ABBOTT'S WAR ON EVERYTHING and its CASUALTIES

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A portrait style concept seemed an obvious choice for the cover design of this issue's theme, 'Abbott's War on Everything and its Casualties', to represent the Tony Abbot era of politics in Australia. In particular my concept was to focus on Abbott's facial expression as a means of communicating the theme. When exploring images of Abbott on the internet I found numerous satirical portraits. One portrait in particular stood out to me as something I felt I could rework for my cover design – one by Neil Moore. Moore had captured perfectly what I hoped to convey, in his illustration for the September 2014 issue of The Monthly magazine where Marr discusses the life and death of Abbott's love of liberty and the many faces of Abbot during his reign (see Marr 2014). It was at the time when a young woman faced jail, having accessed restricted data without authorisation over Abbott's daughter receiving a $60,000 scholarship that was not advertised to other students at the college she attended. The penalty for whistle blowing was a maximum of two years jail.

I wanted to pay homage to Neil Moore as a well-known and successful artist, who won a Walkely award for Australian journalism in 1980 and appears extensively in the Australian press. However, it was important not to just reproduce Moore's work exactly, not least as his illustration presents only a headshot. For my cover design I sketched in pencil a monochromatic replica of Moore's Abbott expression, and further developed my design by creating open arms as if Abbott was saying, 'Oh well, that's all folks' - as David Marr (2014) pens, 'He has not lost his faith in himself'.

References
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• three - five keywords.

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The title of this issue echoes a satirical take on Australian politics by the irreverent Chaser boys. Yet many Coalition policies are no laughing matter. Despite Tony Abbott's invocation of 'Team Australia', the Coalition was at war not only with the usual suspects such as parliamentary Opposition parties, terrorists and drug traffickers, but also with refugees, multiculturalism, the poor and infirm in Australia and overseas, trade unions, indigenous people, the environment and, indeed, the plethora of advocates for these causes. There seemed to be few Aussies actually on the team apart from the Coalition itself, individuals in the highest income bracket and powerful sections of corporate Australia.

This special issue casts a critical eye on the adverse impact of the Abbott Coalition Government policies on the quality of public debate, vulnerable groups, civil society, national security and Australia's international reputation. In the space of just two years it is remarkable how much harm Coalition policies caused and how much opprobrium they attracted, both at home and abroad. Here we focus on the media, social inequality, defence policy, climate change, and refugees as well as immigration more broadly. The ramifications for Australia's standing at the United Nations and for democracy, including the political party base, are also subject to scrutiny.

The analyses that follow demonstrate that Coalition policies and their style of implementation share certain dubious traits. On the domestic front the issues, remedies and slogans such as 'stop the boats' and 'axe the tax' were simplified and politicised by the Liberal National Coalition in a bid to ensure that they were elected and retained power. There was a dearth of open and informed debate based on evidence and no attempt to craft bipartisanism, notably in the recourse to wedge politics on climate change. The Abbott-led Coalition exhibited a marked resistance to expert advice and intolerance of criticism from any quarter including inter alia statutory authorities, non-government organisations and the United Nations.

A related theme that cut across policy domains was a lack of transparency manifest most prominently in covert negotiation of preferential trade deals, the slippery slope back to war in the Middle East, the secretive Operation Sovereign Borders and the offshore detention regime. When evasion of public accountability was called out, the Abbott Government sought to silence whistleblowers by excoriating them in public and threatening legal action. Such was the fate of concerned staff at detention centres, the former Australian Secret Intelligence Service ASIS operative who exposed Australia's bugging of the East Timor Government, and environmental NGOs protesting poorly regulated developments. Abbott said he was the 'political love child' of John Howard and Bronwyn Bishop; this was certainly evident in his efforts to repress critics.

Inconsistency was the order of the day. Professing a determination to balance the books, successive Coalition budgets sought major savings in expenditure, albeit not matched by a preparedness to raise taxes. Instead, they placed the burden squarely on the disadvantaged via deep cuts to social welfare and foreign aid, while also raiding irksome institutions of education, research and enquiry such as universities, the CSIRO and public broadcasting. Yet in these straitened times perks for the wealthy were quarantined, as were generous subsidies for the fossil fuel and mining industry, while expenditure on defence, counter terrorism and unauthorised immigration was greatly increased.

The Coalition's approach suggests an extremely narrow conception of the national interest that privileges political survival, border control and short-term economic growth at the expense of democracy, human rights and the environment. There was reckless disregard of the long-term cost to Australian society and broader conceptions of security in these policy areas. On the global level, jettisoning Australia's reputation as a good international citizen undermines its soft power and leverage with bilateral partners and in multilateral forums, not just in the life of the Abbott Government, but for years to come.

While the focus is on the Abbott Government, preliminary consideration is given to prospects for substantive policy shifts under Malcolm Turnbull. At first when Turnbull took over as Prime Minister there was optimistic speculation that he would steer the government on a relatively enlightened course in regard to treatment of asylum seekers, action on climate change, a modicum of bipartisanship and a more socially inclusive approach to the Australian community. These hopes were dashed with the right wing of the Liberal party maintaining a tight rein on Turnbull and, notwithstanding the odd rhetorical gesture to the contrary, there was little to no change in key policy domains. By mid-2016 the Coalition's electoral platform confirmed, if there was still any doubt, that Abbott's legacy was to remain intact.

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End Notes

1. Allusion to the satirical ABC TV program The Chaser's War on Everything.
2. Helen Ware covered the Abbott Government's decimation of the overseas aid budget in a previous issue Vol.34, No.1, 2015. Hence it is not addressed in this issue.

Abbott’s War on Everything and its Casualties

KARIN VON STROKIRCH
Commentary on Abbott Government and the Media

NICK ECONOMOU

In the aftermath of the 2013 election at which the Tony Abbott-led Liberal-National Coalition secured a substantial majority in the lower house, some of the Labor vanquished were quick to point to the media as a contributor to the outcome. News Corporation – the publishers of The Australian, The Herald Sun and the Daily Telegraph – and New South Wales-based talk-back radio hosts figured prominently in Labor claims of unfair, personality-based reporting and commentary especially in the period in which Julia Gillard was Labor leader and prime minister. Accordingly, the success of Tony Abbott was seen as being due in no small way to the obsession of News Corporation with Labor’s internal tensions over the leadership, and the constant vicious personal hounding of Julia Gillard by broadcasters like Alan Jones and Ray Hadley (by no means an exhaustive list).

While the allegation of sexism in the coverage of national politics during Ms Gillard’s prime ministership was an important development reflecting her historic ascendancy, the notion that the privately-owned media with its over-representation of conservative thunderers was responsible for unbalanced coverage of Labor has been a long standing feature of discussions about the relationship between ‘the press’ and Australian politics. Axiomatically, these forces ought to have been enthusiastic embracers of the new Coalition Government and its ultra-conservative leader Tony Abbott. By the same token, if the privately owned press is axiomatically anti-Labor, the suspicion is that the statutory authority called the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that provides a national television, radio and (increasingly these days) internet network is inherently anti-conservative. Given the very tense relationship that existed between the ABC and the previous Coalition Government under Prime Minister John Howard and his obsession with ‘the culture wars’, there was an expectation that old enmities would be resumed now that a socially conservative national government had been elected.

It didn’t quite turn out as expected, however. As the Coalition got down to the business of governing, a rather odd set of strained relationships emerged with the very same privately owned media that had appeared to be so hard on Gillard and Labor. One source of discontent was the apparent inability of the Abbott Government to expedite changes to racial vilification laws that had been used previously by indigenous political activists in a case against conservative commentator and columnist for the Herald Sun, Andrew Bolt. The government’s inability to pass changes through the Senate was part of the problem, but so too was a strong sense of resistance to them from within the Liberal party room. The responsible minister, Attorney General Senator George Brandis, struggled to justify his government’s definition of freedom of speech where such freedom could open the way to racial vilification. Later, Brandis would also struggle with another liberal notion when he (rather than the then Media minister, Malcolm Turnbull) took charge of changes to privacy laws to allow authorities to track citizen internet usage patterns that were based on requiring service providers to retain ‘meta-data’. Brandis’s attempt to define meta-data was almost as clumsy as his attempt to define free speech.

