else, they do not have the staff or the budgets to conduct a news-gathering operation.

There are recently established digital sites, such as *The New Daily* and *Guardian Australia*, that do compete with mainstream news media, but they are lean operations that rely on other sources to supplement what they can offer readers from their own newsrooms: the *Guardian* draws from its UK parent and *The New Daily*, thus far at any rate, runs a lot of wire-service and contributed copy.

All this digital media activity has allowed savvy users of the internet to seek and sift information from multiple sources, thereby acquiring a kind of independence from the agendas of editorial decision-makers in mainstream media that was not possible in the pre-internet world. As *Guardian* columnist Katharine Murphy has pointed out, however, that is an elite usage of the 'net. Most consumers still depend on mainstream media, whether print, broadcast or digital, for news and usually for commentary on it too.

And because that is so, Australia's cross-media ownership laws, which at present prohibit a proprietor from owning more than two of three kinds of outlet — print, television and radio — in the same local market, are all that prevents another 1987-style upheaval, resulting in yet further concentration of ownership.

Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull has indicated that the Government favours lifting these restrictions, citing the usual argument that the merging of delivery platforms in the digital age makes distinctions between print and broadcast media obsolete. Future media acquisitions, he says, should be regulated only by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, just like any other corporate merger or takeover.

If the argument were about technology alone, Turnbull's case would be

incontestable. But it is not about technology alone. For, as Murphy, *The Conversation's* Michelle Grattan and others have also pointed out, we all know who would be most interested in acquiring the assets that would be up for grabs if the cross-media laws are repealed. It won't be the proprietors of the newer, digital-only sites. It will be the owners of the existing newspaper and broadcasting empires, and the quickest to pounce would be the behemoth itself, News Ltd.

Turnbull surely knows this. As anyone who has discussed the future of media with him can attest, he is unusual among Australian politicians in having a keen regard for the role of journalism in any democracy worthy of the name. That makes his blithe disregard of the prospect of handing Rupert Murdoch even greater influence over Australian politics all the more puzzling, and it is unsurprising that some observers see the foreshadowed law change as a pay-off for News Corp's support of the Coalition in the 2013 election.

Whatever the Government's motive may be, the vigour of Australia's democracy would be sapped by what it proposes to do.

Too soon for MH370 punchlines

MEDIA

Tim Kroenert

The jokes have already begun. One meme juxtaposed a photograph of an F-117 Nighthawk and a caption declaring its formidable stealth capabilities, with a picture of a Boeing 777 similar to that used in flight MH370 and the tart retort, 'Bitch, please.' Another featured Herv  Villechaize's *Fantasy Island* character Tattoo, whose claim to fame was crying 'The plane! The plane!' to announce the arrival of a new set of resort guests — perhaps he should help with the search for the Malaysia Airlines passenger flight that went missing two weeks ago?

Contrast these wry gibes with the [image](#) of Erlina Panjaitan, mother of 24-year-old MH370 passenger Firman Chandra Siregar, slumped in anguish among the consoling arms of her family. Of four Chinese men, sagging and sombre in a dark hotel ballroom, as they watch news coverage of the disappearance. Of a woman weeping, and a man crumpling a damp tissue in the fist that props his stooped head. Of other relatives of passengers, locked in an embrace ahead of a meeting with airline officials. These are the human faces of the tragedy.

There is little doubt that it is too soon and the story too tragic to be the butt of jokes. But the fact that such responses exist speaks to the ways in which this story has permeated the public imagination in unhealthy ways. The engagement is frequently marked by genuine concern, but also contains a deeply voyeuristic fascination that is divorced from the humanity of these events. People love a mystery, and an unhappy ending even more. It seems likely that the greater the drama of the eventual truth, the more satisfied we will be.

Despite the slim hope that the aircraft has landed in remote terrain, stranded but safe, the sad truth is that the story will probably turn out to be one of heartbreak for the families and loved ones of the 227 passengers and 12 crew members. Yet it is not the human tragedy but the chords of uncertainty and mystery — the lack of debris, the formal sign-off that came from the plane some hours after things had ostensibly started to go awry — that have captured the public imagination. MH370 has already become the stuff of legend.

Some commentators predict a mundane, albeit tragic outcome. Writing for wired.com, Chris Goodfellow, a pilot with 20 years experience, [outlines](#) a commonsense theory involving a cockpit fire, that encapsulates some of the more baffling details of the case. Goodfellow draws on his extensive experience to make sensible inferences about the thought processes of the flight's senior captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, and cast doubt on some of the more fanciful conspiracy theories. His account isn't airtight, but it is refreshingly levelheaded, and persuasive.

Yet the conspiracy theories hold sway. News sources have thrived on rumours

of terrorist hijackings and government cover-ups, and shovel-fed them to a ravenous public. Chagrined by the fatuous coverage, a colleague voiced his own theory: that the culprits are Kang and Kodos, the cycloptic, tentacled extraterrestrials of *The Simpsons* fame. In an age where the immediacy of social media and the surfeit of 'celebrity' make human lives fair game, we take our news with a dose of drama, and the more extreme, the better.

It's the same psychology that is at play when we blindly accept the latest celebrity death hoax (this week it was Wayne Knight, *Seinfeld's* Newman, who had to take to Twitter to assure the public of his continued viability). Or when the tragic news of a celebrity's death is proven to be true. Philip Seymour Hoffman was reported dead, then it was a hoax, then it turned out to be true after all. The grief we feel for popular public figures who die may be authentic, but doesn't it also contain a kind of voyeuristic satisfaction, that the narrative of their life, in which we have been so invested, should come to such a dramatic conclusion?

The MH370 story does make for compelling drama. I've been as enticed by the elements of mystery as anyone else. But let's not lose sight of the main picture: 239 human beings have likely lost their lives. They will leave behind friends and families for whom the grief will be real and long-lasting, and not the stuff of reality TV rubbernecking. The search for answers should be marked by sensitivity and empathy for them, and not be fuelled by a broader public thirst for dramatic satisfaction. And it's definitely too soon for jokes.

Murky law in Crimea land grab

INTERNATIONAL

Justin Glyn

While pro-Russian and pro-Western media have been spinning the Crimea crisis as either a heroic exercise in righting a past wrong or a land grab by a new Hitler, the legal position is far from straightforward.

Crimea was once an independent Tatar khanate, captured by Russia in the 18th century. The Tatars were deported by Stalin as punishment for alleged collaboration with the Nazis — although some fought on either side in World War II. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev (then Soviet leader), gifted the territory to Ukraine. The decision was of no practical consequence at the time since both Russia and Ukraine were simply states within the USSR. There was, however, no public (or even parliamentary) consultation.

In the Gorbachev era, many Tatars returned. They now form about 12 per cent of the population (about 60 per cent are Russian, the remainder Ukrainians, Bulgarians etc.). Strategically, Crimea is important for its natural resources and its ice-free, deepwater port of Sevastopol, a major base of Russia's powerful Black Sea Fleet.

The international law claims are as complex as the history.

The US and its allies are right to note that, since the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 (later embodied in the UN Charter), borders may no longer be changed by force.

The Russian answer (equally true) is that it is not clear that Ukraine ever validly acquired title to Crimea — it seems the peninsula's status was papered over after the USSR's dissolution. A number of declarations of autonomy, clashes and de facto compromises in the following five years left Ukraine holding the territory and most naval facilities, but gave Russia the bulk of the fleet anchored there, a lease of the port of Sevastopol and the right to station up to 25,000 troops in Crimea.

In addition, Russia claims to be defending its nationals by intervening in the dispute. This, too, is murky. While defence of nationals is a kind of self-defence (and a traditional justification for use of force), it is not clear that Russians in Crimea were endangered. Certainly, no direct threats had been made against them. On the other hand, a pro-Russian Ukrainian government had just been ousted by force, and the new government's first act (later vetoed by the new president) was to strip Russian of its status as regional language.

All of this seems to have created a great deal of mistrust among ethnic Russians as to the new government's intentions, doubtless inflamed by Russia for its own ends.

NATO correctly says Crimea's defection runs counter to Ukraine's constitution.

Pro-Russian Crimeans retort that the current Ukrainian government is unconstitutional, as it came to power in an unconstitutional coup. The last president (incompetent and corrupt though he may have been) was democratically elected and was only impeached by a rump of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) operating without the necessary quorum. Both an autonomous Crimea and the new Ukrainian government therefore seem equally unconstitutional.

The next difficulty is posed by that very slippery concept: self-determination. While, in general, international lawyers agree that peoples have the right to self-determination, it is not clear what that means. Does everyone have the right to their own state? Probably not: national sovereignty is fundamental to international law.

Nevertheless, the rights to cultural life and language do enjoy broad protection. Thus it was that in 1999, NATO forces cited the Kosovar Albanians' right to self-determination and their persecution by Serbia as the reason for bombing Serbia. In 2008 (in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 which recognised an autonomous Kosovo within Serbia), most NATO countries recognised Kosovo's declaration of independence.

While NATO claims Kosovo was a special case due to the violence of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, Russia sees it as a precedent in favour of intervention. If Crimea's referendum was invalidated by the presence of thinly-disguised Russian troops, the Kosovar declaration of independence (accepted by the West) seems equally tainted: after all, it took place without a referendum, following a sustained NATO bombing campaign (with only retrospective UN authority) and during Kosovo's subsequent occupation by a NATO-led force.

In the final analysis, the international law position is debatable and there is more than enough hypocrisy to go around. The Crimean issue is perhaps best analysed not through the prism of international law but rather that of age-old great power politics.

Free speech! Well, sort of

MEDIA

Ellena Savage

A few months back, I promised myself I would stop clicking on click-bait; would never again step into the dark abyss of reactive journalism and professional trolling. The real news lately has been difficult enough to swallow without wading through sloppy think pieces on why gen Y is literally the worst, what beards and/or Beyonce really say about café culture, and what Andrew Bolt's opinion about something is.

But I fell down the rabbit hole this week when the ABC apologised to Bolt for airing panellists' comments on last week's Q&A that suggested he was 'racist'.

Yes, back in 2011 the Federal Court found that certain pieces of Bolt's writing were in breach of part of the Racial Discrimination Act, and so one could suggest that Q&A was within its legal rights to broadcast such an accusation. Marcia Langton, chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at Melbourne Uni, [apologised](#) for causing offense, but not for the intentions behind her words, stating Bolt's 'obsessive writing about the colour of the skin of particular Aboriginal people is malicious and cowardly'.

Public opinion, at least that on the right-hand side of politics, says the racial vilification legislation is political and therefore not about enduring notions of justice. *Free speech!* it says, as if unqualified freedom to information and expression has ever and could ever possibly exist in a civil society. So I can see why the ABC apologised, apologies being easier to procure than permission slips.

Bolt's response to Q&A's airing was surprising. While no human is immune to emotional distress, it seems excessive for a man whose career has taken him to the edge of defamation laws to publicly wither under his opponents' attacks. Sincerity aside, what this matter brings to light is the discord between Australian conservatives' rhetoric about liberty and free speech, and the reality their policies and opinions impose.

Take Attorney General George Brandis' explanation behind his commitment to repeal section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. He says 'it's not the role of the Government to tell people what they are allowed to think and it's not the role of the Government to tell people what opinions they are allowed to express.' Sounds reasonable.