Meanwhile, relations between the Abbott Government and the other half of Australia’s private media duopoly, the Fairfax Corporation, had become somewhat fraught and, when it came to the then Treasurer, Joe Hockey, very nasty and personal. Part of this deteriorating relationship may well have been a reflection of the nature of the Fairfax media company and the readership/audience that consumes its product. If News Corporation’s tabloids are the preferred media choice for blue-collar, lower income earning, less well educated consumers, the Fairfax demographic tends to be the opposite. Fairfax papers were thus always likely to be more sensitive to the issues that are important to their readership, including how seriously matters such as climate change should be taken by government, what Australia should do about asylum seekers, whether marriage laws should be changed to accommodate same sex partnerships, and so on. On these issues, Fairfax papers had editorialised to advocate tolerance, compassion, equal opportunity, action on climate change and various other positions in line with outlooks of its overwhelmingly post-materialist consumer base.

Clearly the organisation was going to find itself in conflict with an ultra-conservative government that felt it had a mandate to pursue policies at odds with those
either explicitly or implicitly championed by Fairfax. The problematic relationship did not stop there, however. The Fairfax demographic not only held progressive views at odds with the government (and the tabloids); it was also the demographic that was no longer buying printed newspapers. With declining circulation and declining advertising revenue, Fairfax was and is, a media company in real trouble. The company thus needed the Abbott Government to address cross-media ownership rules and to allow for a shift in the amount of foreign investment permitted in Australian media companies. In the midst of all of this, the company found itself in the New South Wales Supreme Court to defend itself from a defamation claim lodged by Mr Hockey. Hockey claimed that the Fairfax press had accused him of corruption with regard to party fundraising, and that the accusation had been driven by malice on the part of some of Fairfax’s executive editors. The Supreme Court agreed with Hockey, and Fairfax had to pay him damages of $200,000.

Compared with all this, relations between the Abbott Government and the ABC appeared to be positively benign save for the usual lament at the Corporation that it could not provide the services expected of it given the government’s decision to cut its funding (even though Abbott had promised not to touch the ABC or the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) during his election campaign). This did change, however, when a full scale dispute between the ABC and the government erupted over the ABC’s treatment of an internal security matter—that staple of tension between state broadcaster and the state in Australian politics.

With the descent to civil war in Syria and surrounds leading to the rise to prominence of hardline Islamic guerrilla movements that were attracting mercenaries from everywhere, the Abbott Government began to harden its line on defence and on what was expected of Muslim communities in Australia. With its emphasis on patriotism, the Abbott approach was always going to generate controversy, and one televised arena where participants could thrash it out was the Question and Answer program (also known as Q&A) on ABC television’s main network. At one of these sessions, Mr Zaky Mallah – a person who had been investigated as a terrorist sympathiser and who had been invited by the program to attend – popped up to make a series of incendiary comments that provoked a full-on crisis between the government and ABC management.

The prime minister and many of his very conservative supporters within the party room (and, of course, amongst the conservative thunderers in the tabloid media) accused the ABC of undermining the national interest and siding with Australia’s geostrategic enemies (in this case, international Islamic terrorism). ABC management’s defence was based on supporting notions of independence not just of thought and expression but also from being dictated to on matters of programming by government. Prime Minister Abbott retaliated by placing a ban on future appearances on Q&A by him or anyone else in the Cabinet. The responsible minister (and Q&A devotee) Mr Turnbull, meanwhile, preferred to attack the apparent lack of judgement on the part of those who planned Q&A and this, in turn, helped to reveal that the program was in fact run under the auspices of the ABC’s entertainment division rather than its news and current affairs department. This was to become the basis of a rapprochement: within a few months the ABC had conducted an internal review and promised to take greater care in managing ‘balance’ when dealing with political affairs, and Abbott lifted his Q&A ban. Within months both Abbott and ABC General Manager Mark Scott were gone – in the case of the former, replaced as leader by none other than Turnbull, and, in the case of the latter, by his announced intention to retire.

When he finally fronted a press conference following his defeat by Malcolm Turnbull in the Liberal party room leadership ballot, Tony Abbott cited press obsession with internecine squabbling as one of the things that contributed to the failure of his leadership. Here then, Abbott maintained the long political tradition of blaming the media for a political outcome he didn’t like. Labor partisans, and especially those who loathed sections of the media for their treatment of Julia Gillard, would have been appalled by such hubris. Meanwhile, the media landscape in Australia continued to be shaped by the rise of digital technology and its attendant phenomena including ‘the blog’, ‘the tweet’ and ‘the facebook page’ where information and opinions can be transmitted very quickly and not necessarily by journalists. The old staple of media politics – the written word in printed form – continued to decline with the venerable Fairfax mastheads The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, and Australian Financial Review losing circulation, advertising and journalists. Soon the printed format of these papers themselves may disappear, leaving the public space to the internet. Here the ABC will be an important player, thanks to Mark Scott’s persistent support of the network’s online services. Politicians may find the ABC to be the last media organ committed to the idea of balance in reporting and to taking Australian politics seriously – food for thought for social progressives and social conservatives alike.

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Austerity for Some: Tony Abbott’s economic legacy

MATTHEW D J RYAN

Tony Abbott’s time as the Prime Minister of Australia was as controversial as it was short, with contrasting characterisations of his approach to fiscal policy abounding – a necessary program of cuts in response to the ‘budget emergency’; a pseudo-Keynesian stimulatory second budget; claims that Abbott was a ‘neoliberal’; and the overarching public response which argued that his policies were simply ‘unfair’. Each of these characterisations is inaccurate or incomplete in some measure. Whilst there is little doubt that the ‘budget emergency’ was largely imagined, it was used to justify wide-ranging cuts to welfare provision. The logic of these cuts was contradicted, however, through profligate expenditures in other areas, such as corporate welfare, regressive tax breaks, and increases to defence spending. The paradoxical logic of cutting with one hand and spending with the other can only be understood through the lens of ‘neoliberalism’ – that is, if ‘neoliberalism’ is understood as a state-led project defined by a certain distributional outcome, rather than the ‘free market’ caricature used by many scholars and critics. This materially grounded analysis also provides a framework for us to consider the question, ‘will Turnbull represent a break from hegemonic neoliberalism?’ The answer, it would seem, is surely ‘no’.

Tony Abbott was the Australian Prime Minister for seven hundred and twenty-six days. Elected on a platform of fiscal consolidation, the first budget of the Abbott Government attempted sweeping cuts across a variety of portfolios – foreign aid, healthcare, education, public service, and welfare programs were all targeted. There was, however, an implicit feeling for many that these cuts had been applied unevenly, and as a result the budget was widely seen as ‘unfair’ (e.g. Gittens 2015). After the backlash against the ‘overreach’ of the first budget, the Abbott Government largely abandoned the ‘budget emergency’ narrative with the 2015-16 budget. This second budget pivoted to focus on encouraging everyone to ‘have a go’, through supply-side incentives. The second Abbott budget has even been labelled stimulatory – ‘Suddenly, everybody’s a Keynesian’¹ (Coorey 2015) – which, if true, would signal a distinct departure from the ‘austere’ first budget. Despite this attempt at electoral appeasement, Abbott remained unpopular, ultimately culminating in a successful Liberal Party leadership challenge by Malcolm Turnbull on 15 September 2015. Turnbull was subsequently sworn in as the Prime Minister of Australia².

Tony Abbott’s short, controversial prime ministership, and the government he led, appear to leave in their wake a paradoxical legacy; some attempt must be made to understand and characterise this period. An early characterisation was provided by Lloyd and Ramsay, who argued that ‘the current Abbott government ... has not just continued the neoliberal status quo but pushed it considerably further’ (2015: 42). Yet the seemingly contradictory turns taken would appear to cast doubt on this interpretation of events. Was it an unpopular, but necessary, attempt at fiscal consolidation, an instance of ‘supply-side’ stimulus, or something else entirely? This article will consider these various narratives. In light of this examination, light will also be shone on the likelihood of significant policy change under Prime Minister Turnbull. The treatment of this second task will be brief and speculative, but the argument developed across the two questions will be this: there is truth in each of the aforementioned criticisms. The Abbott Government was austere in some ways, and profligate in others. The overarching explanation for this contradiction is to be found by looking at the distributive impact of the policies of the Abbott Government. This can indeed be understood through the lens of ‘neoliberalism’, though not in the way suggested by some commentators. The Abbott Government was not neoliberal in the sense that it was committed to free markets – it was neoliberal in the sense that it continued to facilitate the reassertion of the power of capital in the post-war context (see Harvey 2005). And, understanding the material reality of neoliberalism in this way, it is quite clear that any difference in a Turnbull-led government will be largely superficial, as a departure from hegemonic neoliberalism in Australia is unlikely to be found in some ‘pragmatic centre’.