It would sound a lot more reasonable if Brandis' party's policies actually supported a liberal agenda and the freedom of expression, which they don't. Ben Pynt at the *Sydney Morning Herald* [reports](#) the cost of accessing the information outlining the legality of the arbitrary detention of asylum seekers: between \$6129 and \$12,259. The cost to an influential arts organisation for taking a stand on human rights? The threat of defunding. The price paid by asylum seekers in

detention chanting 'freedom' in an offshore detention facility? Priceless.

At the state level, a conservative government is limiting Victorians' freedom of association and expression by increasing police powers to remove peaceful protestors from public spaces. And good luck to you if you are suspected of being involved in biker gangs in Queensland, where if you don't talk to police you'll face five years in prison. But I guess that's a violation of the right to silence rather than speech, so we can let that one slide.

Neither major party seems interested in averting this dangerous trend of eroding basic civil liberties. It speaks to the coverage of the weekend's March in March protests which attracted over 50,000 folks airing their outrage and feelings of powerlessness against a reactionary government: several news outlets did not report on it, others reported with cynicism. Conversation around the event belittled the rally to a disorganised bunch of hippies acting undemocratically for suggesting the Prime Minister is not fit for his office.

When people use their bodies politically, when they rally, and when they speak up in defence of their experiences, it's because they are acutely aware of how little consequence they are to a government and the powers enabled by a government. They have exhausted whatever options they have to be heard, and for most people, those options are very limited in the first place.

Brandis can talk liberty and freedom as much as he likes, but unless he can guarantee equal freedoms — and the resources that enable the full democratic participation of all — he's taking the piss.

Faiths fight forced marriage

RELIGION

Ashleigh Green

This week's inauguration of the Global Freedom Network — a large-scale interfaith initiative to end slavery — publicly recognises the importance of interfaith collaboration as a means of understanding and addressing social issues. The united efforts of Catholic, Anglican and Muslim leaders reflect a realisation that no single religious tradition can solve an issue as immense as slavery, and that solutions to big issues require the wisdom of many.

The launch comes not long after an interfaith forum on forced marriage, which I attended earlier this month at the NSW Parliament. The issue of forced marriage re-entered Australia's media spotlight in February following [reports](#) that an imam in NSW married a 12-year-old-girl to a 26-year-old man. Now, for the first time in Australia's history, the issue was being discussed in an interfaith context.

Forced marriage was not presented as an issue limited to one religious tradition. It was presented as a human issue fuelled by emotional, cultural and familial matters that span religious traditions. It was therefore an issue that must be dealt with by the broader society.

It is easy to deem a problem 'somebody else's business', especially when the issue seems far-fetched and foreign. But it would be foolish to leave it solely to the Muslim community to address the issue of forced marriage, which is the product of deep cultural and familial structures. Islam itself condemns forced marriage, and Muslim leaders need to be educated and trained to work with forced marriage victims. But the roots of the issue span cultures and religions to the extent that one religious community alone cannot end this practice.

This year, for the first time in Australia, we read about an incident of forced marriage in the Muslim community and, rather than scoff and make derogatory comments, we discussed the issue sensibly in a public forum. We took it to the NSW Parliament. We invited Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Jews to take part in the discussion. And we discovered that forced marriage is not a Muslim issue.

Clinical psychologist Dr Saroja Srinivasm, Hindu representative on the interfaith panel, described the emotional, cultural and familial factors involved in forced marriages: 'You have parents telling their daughters that if they don't marry, Grandma will have a heart attack.' Girls feel compelled to honour the will of their parents and preserve their cultural heritage, or face community violence. In cases where women refuse to enter a marriage or request a divorce, communities often react by saying, 'She destroyed her family. How can we support her?'

Forced marriage is not an issue that can be handed over to one religious tradition for solutions. Panellists emphasised the need for early intervention and education in schools and communities.

For years, interfaith dialogue has been taking place in homes, places of worship, and community centres. In the wake of September 11, mosques, temples and synagogues held open days, Muslim homes were opened during Ramadan, and interfaith discussion groups began in the lounge rooms of well-intentioned individuals. Efforts have been local, organic, and motivated by a humble desire to get to know the person next door.

For the interfaith veterans who have spent years fostering relations with other faiths, the launch of the Global Freedom Network is encouragement that their work is valued. It is a sign that our global leaders see interfaith collaboration not as a token gesture, but as a crucial step in addressing important issues.

As expressed in a joint statement by the founding committee: 'Only by activating, all over the world, the ideals of faith and shared human values can we marshal the spiritual power, the joint effort, and the liberating vision to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking from our world and for our time.'

From climate change to slavery to forced marriage, solutions can only be found through time spent in dialogue and deep exchange. We need to listen. We need to share. We need to collaborate. An interfaith initiative as large and potentially influential as the Global Freedom Network is unprecedented. It is, indeed, a step forward.

Asylum seeker ethics is simple

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

When governments and other authorities treat people harshly, as is now happening to asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island, someone will normally ask whether what they are doing is right. This is the ethical question, and it will receive one of three responses.

Many will say that government policy making has nothing to do with ethical reflection. What a duly elected government does with majority support is by definition right. The strong do what they wish, and the weak suffer what they must. This position should be respected for its honesty even though it will corrupt a society.

Many will engage with the questions of right and wrong and draw conclusions. Some will argue that the harm inflicted by government policy is ethically defensible. Others will deny it.

Finally, some people will withhold judgment, arguing that the question is ethically complex and even confusing. Asylum seeker policy, for example, must take into account many issues, such as the protection of borders, the number of refugees Australia can take, the deaths at sea, the behaviour of people smugglers, the attitude of the community to refugees and the cost of receiving asylum seekers. An ethical judgment on the any part of the policy must await consideration of all these factors. In other words we must offer an acceptable alternative policy before judging elements of an existing policy to be unethical.