Budget emergency?

First, let us consider the idea that the Abbott Government was characterised by attempted fiscal consolidation. After

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¹ Coorey 2015
² Turnbull was subsequently sworn in as the Prime Minister of Australia

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being elected on a platform of fiscal responsibility, the 2014-15 budget was purportedly necessary to ‘repair’ the ‘budgetary emergency’ that the Coalition Government inherited from the Labor Party (Hockey 2014). This narrative is largely congruent with that of ‘austerity’. Austerity is defined in this narrative as budgetary fiscal consolidation (cuts to social services) alongside other forms of deflation, in order to reduce sovereign debt and deficit, with the explicit aim of achieving surplus (Blyth 2013: 15). The correlation between the idea of austerity as necessary fiscal consolidation and Treasurer Joe Hockey’s now-famous speech, ‘The End of the Age of Entitlement’ is quite clear:

We must rebuild fiscal discipline. Budget surpluses must be restored, ideally until the debt is repaid. This can only be achieved by cutting spending or by raising taxes. And given the general acceptance that is the increased drag from higher taxes would compromise economic growth, the clear mandate is to lower expenditure (Hockey 2012).

This same rhetoric was used to justify the 2014-15 budget, with Hockey insisting that ‘unless we fix the budget together, we will leave the next generation a legacy of debt, not opportunity’ (Hockey 2014).

But what was this ‘emergency’? As Hockey brought down the first budget in 2014, it was framed by the issue of debt – ‘on the back of five budget deficits in a row we have inherited a further $123 billion of deficits and debt rising to $667 billion’ (Hockey 2014). This accumulated debt equates to more than 40 per cent of the gross domestic product. Surely reducing this growing figure would be an admirable and responsible policy goal? The necessity of balanced budgets is far from a given, however. Despite the common analogy drawn between household and government debt often presented to justify austerity, the invalidity of this parallel is widely established (Watts 2012; Blyth, 2013). Further, this stance has the effect of a complete ‘de-political’ preclusion of fiscal Keynesianism, foreclosing a swathe of fiscal strategies (Keynes 1951; Skidelsky 2010; Jessop 2014). Since Federation, only 14 federal budgets delivered in Australia have been in surplus. That is less than one in eight. Even the current accumulated gross debt – a largely meaningless figure, usually replaced by its net equivalent – is smaller, in relative terms, than it has been at many points in Australia’s past (Owens 2014).

When put in an international context, the seemingly huge figure of $667 billion is hardly constitutive of an emergency. Compared to the rest of the OECD countries, Australia’s debt and deficit is closer to trivial than dangerous – this was precisely the argument made by 63 leading Australian economists in an open letter, the Economists’ Statement on Commonwealth Budgetary and Economic Priorities:

The austere measures contained in the proposed Commonwealth budget have been justified by fears that Australia’s public debt is expanding rapidly and dangerously, and must be arrested through a dramatic change in fiscal policy. These fears are misplaced. Australia does not face any present or imminent debt crisis. Australia’s deficit and accumulated debt are both low, relative to international experience and Australia’s own history (The Australia Institute (TAI) 2014).

The argument that Australia has a ‘budget emergency’ does not hold empirical water. Not only are the actual debts and deficits relatively small in relation to the fiscal history of the federal government (Owens 2014), but the vast majority of developed countries have larger debts and deficits (TAI 2014).

Another layer of inaccuracy is added when we move from current debts to projected and estimated deficits, due to considerable methodological limitations. Take the routine inability to project debts and deficits accurately, even in the short to medium term. The forecast deficit for the 2014-15 budget was $29.8 billion (1.8 per cent of GDP). This projection was then revised to $40.4 billion in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) in December, 2014. The 2014-15 budget papers were not only inaccurate in estimating the receipts and expenditures of that year, but failed to properly track the trajectory of deficits through the forward projections. After the $29.8 billion shortfall of 2014-15, the position of the year 2015-16 was forecast to improve to $17.1 billion. That projection was adjusted in the 2015-16 budget, which announced an estimated deficit of $35.1 billion (2.1 percent of GDP). After this repeated failure to accurately model even that year’s fiscal position, let alone accurately estimate the deficit of the following year, the projected return to surplus by 2020 (Treasury 2015) would seem optimistic at best, or completely fictitious at worst.

The methodological limitations of these projections and estimations are reflective of a deeper problem. There is arguably an ontological mismatch between the closed models used to generate these projections and the complex, open ontological nature of the reality being modelled. It is this fundamental ontological inconsistency which leads to the wild inaccuracies of these predictions (Lucas 1976; Lawson 1997), and which has led to broader, more general criticism of the neoclassical economics framework which these models are drawn from (Keen 2011; Quiggin 2012; Weeks 2012). When the impossibility of accurately modelling even a single year’s fiscal balance – let alone projecting that balance into the short, medium, or long terms – is appreciated, the figures produced this way are seen in a different light. Jens Beckert notes the way these ‘imagined futures’ are deployed largely as discursive devices – i.e. politically (2013). And so while there is no actual fiscal emergency in Australia, it is not controversial to say that this rhetoric played a legitimising role for the Abbott Government’s cuts. But whether the ‘budget emergency’ was fictional or not, should the Coalition’s policies during this period...
be seen as an attempt at fiscal consolidation, or, more simply, austerity? The selective application of austerity logics would suggest otherwise.

The first budget did table significant cuts across a variety of portfolios. In an apparent effort to reduce spending, Joe Hockey proposed cuts across many social services, and looked to increase revenue in various areas, achieving a projected total $36 billion of savings (ABC 2014). These savings included cuts from foreign aid, the public service, raising the age of the pension (as well as changing indexation arrangements, meaning payments would grow at a slower rate), putting dole-recipients on a waiting list for six months of each year, as well as decreasing expenditure through a co-payment for those visiting a GP, and a temporary taxation levy on the top income bracket. Taken at face-value, it would seem that the first Abbott budget was at least an attempt at introducing austerity, though many of these measures ultimately failed to pass through the Senate.

Concurrent with these cuts and a purported concern for the budget’s fiscal balance, however, the Abbott Government removed two sources of government revenue – the ‘carbon tax’ (actually a carbon trading scheme with a temporary fixed price) and the ‘mining tax’. Governments often find themselves pursuing contradictory agendas; these tax repeals do not in and of themselves show that the Abbott Government did not believe its own rhetoric of debts and deficits. They can, however, be seen as policy changes which are in the interests of certain fractions of capital. And if we follow this line of inquiry further, it will become clear that this is not an isolated example.

If a surplus were indeed the overriding policy goal, increasing the minerals tax to the same average rate as of labour would be a good start toward that end. Such a tax would have increased revenue by an estimated $67.8 billion each year at 2013 prices (Mansillo 2014) – even with subsequent price changes, this offers a significant source of revenue. As well as this effective tax-break, this industry receives billions of dollars of government support and subsidy every year – through fuel tax credits, aviation fuel rebates, and mining exploration grants – which the IMF has calculated as totalising $41 billion in 2015 (Coady et al. 2015). Other profligate expenditures, which an earnest attempt at fiscal consolidation would have targeted, include the $15 billion of revenue foregone through current negative gearing arrangements on housing and the $35 billion (set to rise to $50 billion by 2016-17) in superannuation tax breaks (Ingles 2014). It is also hard to see how the $24 billion pledged to the Joint Strike Fighter project fits within the overarching logic of austerity. Even if we leave the fighter jet and superannuation expenditures aside, these costs total $123.8 billion each year – more than triple the current deficit. Estimations of foregone revenue as expenditure (again, leaving aside direct subsidy and spending) are, of course, imprecise measures, but other independent analyses have put the total at $115 billion in 2012-13, 7.5 per cent of GDP (Holmes and Gobbett 2013). The history of austerity shows that it is inherently a class-based project in terms of which programs are usually targeted (Lichten 1986), but that should not preclude interrogating the practice of the Abbott Government on its own terms. And on those grounds, the Abbott Government cannot truly be characterised in terms of the fiscal consolidation, attempting to avert a ‘budget emergency’. Even the rhetorical commitment to this tenuous position was eventually abandoned with the delivery of the Abbott Government’s second budget. So, how to characterise this next turn?

**Stimulus?**

After delivering the 2015-16 budget, Joe Hockey concluded his speech by declaring that ‘now is the time for all Australians to get out there and have a go’ (Hockey 2015). With the ‘heavy lifting’ of fiscal ‘repair’ done, it became a matter of providing the right incentives to allow Australians to help themselves. This was the narrative used to justify the flagship new policy of the second budget, a $5.5 billion spending package directed at small- and medium-sized businesses, comprised of asset write-off tax concessions and a 1.5 per cent taxation rate cut. There were also increases to expenditure in the areas of security, including commitments of funding to support the Abbott Government’s immigration policy and ongoing military involvement in the Middle East (discussed elsewhere in this edition), and a $3.5 billion commitment to a paid parental leave scheme. It was policies such as these that led to the second budget being characterised as ‘stimulatory’ (Smyth 2015). On the other side of the balance sheet, a crackdown on welfare fraud would save an estimated $1.7 billion (Griffiths 2015) – a far cry from the wide-ranging cuts of the first budget. So are we to characterise the Abbott Government as some kind of ‘trickle down’ New Keynesian revival?

It should be said that the stimulatory effect of a business tax cut is far from a given. The logic behind this claim is that of supply-side economics. Put simply, for it to hold, all products produced must be sold. However, if in reality the main drag on growth is that of inadequate demand then increased supply (made possible by the lower cost of production flowing from the tax cut) will fail to have any impact on growth (Quiggin 2012). And with growth rate projections being lowered after this ‘stimulatory’ budget (Morgan 2015), it would seem that while the second budget certainly involves increased spending, we should not go so far as to characterise Abbott’s government as stimulatory, let alone Keynesian.

To constitute a pivot from austerity, however, one presupposes a position of austerity in the first place – as established above, this was hardly the case with the first budget. Even if we accept the Abbott Government’s own narrative, however, there are more commonalities between the two than is commonly appreciated. Indeed,
possibly the best way to characterise the second budget is ‘more of the same’, in that the vast majority of the cuts tabled in the first budget – in particular, a shifting of $80 billion of health and education funding to the states and territories – were either continued or re-proposed in the second budget. It is also important to remember that all of those examples of profligacy outlined with reference to the first Abbott budget are **continued** here: fossil fuel industry subsidies, negative gearing arrangements, and upper-quintile-targeted superannuation tax breaks. And so the second budget can be characterised in the same way – neither austere nor stimulatory, but defined by a contradictory tendency toward spending in some areas and cutting in others. This apparent paradox cannot be resolved by reference to the narrative of a ‘budget’ emergency; nor can it be explained by pseudo-Keynesian supply-side stimulus. Early analysis of Abbott’s economic strategy presented by Christopher Lloyd and Tony Ramsey suggested that it could be explained by reference to ‘neoliberalism’ (2015: 42). Perhaps the lens of ‘neoliberalism’ might provide a way to understand these contradictions?

**Abbott as ‘neoliberal’?**

Lloyd and Ramsey are not the only ones to describe the Abbott Government with reference to neoliberalism. Progressive commentator and academic Waleed Aly has done the same: ‘[t]he Abbott government has a plan to have no plan and it’s really committed to it. That’s the point of neoliberalism. It sees the world as a market and solves every problem through it’ (2014). But what is this thing called ‘neoliberalism’? Lloyd, Ramsey, and Aly all conform to the widely accepted understanding that neoliberalism is defined by a commitment to free markets as the best way to organise society (Edwards et al. 2012: 2). As a typical example, consider Steger and Roy’s claim: ‘neoliberals across the globe share a common belief in the power of “self-regulating” free markets to create a better world’ (2010: x). Contained in this statement are the key ontological and normative attributes of the mainstream conception of neoliberalism – free markets, small states, self-regulation, all leading to an ideal society.

This orthodox understanding of neoliberalism is widespread (e.g. Kunkel 2009; Zafarullah and Huque 2012; Rudd 2009). This approach usually situates the start of the neoliberal period with the rise of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and their equivalents. The tendency is to see these movements as driven by thinkers such as F.A. Hayek, Milton Freidman, Eugene Fama, Arthur Laffer and Robert Nozick, to list just a few. Think tanks and intellectual associations, such as the Mont Pelerin Society, supposedly form the vehicle through which these individuals apparently wield influence (Mirowski and Plehwe 2009). What we might call ‘free-market neoliberalism’ presents the market as not only the most efficient way to organise society, but also as the most moral. Flowing on from this portrayal of the market as an omniscient information processor that will ensure an optimal distribution of goods and services is an argument to limit or remove forces that could distort this market utopia – i.e. state intervention. While pervasive, this understanding is severely limited in its explanatory power and critical utility (Konings 2012; Cahill 2014).

The limitations of this conception are illustrated by the example of the Abbott Government. From the discussion above, it should be immediately apparent that ‘free market’ caricatures fail to accurately describe the material reality of the Abbott Government, just as it has failed to accurately describe material changes to markets, states, and class since the turn to neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s. It is hard to see how $41 billion of subsidies to the fossil fuel sector fall into a free market agenda. That said, Abbott has certainly shown rhetorical commitments to these ‘free market’ ideals, such as at the World Economic Forum in January of 2014, when he professed that ‘as soon as people have economic freedom they create markets. Markets are the proven answer to the problem of scarcity’. To take these claims as representative of the actual policies enacted is to fail to appreciate the material impact of the Abbott Government. Despite his rhetoric, Tony Abbott’s prime-ministership cannot be understood through these free market caricatures. That does not, however, strip ‘neoliberalism’ of all its explanatory power.

Against the dominant free-market approach, there are emergent, nuanced conceptualisations of the term that recognise the realities of neoliberal practice – especially the ‘neoliberalism’ of the Abbott Government. In particular, the work of Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002) – built upon by others, including Peck and Tickell (2002), and Cahill (2010) – presents a historical materialist appreciation of the complexities and contradictions of neoliberal practice, encapsulated within the concept of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’. This conceptualisation ‘highlight[s] ways in which neoliberal ideology systematically misrepresents the real effects of such policies on macroinstitutional structures and evolutionary trajectories of capitalism’ (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 352-353). This approach rejects the idea of ‘free markets’ being a blueprint for actual policy, suggesting instead that such frameworks serve as utopic imaginaries and ideological devices. Flowing from this departure from rhetoric, the ‘small’ or ‘weak’ state, which so often goes hand-in-hand with pro-market discourses is never attempted (nor realisable) in reality. Rather, the material history of neoliberalism has been defined by a strong state which actively works to create markets in some areas – i.e. healthcare and education – while suppressing market discipline in other areas – such as the case of fossil fuel industry subsidies (Gamble 1994).

This is only the surface of the constantly shifting, undulating, modulating morass that is ‘neoliberalism’. It is spatially and temporally variegated; it is shaped by the ideological and institutional frameworks extant in each localised context; it both creates and thrives on
crisis, allowing it to continue to change faces whilst also embedding itself deeper in modes of governance and governmentality. In the face of this complexity, we can cut through it somewhat by looking at purpose and outcome. And while approaching cliché in its use and abuse, a particular quotation from David Harvey still presents a succinct definition. Neoliberalism is best understood as a ‘political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites’ (Harvey 2005: 19). This argument has attracted significant criticism – on grounds of agency for example. Further, questions have been raised as to whether accumulation rates actually improved. Another challenge might be concerned with whether these ‘economic elites’ are synonymous with ‘capital’, and if so, how would they organise to present a coherent strategy? Whilst these criticisms are acknowledged, they do not necessarily undermine the key point being made here. That is to say, the uneven and selective applications of market- and non-market-based policies employed by the Abbott Government are best understood by considering the material, distributional outcome.

Who benefits?