I would argue that this position is mistaken. When we are considering the harm inflicted on people by governments the ethical questions are quite simple. The complexities and confusions arise properly only after we have answered them. They concern how to shape a policy that is both effective and ethically defensible, and how we are to handle living in a society whose government we believe to act unethically.

If we are asked whether it is right to inflict harm on others, we would normally say it is not. The exceptions are when people consent to the harm because it is for their own good, as it might be in medical procedures, or when the harm they suffer is in response to wrongdoing on their part, as it might be in gaol sentences, or when they personally represent a danger to society, as they might in the isolation of plague carriers.

But when the disrespect for people's human dignity is inflicted to secure goals that have nothing to do with their needs or wrongdoing, it is clearly and simply ethically unjustifiable. And it should be said to be such.

So it would be ethically unjustifiable for a government to achieve the goal of

population control by having new born babies killed. It would be ethically unjustifiable for a government to alleviate racial tension by making citizens belonging to a racial minority wear a scarlet uniform. It would ethically unjustifiable for a school to allay anger at the behaviour of some of its older students by expelling and shaming a group of younger students.

For the same reasons it is ethically unjustifiable for the Australian Government to imprison in dangerous and uncontrolled situations one group of asylum seekers in order that their hardship will deter others from claiming protection, and so from the risk of drowning.

From the ethical point of view the ill treatment of asylum seekers is neither complex nor confusing. In fact in a just society ethical judgment simplifies the making of policy. It eliminates unacceptable options and so encourages good policy making.

Complex questions do arise after the ethical questions are answered. The first question is how to deal in an ethically principled way with the many factors that need to be addressed in good policy. We ought to engage with these complexities, and should expect from time to time to be confused by them. But our confusion at this complexity does not extend to the judgment of what is right and wrong in the way people are treated.

The second complex set of questions is psychological or spiritual in character. When we have come to a conclusion that people are being treated wrongly, how do we relate to people who argue that their treatment is right, or that governments should not be concerned with what is right or wrong? And if our judgment is shared only by a small minority in our society, should we keep our opinions to ourselves for fear of seeming self-righteous? Such questions can lead us to back off our judgment about right and wrong.

As we wrestle with these questions our proper stance is one of courage, simplicity and humility. In holding to what we believe to be true we have Luther's words to guide us, 'Here I stand, I can do no other'. And if we need ecumenical support, we have Ignatius' account of what is necessary for salvation: 'to obey the law of God in all things so that not even if I were made Lord of all creation, or to save my life here on earth, would I consent to violate a commandment ... that binds me under pain of mortal sin'.

But especially if we are in the majority on any issue, the challenge is to recognise our fallibility, and to engage without shouting, or demeaning those who hold different views.

And finally, we can face complex questions about how we are to act. Generally if we come to the judgment that our government is treating people wrongly, our judgment should flow into action, whether it be through prayer, conversation, writing to our local member or attending a vigil for the afflicted.

Sex, lies and political theory

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Hannah Arendt* (PG). Director: Margarethe von Trotta. Starring: Barbara Sukowa. 114 minutes**

***Gloria* (MA). Director: Sebastián Lelio. Starring: Paulina Garcá-a, Sergio Hernández. 109 minutes**

Accepting her well-deserved Oscar this month for her role in Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine*, Cate Blanchett decried the Hollywood myth that 'female films with women at the center are niche experiences'. Two non-English-language films currently on release may not achieve the box office bounty or mainstream recognition of *Blue Jasmine* but they do contain robust and deeply empathetic portrayals of strong female characters who are as intriguing and authentic as Blanchett's Jasmine.

Watching *Hannah Arendt* is largely a cerebral experience. The film is based on the experiences of German-American Jew and political theorist Arendt, who in 1961 developed the theory of the banality of evil, in response to the trial of Nazi 'desk-murderer' [Adolf Eichmann](#). It portrays the act and aftermath of her controversial reporting on the trial for *The New Yorker* magazine, in a series of articles that would later evolve into her seminal tome *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

The film explores both Hannah's ideas and her thought process. She develops her arguments through heated conversations with friends and colleagues during casual gatherings. In this regard it is a dialogue-heavy film, in which some characters seem to serve no function other than to provide the counter-arguments that help Hannah fine-tune her larger theories. But at other times it lapses into near silence, finding Hannah in moments of deep rumination, her cigarette burning low as behind her eyes her formidable mind blazes.

Sukowa is excellent as Hannah, whose staunch intellectualisation of the trial and the events to which it pertains puts her in opposition to much of the western world, and particularly to members of the Jewish diaspora, who take her rationality as heartlessness, and viciously condemn her for it. But Arendt's desire to understand these events intellectually is not merely abstract. It is motivated by passion — the Holocaust touched her life directly and had a profound personal impact. Sukowa captures also these sad, wounded depths of the character.

This film is intriguing but imperfect. It is replete with phony American accents and bad vocal overdubs that often thwart its attempts at humour (a magazine editor's strict interventions with Hannah are stymied by his awe for her) and conflict (such as her verbal spats with an appalled Jewish colleague). A scene where she is refused forgiveness by an old, dear friend on his deathbed is one of

the few truly touching moments in a film that appeals more to the head than the heart.

In this respect at least, Chilean film *Gloria* is *Hannah's* opposite. It relies almost solely on engaging the audience emotionally in its lead character's experiences, and does so effectively, despite a decidedly thin story. Gloria (García) is a free-spirited, 'older' woman who is looking for love and companionship in modern-day Santiago. Her adult children love but have little time for her, and her evening excursions to boozy dance parties seem often to conclude with her returning home drunk, despondent and alone.