It is this question, and its significance, which was implicitly understood by those who saw the first Abbott budget as ‘unfair’. At the outset, it is worth noting that measuring inequality is technically challenging and politically loaded (Meagher and Wilson 2008). Following from this, to go beyond the implicit to show empirical support for a class-distributional impact of the 2014-15 budget has proved somewhat difficult. Since 2005, Australian federal budgets have included an appendix which models the impacts of policy changes across income quintiles and various familial arrangements. For the 2014-15 budget, these figures were omitted from the budget papers. Various attempts have been made to estimate the budget’s distributional impact – without access to the Treasury’s resources. Despite these limitations, however, there is still indicative evidence to support the characterisation of Abbott’s fiscal policy as inequitable. Peter Whiteford and Daniel Nethery (2015) from ANU showed the differentiated impact across a variety of groups, the starkest comparison being between an unemployed 23-year-old and an individual in the top income bracket: losing 18 per cent and less than one per cent of their disposable income respectively. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) also produced a report, NATSEM Budget 2014-15 Analysis (Phillips 2014), which provided a more comprehensive breakdown of demographics. According to this analysis, we see that those with the greatest change in their disposable income are in the lowest income bracket, while those earning more than $125 000 per annum have almost no losses. Crucially, a five per cent loss for a single parent earning $25 000 per annum is much greater in terms of impact than a 1 per cent loss at $250 000 per annum. The class-based impact of Abbott’s economic approach can be seen in some small way here.

These figures only show the impact of the 2014-15 budget on household incomes; current trends in inequality are arguably more to do with wealth than income (Piketty 2014: 26), and the impact of continued subsidies and tax breaks across the corporate sector is not shown here either. Further, while some of the more direct cuts of the first budget were dropped in the case of the second budget, it would be wrong to see it as a return to some previous norm of ‘fairness’. As Ross Gittens argues, ‘The fact is, most budgets contain unfair measures or continue unfair policies that should have been corrected, without arousing anything like the outcry last year’s did’ (2015). That is why these two budgets must be placed in a broader context of continued – and rising – inequality of incomes, wealth, and opportunity, considered alongside the extant policy frameworks that have been facilitating this rise over decades. Crucially, this outcome of entrenched and state-sponsored inequity has been seen as a defining facet of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, both in Australia and internationally (Cahill 2010).

Inequality in Australia is an expansive topic in its own right, and is the focus of many pieces of research (e.g. Stilwell and Jordan 2007; Leigh 2013; Fletcher and Guttmann 2013). Without attempting a comprehensive review of this literature, we can take some key indicators in order to illustrate this trend in broad brushstrokes. Take first full-time wages growth. Since 1975, the wages of the tenth percentile have risen only 15 per cent. This is compared to the ninetieth percentile, who have seen their wages rise by 59 per cent (Leigh 2013: 66). Concurrently, the wages share of total income has dropped from 62.5 per cent to 53 per cent. Simultaneously, the profits share has nearly doubled to 27 per cent (Stilwell and Jordan 2007: 22). These indicators of inequality, alongside rates of accumulation and profit were all depressed during the ‘long boom’ period. It is their subsequent exertion since the 1980s which is illustrative of Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism. Australia’s supposed egalitarianism has been eroded to the extent that the combined wealth of the top percentile is equal to that of the bottom 60 per cent (Oxfam 2014: 1) – the most unequal distribution of wealth in Australia since records have been kept.

It is within this context of rising inequality that our understanding of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ must be located. The connection between those regressive policy frameworks of profligate subsidies and expenditures, which are enjoyed exclusively by the upper quintiles of income distribution and already-profitable corporations, and this historical trend of inequality must also be drawn. Crucially, however, a mischaracterisation of neoliberalism cannot lead us to the conclusion that these inequities are the outcome of a ‘free-market’ policy program. Rather, as the two Abbott budgets illustrate, these inequalities are not just allowed, but also promoted by specific policy choices. The Abbott Government was neoliberal, in the sense that an active state promoted a policy platform that had a direct class-distributive effect. The fact that
some (even many) of Abbott’s policies were blocked by the Senate does not necessarily challenge this argument – Abbott’s neoliberalism was reflected as much in those existing policy settings which he simply continued as it was in brazenly class-based proposals such as the GP co-payment or changes to the pension. It is important to see Abbott’s inaction on these extant regressive policies, alongside more direct policies, as comprising the materiality of his platform.

Conclusion
The aim of this article has been to consider how best to characterise the Tony Abbott’s brief, but controversial, Coalition government. This article has only focused on the economic sphere – the other articles in this edition have engaged with other facets of the Abbott Government, from anachronistic and damaging environmental policy to malicious and criminal treatment of asylum seekers – though these distinct focuses are necessary abstractions of an internally related whole. The economic narrative of the Abbott Government was far from clear, neither as it was presented by the government, nor in the way it was received; an attempt at introducing austerity as the necessary response to a fictional budget emergency; an apparently stimulatory second budget looking to encourage growth; a fundamentally unfair platform, across the two budgets. It has been argued here that while the concept of ‘neoliberalism’ does somewhat explain this paradox, such a conception cannot rely on free market caricatures – rather, it is by considering the active state of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, and the material distributional outcome of the neoliberal period. Abbott can indeed be described in such a way.

But what of the future? Does the rise of Malcolm Turnbull represent a clear break from this entrenched norm of hegemonic neoliberalism? Or can we expect more of the same, wrapped up in a slightly slicker public relations campaign? Although in these early stages this is largely speculation, the theorisation of neoliberalism above does provide a framework for considering this question. Neoliberalism has been hegemonic for at least three decades, if not longer (Cahill 2010). And as the ‘neoliberality’ of a given government is not just found in specific policy proposals, but also in their inability (or in-volition) to challenge already-existing policy frameworks, the idea that a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Australia will lead a progressive turn is distinctly unlikely. Perhaps the most likely political outcome of this change in leadership is simply the co-option of those social movements and groups that riled so violently against Abbott and his government.

Tony Abbott’s economic legacy is one of neoliberalism, understood as in its ‘actually existing’ sense, defined by direct and deliberate state action to further entrench the power and interests of capital. It is in a deeper engagement with our theorisation of the state, and empirical investigation into the agencies, mechanisms, and structures that facilitate this penetration of the state by capital where research must focus, rather than being caught in the rhetorical web of state-market dichotomies.

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End Notes
1. This misspelling was in the original. Working to a deadline? Or perhaps indicative of a deeper misunderstanding of Keynesianism?
2. Since this article was written, Malcolm Turnbull has, with Treasurer Scott Morrison, delivered his 2016/17 Budget. Integrating this budget into this analysis is outside the scope of the article, but it should be noted in passing that it is largely congruent with the analysis presented here – in particular, cuts to foreign aid, healthcare and education continue alongside some attempts to collect more revenue which are contradicted with continued supply-side, ‘trickle-down’ tax cuts to business and increased defence spending. These can be argued to be a part of the complex, contradictory process of ‘neoliberalisation’, in the ‘actually existing’ sense.

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Abbott's casualties: A coherent and judicious defence strategy

Paul Barratt

This paper examines the Abbott Government’s defence policies to determine whether Prime Minister Abbott was on a path to maintain the defence of the realm on the basis of a suitably diligent approach to strategy and capability development, and a suitably cautious approach to the use of military force. It finds little to admire. The Abbott Government failed to heed the published counsel of former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser that there were important issues to be addressed in relation to the ANZUS Alliance and in particular the Joint Facilities at Pine Gap, and imposed upon the Department of Defence yet another review and reform program. As an exemplar of capability development the paper examines the approach to the replacement of the Collins Class submarines and highlights several deficiencies. It also finds that the Abbott Government had an incautious approach to the use of military force but acknowledges that Mr Abbott was dissuaded from pursuing wild ideas like the unilateral insertion of Special Forces into Iraq or the insertion of a battalion into the Russian-backed rebel controlled area of Ukraine to recover the bodies of MH17 by force. On the basis of this review it identifies issues that require the attention of the Government that finds itself in place after 2 July 2016.

Speak softly and carry a big stick
- Theodore Roosevelt

It is fatal to enter any war without the will to win it
- General Douglas MacArthur

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the Abbott Government’s defence policies, as far as they can be determined from publicly available sources, to determine whether, before he was replaced as Prime Minister by Malcolm Turnbull, Prime Minister Abbott was on a path to maintain the defence of the realm on the basis of a suitably diligent approach to strategy and capability development, and a suitably cautious approach to the use of military force.