Things seem to take a turn for the better when she meets fellow divorcee Rodolfo (Hernández) and commences a relationship with him. *Gloria* is remarkable, and commendable, for the way it honours the romantic and passionate aspects of these older characters' lives. This translates into some fairly graphic sex scenes between Gloria and Rodolfo; no mere close-lipped stage kisses or under-the-sheets canoodling here. The sweet and increasingly sour moments of this romance are treated with equivalent seriousness.

Motifs offer signposts to Gloria's mental and emotional state. We see her driving her car, and she is either singing aloud or steering in sullen silence. She spurns a hairless cat that finds its way into her apartment, then later, when she is at a particularly low point, takes pity on it, and allows herself to take comfort from it. The cat is woven into a biblical myth by Gloria's housekeeper, who implies that the cat's essence is the breath of a lion; an image that is at once fierce, permeable and impermanent. This, too, describes Gloria.

And Gloria drinks, and Gloria smokes, and Gloria begins using marijuana. These substances are ostensibly the accoutrements of free-spiritedness, but Gloria's prolific use of them reeks also of unhappiness. Likewise her willingness to forgive Rodolfo's mistreatment of her; he is preoccupied with his ex-wife and adult daughters yet refuses to tell them about Gloria, not seeing how this secrecy is a slight against Gloria's dignity. If Gloria is to regain dignity and achieve happiness she must learn to thrive beyond Rodolfo's inadequate affections.

Like Sukowa with Hannah, García brings depth and vibrancy to a flawed character. *Gloria* is frequently sad, and seems to struggle during its arduous final 30 minutes to find a hopeful note on which to settle. It finds one eventually, leaving us with the image of Gloria dancing ebulliently to a song that bears her name. It is perhaps the happiest ending you could expect for her: sure, she'll be down again, but right now she is up, and there seems to be little doubt that no matter what happens next, she will always find her way back here, somehow.

Trials of a recalcitrant priest

RELIGION

Frank O'Shea

Let us talk about Catholic priests. Consider especially those who are now in their 60s, after a life of service to their church. They were seminarians in the heady days of Vatican II when everything seemed possible. They managed to survive the aftermath of was [Humanae Vitae](#) and continued to preach and counsel, to lead the sacred rites and to be faithful leaders of their flocks.

Some have directed retreats or preached parish missions; others have ministered to the young in schools and youth clubs; all have lived by the dictum that service to the least — the poor and mentally ill, the prisoners and prostitutes, the homeless and the addicted — is service to their god. But while their life has been exemplary, they cannot help being stained by association with those who have disgraced their calling.

In addition to this many priests see themselves as being under siege from an old guard in the Vatican. As this is written, six Irish priests have been silenced so that they cannot hear confessions or officiate at baptisms, weddings or funerals. There is some official term like 'had their faculties removed' but that sounds too painful. Two are Redemptorists; the others are a Passionist, an Augustinian, a Capuchin and a Marist — all order men. Tony Flannery, one of the Redemptorists thus silenced, has written of his [experience](#) .

In the aftermath of one of the reports on clerical sexual abuse in Ireland, he speculated on how difficult it would soon be to find priests for ordinary parish work. In that context, he said he did not believe 'the priesthood, as we currently have it in the church, originated with Jesus'.

He suggested that some time after Jesus 'a select and privileged group who had abrogated power and authority to themselves' claimed that priesthood had been instituted at the Last Supper. His view was that it is not the priest alone who has the power to celebrate the Eucharist but that this belongs to the whole community.

His writings brought him to the notice of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), the curial body responsible for defending orthodoxy. He was duly summoned to Rome to answer to them, through the Canadian Superior General of his order. They provided two A4 pages for the meeting, one detailing the charges and one telling his superior what he was to require the recalcitrant one to do. Both pages were unsigned and un-headed.

Interestingly, the final sentence on the second page, read, 'You are to instruct Fr Flannery to withdraw from his leadership role in the Association of Catholic Priests.' Flannery speculates that this was as much a problem as his perceived doctrinal errors.

The ACP, founded only two years earlier in 2010, had a membership of more than 800 and was seen as inimical to the concept of obedience to authority. As well as its obvious function as a fraternal organisation, it also assumed a legal role: 'One of the things we quickly learned to do was to advise priests never to go to meet their bishop or superior without knowing the purpose of the meeting.' A simple and wise precaution, but it is easy to imagine how it would be interpreted as bolshie talk that would scare the establishment.

In time, Flannery found a theologian who was able to compose a form of words on the priesthood that would satisfy the CDF while not changing much that he had written. Unfortunately, they now found other things in his writings — about clerical celibacy, the role of women in the church, human sexuality, sexual orientation — to which they objected.

He did not have as much wriggle room in these matters and decided that he did not want to play the game any longer. Instead, he wrote a document explaining his position on all of these issues, ending with 'I cannot do otherwise than follow my conscience. This is where I stand.'

Some of Flannery's supporters hope that Pope Francis will reinstate him and the five other Irish priests who have been silenced. It would be some admission that their lives of service had value. Vatican II must seem a long time ago for them.

Religious rebels rattle Big Coal's cage

ENVIRONMENT

Thea Ormerod

The arrest last week of three identifiably religious people drew attention again to Whitehaven's new coal mine site at Maules Creek, in northern NSW.

The arrests came after a Catholic priest, three Uniting Church ministers, a Buddhist priest and the three arrestees faced off against a line of heavy haulage trucks at the entrance to the site. Why did these people of faith feel it was time to put their bodies on the line?

Simply put, when the law is fully harnessed to keep in place a system that many consider to be immoral, the most ethical action is peaceful, non-violent disobedience. Such action was taken by those protecting Jewish people from the Nazis during World War II, by the Jesuit [Berrigan brothers](#) in the Plowshares Movement, and during India's independence struggle, led by Mahatma Ghandi.