Lead times in defence are long, as is the service life of major platforms – planning for the Collins Class submarines began in the 1970s, the winning design was announced in 1987, and the first of class was commissioned in 1996. It was cleared for operational service in 2000, and will be in service until the 2030s. F-111 aircraft were in service with the RAAF for almost forty years.

This means that every incoming government is the inheritor of a spectrum of defence capabilities, and of inescapable contractual commitments, that are the product of decisions taken by its predecessors. It in turn puts its mark on the capability spectrum, the force structure and the acquisition pipeline that it hands over to its successors.

Nevertheless, it is possible to gauge within a relatively short time, by the decisions it is making and the decisions it is failing to make, whether a government is adequately discharging its responsibilities to maintain and develop the capabilities of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Important components of any assessment include whether the government has a clear view of Australia’s strategic environment and how it is likely to evolve, a coherent sense of what the ADF needs to be able to do, and effective management of the required capabilities. It is also possible to gauge whether it makes judicious use of armed force for combat operations – supposedly a last resort since the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945 – because such decisions are made within the life of the government, based on the circumstances and using the capabilities of the day.

A Note About Sources

The researcher seeking to analyse contemporary defence and strategic policy faces severe limitations on access to authoritative sources. The relevant Cabinet documents will not emerge until 25 years have elapsed, and as they will undoubtedly carry a national security classification...
there is no guarantee they will be released even then – unlike the United States, Australia has no system of automatic downgrading of classifications. Similar considerations will apply to all classified documents bearing on strategy, force structure, capability or defence acquisitions. We may not have to wait so long for memoirs or diaries to appear, but it is likely to be years rather than months. The only authoritative sources we have are the official statements of government, which are important, and can on occasion be very informative, but must be treated with caution because they are intended to cast the government in the most favourable light, and not to be a reliable guide to history.

For additional information and deeper insights we must rely on the small but important community of scholars and writers outside government who have high level military or civilian experience in defence, and maintain their professional links, and the community of experienced and reputable journalists who talk to them regularly, as well as to Members of Parliament across the political spectrum. Only in the rarest of cases will these writers, whether academic or journalistic, identify their sources.

In analysing the commentary that emerges via these channels, therefore, the task of the researcher is more akin to the task of the intelligence analyst than the scholar. Hence, the researcher needs to bring experience and professional judgement to bear on whether the writer in question can be relied on to attempt to corroborate information, whether they are likely to have been in a position to talk to someone with first-hand knowledge, and whether the story itself is credible. Media commentary attributed to unnamed sources rarely meets the test that scholars would regard as ‘proof’, but to ignore it is to run the risk of being over-reliant on the official account and arriving at an unbalanced or distorted view of the situation being analysed. Of course, the responsibility for accepting or discarding information of this type rests with the researcher.

**The Strategic Environment**

From the time the ANZUS Treaty was signed in 1951 it has been assumed that Australia shelters under the protective mantle of the US nuclear umbrella (extended nuclear deterrence), that Australia should earn its keep within the alliance, and that it should keep the alliance fresh by being a ‘good ally’.

We entered the Korean War in 1950 and the 1991 Gulf War as a member of the UN in good standing; we respected the UN Charter and the UN’s processes, and were prepared to contribute to its authorised military and peacekeeping operations. It was as a ‘good ally’ of the US, however, that we deployed troops to Vietnam, Afghanistan (twice) and to Iraq (2003 and 2014). Given that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was illegal, our participation in that campaign was at the expense of our standing as a UN member – when put to the test we favoured the US rather than the UN.

Consistent with the close alliance relationship, Australia agreed to the establishment of US or joint facilities, including those at Pine Gap and Nurrungar. These facilities contributed to the strategic balance during the Cold War, but former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser expressed concern that in more recent times new technologies have permitted Pine Gap’s capabilities ‘to be used in new and aggressive ways’ – namely to facilitate drone assassinations and targeted killings by pinpointing targets in real time (Fraser 2014: 252). Fraser made the point that the longstanding insistence by successive Australian Governments that everything Pine Gap does happens with our ‘full knowledge and concurrence’ means we can be taken to approve of American drone killings of the citizens of friendly countries with which we are not at war (Fraser, 2014: 253). Pakistan is a case in point – a fellow member of the Commonwealth and a country to which we propose to give $47 million in Official Development Assistance in 2016-17 (DFAT 2016). Yemen and Somalia are two other examples – we are not at war with either.

In analysis which supports Fraser’s critique, Ball et al. (2015a, 2015b) have recounted in detail the militarisation of the personnel and administration at Pine Gap, and the changes to its higher management structure. After more than two decades in which there were no serving US military personnel at Pine Gap, from 1990 there has been a steady increase to the point where serving military personnel now constitute 66 per cent of US Government employees excluding contractors. In parallel with and reflecting this militarisation, the higher management of Pine Gap, always an American affair, passed in the early 1990s from the CIA’s Directorate of Science and Technology to the National Reconnaissance Office, while personnel now constitute 66 per cent of US Government employees excluding contractors. In parallel with and reflecting this militarisation, the higher management of Pine Gap, always an American affair, passed in the early 1990s from the CIA’s Directorate of Science and Technology to the National Reconnaissance Office, while the facility became more oriented to direct support of combat operations. These changes, plus the evolution of both the technology and the geopolitical situation, suggest that the relationship via Pine Gap alone brings us into a very different political and military stance in the world, from supporting the strategic balance during the Cold War, to a virtually automatic collaborator in US wars of choice anywhere in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Malcolm Fraser was a staunch cold warrior in his day – no bleeding heart leftist – and when a former Prime Minister of his stamp (and with his insider knowledge of the US facilities in Australia) says, ‘The new uses to which the information it gathers can be put transforms Pine Gap into a critical part of an offensive weapons system. Australia
should not be a part of it’ (Fraser 2014: 273), it would be appropriate for any Australian Government to take heed and undertake a fundamental review of whether, to what extent and under what circumstances the facility continues to serve Australia’s national security interests.

There was no sign from Tony Abbott of any deep reflection on the alliance and the infrastructure that goes with it, even when a former Prime Minister from his own party was counselling it, with the cogent reasons for doing so presented in his 2014 book Dangerous Allies (Fraser 2014). This lack of willingness to examine the decades-old foundation of Australian defence policy planning was carried through into the Turnbull era, with the Defence Minister insisting in her introduction to the White Paper issued on 25 February that ‘an important part of the Government’s strategy is to continue to strengthen our alliance with the United States’ (Defence 2016: 9).

Furthermore, in relation to the challenge now posed by Chinese military power and assertiveness, Professor Hugh White of the Australian National University, principal author of the 2000 White Paper, commented:

> Australia has been left drifting without a coherent response to the biggest shift in our strategic circumstances since the Second World War ... [The White Paper] offers no new or credible analysis of the immense changes now under way in the strategic regional order, and no new or credible proposals to respond to it (White 2016).

### An Overall Defence Strategy?

The traditional method of establishing the size and shape of the ADF is via the production of a Defence White Paper which analyses Australia’s strategic circumstances. It derives from that analysis an account of what operations the ADF might be required to conduct, leading to an assessment of what capabilities must be acquired, a program for acquiring them, and a corresponding budget.

Ostensibly the Abbott Government adopted this approach. On 4 April 2014 the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence announced that Defence would produce a new White Paper. It would be a ‘whole-of-government product that reflects the Government’s overall strategic, fiscal and broader policy priorities’ which would ‘align defence policy with military strategy and deliver an affordable Australian Defence Force structure’. The White Paper would be underpinned by a fully costed Force Structure Review, which would ‘assess Defence’s future capability needs and propose a force structure that addresses Australia’s defence objectives within an agreed allocation of funding’ (Defence 2014a).

The Minister for Defence appointed an external Expert Panel headed by Mr Peter Jennings, Executive Director of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), to support the development of the White Paper and the Force Structure Review and to provide independent advice to the Minister (Defence 2014b).