What has the Maules Creek coal mine got in common with these rather extreme examples? A great deal.

Probably the most underestimated crisis of our time is the developing ecological calamity resulting from climate change, driven by the extraction and burning of fossil fuels. Increasingly, humanity's collective investment in fossil fuels, which many people unwittingly support through our banks and super funds, has become dangerously disconnected from its ultimate outcome, the destruction of the biosphere. Coal is a major culprit.

Analysts have calculated a [carbon budget](#) , beyond which we will exceed the gravely dangerous threshold of a two-degree temperature rise. If greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at the current pace, this budget will be exhausted in just 15 years. Yet the business model of fossil fuel companies assumes that the extraction and burning of coal, oil and gas, will continue well into the future.

The fossil fuel industry globally has the confidence of governments, the finance sector and the public. Here in Australia, Big Coal uses its wealth to pay well-connected lobbyists at federal and state levels, as well as climate denial think tanks. The public's support is secured through misinformation about 'clean coal' and vastly inflated claims that the sector provides wealth and jobs. The finance sector's support is secured by promoting the perception that coal is a highly profitable, low risk option that renewables will never realistically replace.

The logical next step is for the legal system to protect the interests of companies. This is what is happening at Maules Creek.

Whitehaven's behaviour has been demonstrably unethical. Local ecologists have established that the company was given federal and state approvals based on false information it gave about the offset properties it purchased. Such concerns

are now being [investigated](#) by a Federal Senate committee into ecological offsets, and was the subject of a recent *Lateline* [investigation](#) and an ABC *Background Briefing* [report](#) .

Apart from the harm its exports will do to the planet, the mine is set to decimate the last remnant of critically endangered box gum grassy woodland, the Leard Forest. The local Gomeri people have been forbidden from entering the Leard, over which they hold native title; their rights have been trampled, sacred sites have been bulldozed, and they are unable to properly hold a culturally important smoking ceremony to honour the passing of a young member. Meanwhile local farmers stand to lose easy access to ground water because the mine, if fully developed, is predicted to drop the water table by up to ten metres.

Yet every legal and legislative avenue to stop Whitehaven's open cut coal mine has failed. The law is being used to defend those who are destroying the planet, from those who are trying to protect it. The only remaining option for those defending the future for future generations is to stand in the way.

For 18 months, peaceful protesters have attempted to blockade entrances to the site and slow the rate of deforestation. Until 12 March, there had been 20 arrests. When the three people of faith were arrested, it added weight to the protesters' challenge: public trust in religious institutions has flagged in recent times (often with good reason), but there remains a perception that religion plays an important role in the defense of morality.

Investing in coal mining projects such as Whitehaven can no longer be described as socially responsible. Regrettably, this message has not yet been grasped by the ANZ Bank, which is a major investor in Whitehaven. But the ANZ is not alone.

We had all better listen to this message soon, because divestment from fossil fuels is emerging as our best hope for averting the climate disaster towards which we are otherwise headed.

Tony hates lefty shirkers

CREATIVE

Various

this poem is about silence

words get in the way of silence
it needs a blank page
it needs space
in silence there can be longing
there can be anticipation
hostile intimate
you can hear it
in the pin-drop moment between bow and string
you can feel it between breaths
the inarticulate use of violence for expression
is this silence?
can you say the sharp sickle moon
that glows on a dark winter sky is silent?
when one turns their back in silence
silence is palpable
and what of a silence imposed in fear
silence can be loud
a silent protest
even without poster or placard is loud
when the powerless stitch their lips together
with needle and fishing line
is this silence
even if tears still fall
evil thrives under silence
a poem about silence

needs to be loud

to be heard

Colleen Keating

Our crisis

You let them cry

With no sympathy

You let them die

With no dignity

You trade their lives

For popularity

You trade their rights

Like they're property

You paint them as animals

They've bled as humans

You lock them in jail cells

Silencing innocence

You treat them as criminals

They're your wars' victims

They re-live their hell

When they need protection

You condemn their persecutors

You persecute them too

They're not our crisis

Our crisis is you.

Sarah George

Realpolitiky

There's a hint of resolution scattered on and off his face,
his aura's a disgrace, he awaits a revolution.

Better still, call it reform and apply a media blackout
and swiftly kick the hack out who would dare to question form

function, frame or dissolution. There's no grounds for appeal.
if you have sufficient zeal you can hide any obtrusion
on the body civic's mug. Spare a minister some change;
let not perspective range over policy in fug.
The PM's poker face flickers like a faulty switch,
he comes across as dense or kitsch when he obfuscates and dickers
and the government succumbs, falt'ring under weight of business;
Tony comes across as listless as he stuffs up stats and sums.
Hey there PM; keep your footing as the mess that oozes slickens
up your path. Abuse still sickens, but you have the bogans rooting
for the bottom line of comfort and indifference to others.
True, you give industries the 'smothers' but the cashed-up get the odd rort
and Australia for Australians is dog-whistled into mandate.
Keep your shoes shined and your part straight and you'll make hay from the
aliens,
single mothers, uppity workers, bleeding hearts and pesky journos ...
Give it up. All the world knows Tony hates the lefty shirkers.
There's a hint of satisfaction in the monolithic scowl.
The 'drys' are on the prowl and the PM needs no faction.
By the bedside shrine to Menzies, the evaporated scriptures,
he plots against the fixtures and prepares his neo-con frenzies.
Get your righteous on, dear Tony; and feed all the forsaken
to your economic Kraken conjured by your faith a'phony,
knowing that your right to rule is your equal right to maim
and the discourse runs the same: the worker is a tool.

Barry Gittins

Australia's asylum seeker holocaust

INTERNATIONAL

Lyn Bender

[Alice Herz-Sommer](#), believed to be the oldest survivor of the Holocaust, [died](#) recently in London aged 110. Her survival is a herculean feat in itself. Her optimism and gratitude for her life is even more remarkable.

An accomplished pianist at age 39, Herz-Sommer was sent to Therezienstadt camp in 1943 and liberated by the Russians in 1945. When the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia she made a fateful decision to stay in Prague, with her son and husband, to care for her sick mother. Most of her family fled to Palestine.

In 1942 her 73-year-old mother was transported to Thereizin, then a few months later to Treblinka extermination camp. Herz-Sommer recalled, even in her final years, that acute despair:

This was the lowest point in my life. She was sent away. Till now I don't know where she was, till now I don't know when she died, nothing. When I went home from bringing her to this place I remember I had to stop in the middle of the street and I listened to a voice, an inner voice — Now, nobody can help you, not your husband, not your little child, not the doctor.

This must have been a time of huge emotional and spiritual devastation. In all the losses and trauma that Herz-Sommer recounts, this seems to have been a turning point. She returned home to play and master the difficult 24 etudes of Chopin. For up to eight hours a day, she was immersed in this task. Perhaps it was then, as she said in later interviews, that music became her religion, that it began to 'save [her] life'. Her entire family was musical and music was her 'language'.

Music did literally save her. When Herz-Sommer and her son Rafael were sent to Thereisenstadt camp in 1943, they survived as performers in musical shows. These shows were staged by the Nazis to exhibit to the world the humane conditions in the camp. She and other artists were to feature in a propaganda movie. It depicted the camp as civilised and cultured, a haven for the many cultured Jews of Prague.

Fake money for fake cafes and fake shops, and fake children's play grounds were set up to dissemble for the visits by the International Red Cross. In truth many Jews were starving, dying or being sent to the death camps. The world was shown a good place, while its macabre truth was hidden. It was displayed as a Jewish settlement with rose gardens. Thus the IRC was tricked and taken in by Hitler.

Perhaps this is why the BBC — with its viable memory of the perfidy of Hitler — was so scathing in its [disbelief](#) regarding the recent words of Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop. Bishop was being quizzed regarding the violence at Manus

Island. The interviewer said, of the policy towards refugees, that it 'seems uncivilised' and 'inhumane'. 'Not at all', replied Bishop.

The interviewer, John Humphrys, continued: 'But [Nauru and Manus] have been described as 'breeding grounds for rape, riots, malaria and mental illness, that bear the look of concentration camps.' Humphrys also asked why asylum seekers couldn't be treated more humanely rather than savagely. After all they are people fleeing from danger and asking for help. Bishop cited stopping the boats and the drownings, and keeping an election promise made to the Australian people.

The BBC interviewer was incredulous. 'You are essentially operating a kind of Guantanamo bay ... in some ways even worse.' Bishop went on to say that she was undeterred by critics, including the UNHCR.

Germany had been a signatory to the Geneva Convention 1929 — a precursor to the Geneva Convention of 1949 — but only 'complied' in a limited way. It was this that allowed the Red Cross to visit Thereisenstadt, but also made it vulnerable to being duped by the fake humane setup for visitors' eyes.

Currently our Australian Government and the Opposition are showing scant respect for the United Nations Convention on Refugees of 1951. Declaring those seeking asylum to be illegals and pushing them back without assessment of their refugee status does not adhere to Australia's obligations as a signatory to the convention.

Julian Burnside QC, a respected human rights lawyer, has said that those seeking asylum are entitled to request refugee status at any country they can reach. He dismissed arguments from some conservative critics that the 'irregular maritime arrivals' are jumping a migrant queue. Apart from questioning the suggestion there is any queue to jump, he said that 'Etiquette became irrelevant when someone was running for their life.'

I wonder how many people like Herz-Sommer might be on those boats and imprisoned indefinitely, within Manus or Nauru.

Herz-Sommer could be an inspiration to us all. Despite the horror and loss that she suffered in her own life, she considered life to be a gift and a thing of great beauty. Her son died in 2001 aged 64. She said, of her son's death, 'He died without pain, for this I am grateful ... We must always look for the good. Even in the bad there is good.' Herz-Sommer continued playing music two hours a day, until her death.

Bali fear beyond Rhonda and Ketut

INTERNATIONAL

Ali Winters

Insurer AAMI's 'Rhonda and Ketut' Balinese love story was teased out over four commercials and three years. The marketing strategy, blurring advertising and entertainment, has come to its long-awaited, soapy end. Whether you have loved it or cringed at it, the campaign is a huge success, and its campy, cocktail soaked tentacles have penetrated the Australian mainstream.

But for the millions who tuned into the AAMI saga, how many have been puzzled by the brown-skinned man with the funny hankie on his head?

The knowledge Australians have for our closest Asian neighbour is poor. And awareness of Bali does not translate into awareness of Indonesia. According to a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade report released last year, 30 per cent of respondents [didn't know](#) Bali was part of Indonesia.

In the final ad, Rhonda chooses Ketut over an Australian man. Ketut says to Rhonda, 'Saya cinta kamu' — 'I love you'. This is the first time in history that Indonesian language has been used in an Australian TV commercial for a national brand.

Indonesia suffers from a lack of popularity in Australia. How is it that most of us are clueless to common words like 'I' or 'love' from the country that straddles our northern border? Indonesia is the world's third largest democracy, it's vital to our national security, and we share approximately \$15 billion worth of annual trade. But we prefer to bathe in apathy until tragedy whets our appetite for the place.