This sounds all very well but some observations are in order. The emphasis on fiscal priorities and the ADF structure being ‘affordable’, and the need to propose a force structure within an agreed level of funding, is inappropriate sequencing. A more appropriate approach would be to identify the capabilities that are required for the government to achieve its defence objectives, cost those, and then make the real world decisions about which capabilities warrant immediate funding, which ones need to be deferred, and which ones are never going to make it.

Also, it seems passing strange that the Force Structure Review was constructed as a parallel process that would feed into the White Paper. One would normally expect the force structure to be derived from the analysis of Australia’s strategic environment and what the Government wants the ADF to be able to do.

Finally, given the level of micromanagement which characterised Tony Abbott and the Prime Minister’s Office, it seemed highly likely that, rather than being an arm’s length expert analysis, the Defence White Paper would be larded with his idiosyncratic fingerprints. Brown (2016: 42-46) describes a Prime Minister who, although he had little direct experience of the military before becoming Prime Minister, ‘developed a deep fascination for it in office’ and took a very activist approach in his relations with the defence planners.

The White Paper that emerged from the Turnbull Government seems to have required substantial rewriting of the drafts inherited from Tony Abbott, who is reportedly unhappy that the submarine replacement timetable had been placed on a more realistic footing – presumably to allow for a more methodical source selection process (Sheridan 2016).

The Turnbull Government’s White Paper is a competent piece of work as far as it goes, but contains no blinding new insights. A former head of the International Policy and Strategy Divisions of Defence commented that:

> ‘it isn’t so different from its forerunners. It’s just as conventional and, perhaps in consequence, just as fragile, with a bit too much hyperbole covering for perplexity in the face of largely irresolvable problems’ (Behm 2015).

He states that it is overall a sound basis for Australia’s future strategic policy design, force structure development
and operational planning, compliments it on providing much needed guidance on the rebuilding of the Navy as a central strategic asset, and says that it should also cement naval shipbuilding into the fabric of our national industrial and technological capacity. He goes on, however, to itemise several specific deficiencies: its threat analysis lacks precision and definition; determining 2% of GDP as the defence-spending envelope within the coming half decade puts the financial cart before the capability horse; apart from a couple of passing references to the humanitarian and natural disaster effects of climate change, the White Paper maintains the government’s coyness on global warming issues, especially the possible strategic consequences in the Asia-Pacific region; and it is silent on the critical relationship between defence and the national economy (Behm 2015).

The Australian Defence Organisation

This brings us to the Australian Defence Organisation (the Defence Department including military personnel embedded in Headquarters functions) and the Defence Force itself. The Department of Defence as an organisation gets an undeservedly bad press – often because when things go wrong, as will inevitably happen from time to time in such a high risk field of endeavour, weak Ministers take refuge in blaming the Department they lead rather than ascertaining and explaining the reasons for the problem.

The Defence Department must be doing something right, however, because despite the high tempo of overseas operations in the last couple of decades it reliably manages, when given a task by government, to field the right people with the right equipment and the right training and complete the task assigned to it. Nevertheless, Defence is afflicted with endless reviews and prescriptions from Government regarding how it should go about its business – at least a dozen reviews in the last twenty years.

Four months after the announcement of the plans for the Defence White Paper and the Force Structure Review, the Minister for Defence announced the establishment of a Panel led by businessman David Peever to conduct a ‘First Principles Review’ of the Department to ‘ensure Defence is fit for purpose and able to promptly respond to future challenges’ (Johnston 2014). Part of the aim was to ‘improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of Defence while delivering a more commercially astute and focused materiel acquisition and sustainment capability’ (Johnston 2014).

The Report was delivered in April 2015. It proposed a series of recommendations that ‘will change the structure, governance arrangements, accountabilities, processes and systems of Defence’ (Defence 2015: 5).

It found that Defence had ‘an outstanding operational record’ but needs ‘a better balance between operational excellence and organisational effectiveness’ (Defence Minister 2015a). That is an extraordinary proposition. It implies that the government would sacrifice a degree of ‘operational excellence’ in return for better functioning of the Headquarters. The Minister announced that the Government accepted, or accepted in principle, 75 of the 76 recommendations. Implementation would be the responsibility of the Secretary and the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), but there would also be an Oversight Panel, consisting mainly of the Chair and Members of the Review Team, which would ‘provide regular updates to the Government and assist the Department with presenting annual progress reports to the Government’. One wonders why the Department itself could not perform those reporting functions.

This is all good clean fun, but under the law of the land the Secretary of the Department of Defence is responsible for managing the Department and advising the Minister on matters relating to the Department (Public Service Act, s.57(1)). With the First Principles Review, the Government is going to direct the Secretary not simply to run the organisation efficiently and effectively, but how to run it. Yet if the implementation of the recommendations does not produce the desired result, it is the Secretary, not the Review Team, who will be held accountable.

Another extraordinary intervention is the Government’s decision to cut the funding of the Defence Science and Technology Organisation in the context of cuts to the budgets of most Commonwealth science agencies. Over the period 2013-14 to 2016-17 there would be a total reduction in DSTO (now DSTG) expenditure of $133.7 million (Academy of Science 2014:15). The problem with this is that DSTG is an organisational unit of the Department of Defence, the mission of which is to provide scientific and technical support to all arms of the ADF. It makes no sense to limit the capacity of the Secretary and CDF to decide how much of the budget they spend on that particular function.

Against the background of the Government promising to maintain the Defence budget in the immediate term and to lift spending to 2% of GDP in the longer term, it makes even less sense. The Government is saying to Defence, in effect, ‘We are going to increase your budget, but we want you to spend less on science’. This becomes even more problematic in light of the Defence Procurement Review 2003 (DPR) led by Malcolm Kinnaird AO (Defence 2003). The DPR envisaged an important role for DSTO in evaluating and reducing risk in all procurement projects by conducting investigations of technology feasibility, maturity and overall technical risk (Defence 2003:17).
Two caveats must be noted about the state of the ADF: chronic underfunding of through-life support (maintenance and upgrades) and the malign effect of ‘stop the boats’. The first of these stems from the fact that there is more political mileage in announcing the acquisition and delivery of new defence platforms than there is in providing the wherewithal to maintain them. As a result, the sustainment budget is a residual derived from the funds required for acquisition, personnel costs, ammunition, fuels, lubricants and other demands upon the budget. It is never derived from an analysis of the costs of sustaining the platforms themselves, as the problems with the operability of the Collins Class submarines indicate. It is also a notable feature of Defence White Papers that the promised new funding is crammed into the out years into the future when provision of the funds will be someone else’s problem.

As to the second, the obsession with ‘stopping the boats’ has reached the point where it is not only in conflict with our international obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol and the Convention on the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), but demonstrably has a distorting effect on the ADF in its performance of, and training for, its key role of being available to conduct military operations.

According to the Defence Minister at the time of the 2015-16 Budget, on average approximately 600 members of the Australian Defence Force are continuously engaged in Operation Resolute, the operation which supports the Government’s so-called border protection efforts. The Government allocated $48.7 million to fund Operation Resolute in the 2015-16 Budget and $54.4 million over the Forward Estimates period (Defence Minister 2015c). This would be a calculated supplementary cost of the operation and nothing like its full cost. In 2013, when the government of the day was budgeting $10 million per annum for the supplementary cost of Operation Resolute, James Brown of the Lowy Institute estimated the full annual cost was at least $262 million per annum (Brown 2013).

The ADF should be patrolling our northern approaches so that we know what is going on in them. And when it has assets that can assist the civil authorities to perform civil functions then we would expect it to do so, as it does in times of bushfires and floods. Yet when the assistance becomes so demanding that we have major fleet units on permanent station ostensibly to ‘protect our borders’ but in reality for the task of detecting the arrival by boat of people whose whole purpose is to give themselves up to the relevant authorities, the operation begins to distort the shape and capabilities of the ADF. The deployment of these assets to Operation Resolute means that their location and tasking is governed by the civilian immigration task of regulating irregular maritime arrivals rather than any militarily useful task. As Brown has observed, every frigate loitering off Christmas Island is one not conducting counter-piracy patrolling in the Indian Ocean or regional engagement visits in South East Asia (Brown 2013).