The latest research into the state of Indonesian language found it was vanishing from our schools and universities. An Asia Education Foundation report [found](#) 99 per cent of all Australian students studying Indonesian quit before year 12. More recently, Murdoch University Professor David Hill [found](#) enrolment in Indonesian courses fell nationally by 40 per cent from 2001 to 2010 and by 70 per cent in NSW.

Aren't we supposed to be preparing for the 'Asian century'? There is a policy belief that this means learning an Asian language. Julia Gillard's 2012 'Australia in the Asian Century White Paper' recommended every Australian student be given the opportunity to learn a 'targeted' language from kindergarten to year 12.

And this is bipartisan. Last December, Tony Abbott [stressed](#) the need for more Australians to 'speak Asian languages, catch cultural meanings and navigate local networks'. Abbott has [established](#) a new \$15 million dollar Australian centre for Indonesian studies to help Australians to 'get to know contemporary Indonesia better.'

Is Australia's 'mono-linguility' an economic disadvantage? Probably not, there

are enough bilingual Australians who are native Asian speakers to get us over the line, and English still is the lingua franca of the global economy. You don't have to be fluent in the mother tongue to do business in Jakarta. But failing to embed and grow Asian language in our education systems hurts our cultural IQ more than anything, making us more introspective and susceptible to mistrust and ignorance.

It's often said that Australia has 'a love affair with Bali', which AAMI has embodied in the Rhonda and Ketut story. But why is half the Australian True Crime genre about Bali-gone-bad? Titles like *It's Snowing in Bali* (referring to cocaine), *I Survived Kerobokan* (the prison), *Bali 9: The Untold Story* (remember them?), *Bali Raw: An Expose of the Underbelly of Bali* and at least three books about Schapelle Corby reveal an unhealthy obsession with the ills of one small island.

Dangers in Bali are real. The deaths of Noelene and Yvana Bischoff in January — most likely from food poisoning — were disturbing. Deaths and critical illness from toxic home brewed alcohol have been heavily reported in the last two years. But traffic accidents, robberies, violence and stupidity can happen anywhere.

More than loving Bali, it seems we love to fear and misunderstand it. And our relationship with Indonesia as a nation is the same. A year prior to the Rhonda and Ketut campaign, a Lowy Institute poll found that 61 per cent of respondents thought Indonesia posed a military threat to Australia. The DFAT report on Australian attitudes towards Indonesia found that the majority think its law-making practice is based on Islamic code.

It also ranked word-associations from respondents: 'Holidays' came in first, but was followed by 'Islamic country', 'people smugglers', 'bombs and terrorism', 'religious extremism', 'poverty' and 'drug smuggling.'

The DFAT poll was conducted in 2012. Since then our Government has lit a rocket under Indonesia's backside. 'Turn back the boats', spying allegations, territorial breaches ... I can't imagine Australian attitudes have improved much in the last six months when all news from Indonesia has centred around their justifiably pissed off president and foreign minister.

We can only hope our diplomatic relationship is restored soon. Meanwhile, let's all follow AAMI, Rhonda and Ketut into a Bali sunset, make an offering to Shiva and sink our toes into the possibly of having a romance of understanding, respect and love with our close neighbour.

Bullying artists and the art of conversation

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

Fingers have been pointed from both sides of the arts sponsorship debate. There are the nine artists who boycotted the Sydney Biennale because it would be accepting money sourced from Transfield's morally repugnant contract to run the Manus Island detention centre. Meanwhile Federal Arts Minister George Brandis and other critics have [described](#) the artists as a 'lynch mob', [suggesting](#) the board of the Biennale had allowed itself to be 'bullied' by the artists when it decided to reject Transfield funding.

The fiasco has humiliated the much respected Belgiorno-Nettis family, who have been regarded as generous and principled supporters of the arts for many years. Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull [denounced](#) the 'vicious ingratitude' of the boycotting artists and their supporters. Biennale board chair Luca Belgiorno-Nettis tendered his resignation and [said](#) he and staff members had been 'vilified'.

Belgiorno-Nettis described the protests as 'naive'. Gabrielle de Vietri, the artist leading the Transfield campaign, [said](#) other companies profiting from the policy of offshore detention centres would also be scrutinised. Artists know that they need financial support but realise that accepting donor funds implies a certain acceptance in the public eye that common values exist between them and their sponsors.

It is a fact that supporting the arts gives moral respectability to corporate entities such as banks and mining companies, which often have a reputation for greed and exploiting people and natural resources to improve their own bottom line. Most artists have a well developed sense of moral purpose that is integral to their work, and this can be compromised by their acceptance of funds from sponsors involved in morally dubious activities.

By definition artists are compromising their principles whenever they accept funds from business. Those who believe they can accept sponsorship and remain pure are, as Belgiorno-Nettis says, naive. If we accept this, we can focus on cultivating the best possible relationship between the artists and the sponsors. Crucial to this is the quality of the conversation that takes place between the two parties.

Sponsors can start out with a preoccupation on how their 'investment' in an artist or arts event can help to improve their bottom line. But conversation with the artists can lead them to consider that their financial 'investment' can contribute to a better world for all by making the moral vision of the artists more far-reaching and sustainable. For their part, the artists can learn from the sponsors how to bring home their message and their work to a wider public.

Joanna Mendelssohn of the University of New South Wales [alludes to](#) the opportunity there is for conversation between artists and sponsors: 'The great value of visual arts events is that it is easy to have conversations while looking at art — opera and theatre tend to demand silence except at interval.'

The threats and name-calling of recent weeks have been a conversation killer, a setback for both artists and business. The artists were correct when they [declared](#) that the mandatory detention of asylum seekers was 'ethically indefensible' and consequently it was not fitting for them to be associated with Transfield. But it would have been better to have brought it up in the form of person to person informal conversation between artists and representatives of the sponsor. Artists could then withdraw if the conversation did not bear fruit.