This is not without cost. In early February 2014, China despatched three warships to carry out combat simulations between Indonesia and Christmas Island (Hill 2014). While there was nothing illegal or fundamentally hostile about the exercise, it represented a change in Australia’s strategic environment (Medcalf 2014). And what was Australia’s response, in these very same maritime approaches it is so assiduously patrolling? It ‘scrambled an air force surveillance plane’ (Hill 2014). Normally, we would assign both air and maritime assets to monitor foreign warships in the waters to our north, as we did when a Russian flotilla appeared at the time of the G20 meeting in November 2014 (Wroe 2014). The Navy was not, however, permitted to detach surface units to shadow the Chinese flotilla, as military priorities would indicate, because it was required to hold station to ‘protect our borders’ from irregular maritime arrivals in old fishing boats (Personal communication from an authoritative source).

**Capability Development**

To judge by the government’s approach to naval shipbuilding, whether submarines or surface ships, it would be difficult to conclude that the Abbott Government had a systematic, orderly approach to capability development.

For a start, the Abbott Government announced major commitments to shipbuilding without completing the Defence White Paper which would presumably form the basis for making decisions about where an estimated spend of $89 billion would figure in Defence’s capability priorities, and how the overall Defence Capability Plan would be rolled out over time.

Within that projected naval shipbuilding spend there are two components: the future surface fleet and the future submarine to replace the Collins Class. The submarine project has had an unfortunate history. In order to introduce a new submarine into service without undertaking a costly life-extension for the Collins Class we needed to be cutting metal by 2016. The first Rudd Government’s 2009 Defence White Paper painted a picture of a replacement fleet of twelve submarines, but Rudd stripped billions of dollars from the budget projections in that paper. In 2013, ASPI’s Mark Thomson wrote that in the three years following the release of the Rudd Government’s 2009 White Paper, $20 billion had been cut or ‘deferred’ and estimated the shortfall for the period 2009-2022 at $30 billion (Thomson 2013).
In December 2014, Senator Johnston was replaced as Defence Minister 2013). Finally, neither Prime Minister Rudd nor Prime Minister Gillard made any definitive decisions about an acquisition strategy nor about the essential design characteristics of the future submarine.

During the 2013 election campaign, then Opposition leader Abbott said the Coalition would have the submarines built in Adelaide by ASC Pty Ltd (the former Australian Submarine Corporation), but from the time of Mr Abbott’s 2014 visit to Japan there were persistent reports that he and Prime Minister Abe had reached an understanding that Australia would acquire a version of the Japanese Soryu submarine (see for example McPhedran 2014). The signing of an agreement for the transfer of Defence equipment and technology during Prime Minister Abe’s 2014 visit to Canberra supports this analysis, as does Johnston’s infamous remark that he ‘wouldn’t trust ASC to build a canoe’, a remark which precipitated his replacement as Defence Minister.

The over-hasty acceptance of the Soryu as an off-the-shelf buy which would meet the Royal Australian Navy’s needs for an upgrade of the Collins capability is made the more remarkable by a comparison of the Soryu Class with the existing Collins Class. It is smaller, has a much shorter range and a higher indiscretion rate, would need to be heavily modified to meet Australia’s needs, and would present major integration issues associated with the combat system and torpedoes (Briggs 2014). Briggs, a former RAN submarine commander who was closely involved in bringing the Collins Class submarine project to completion, is a strong supporter of a locally built replacement as Defence Minister.

The effect of this may be gauged from the fact that the Defence Budget for 2013-14 was $25.3 billion (Defence Minister 2015b). This ‘competitive evaluation’ process for the selection of potential partners between major platforms is too often delayed, there needs to be some explanation for why the frigate replacement program has been brought forward three years and the OPV by two years – both committed to Adelaide without consideration of alternative locations. This suspicion about Tony Abbott’s intentions is strengthened by Prime Minister Turnbull’s 18 April announcement that the OPVs construction will commence in Adelaide in 2018 but will transfer to Western
Australia when the Future Frigate construction begins in Adelaide in 2020 (Prime Minister et al. 2016a).

The Abbott-Andrews announcement brought out the critics, of whom perhaps the most trenchant was the principal author of the 2000 White Paper, who criticised the assumption that the ships needed to be built in Australia, the notion of a continuous build, the survivability of the vessels in the type of warfare for which they would be designed, and the idea of selecting them via the flawed Competitive Evaluation Process (White 2015).

With $89 billion of the Defence Department’s forward capital program committed on the basis of no clear analysis of the capability requirement and a highly unorthodox and risky approach to procurement, it would be hard to sustain a claim that capability development under the Abbott Government was established on a sound footing.

In the event, the Turnbull Government announced on 26 April that the future submarine would be designed in partnership with the French naval shipbuilding company DCNS (Prime Minister et al. 2016b). To judge by the Defence Minister’s description of the process, the selection appears to have been a careful one and the political demise of Tony Abbott appears to have averted an over-hasty decision in favour of a design based on the Japanese Soryu submarine. Judicial Use of Armed Force?

The Abbott Government was hardly judicious in its use of armed force. The two years in which Tony Abbott held the reins saw the all-too-quick slide from an unambiguously humanitarian operation to drop supplies to fleeing Yezidi trapped on Mount Sinjar, to the RAAF conducting and facilitating ground operations in Northern Iraq, and then the extension of these operations to Syria. So anxious were we to engage in Iraq that we inserted Army personnel with no Status of Forces Agreement to provide them with the necessary legal protections, in the absence of which they have instead been provided with diplomatic passports (Toohey 2014) – an inadequate protection and a misuse of our diplomatic passports.

The extension of RAAF operations to Syria was ostensibly in response to a request from President Obama, but Fairfax media, citing ‘senior government sources’, reported that the driving force for this request came from Canberra (Kenny and Wroe, 2015). This was denied by Tony Abbott (ABC 2015), but given the marginal contribution the RAAF could make in Syria, it is unlikely the US raised the issue and it is reasonable to assume that the initiative came from Australia.

The extension to Syria is an important issue because at the time its legality was highly doubtful. The Government has been let off the hook to some extent by UN Security Council Resolution No. 2249 of 20 November 2015 which called upon:

Member States which have the capacity to do so to take all necessary measures, in compliance with international law ... on the territory under the control of ISIL also known as Da’esh, in Syria and Iraq, to prevent and suppress terrorist acts specifically committed by ISIL [and Al-Qaeda affiliates designated by UNSC] ... and to eradicate the safe haven which they have established over significant parts of Iraq and Syria (UNSC 2015).

Nevertheless, in the complex situation in Syria the legalities of any operation outside the ambit of Resolution 2249 need to be kept under close scrutiny.

In addition to the operations in the Middle East, there were some alarming but apparently well-sourced reports about military operations that fortunately did not take place. In February, Associate Editor of The Australian John Lyons reported that on 25 November 2014 Tony Abbott had suggested, first to his staff and then to ‘Australia’s leading military planners’ that Australia conduct a unilateral invasion of Iraq, with 3500 troops, to confront the Islamic State (Lyons 2015). This story was denied the same day by Tony Abbott, in terms which on any reasonable interpretation actually confirm the story – he said that ‘he had never formally proposed invading’ Iraq (Kelly and Aikman 2015). That word ‘formally’ always reveals more than it conceals.

Shortly after Tony Abbott’s demise, one of his journalistic admirers, Dennis Shanahan of The Australian, confirmed that Tony Abbott had actively considered, and consulted the Dutch Government, about deploying 1000 troops to the site of the MH17 crash site in disputed territory in Ukraine, to secure the site and begin the recovery of the bodies (Shanahan 2015). Abbott is quoted as saying:

When it looked like those Russian-backed rebels in Ukraine were not going to release the bodies, we were talking about (sic) the National Security Committee table of what military options we might have – that is when you know things are getting very serious. Luckily the bodies started to shift – I assumed the Russians were tapping our conversations and didn’t want to take on those Aussies.

Far from being the voice of someone who makes judicious use of military power, this sounds like the voice
of someone detached from reality. Australia would be unable to sustain an opposed incursion into such a hostile environment, and the notion that a nation as powerful as Russia operating in its own area of interest would be fearful of taking on a modest Australian infantry force is preposterous.

Finally, just a day or two before Tony Abbott’s demise, well-connected senior journalist Tony Walker quoted one of Abbott’s ‘senior colleagues’ as saying ‘Abbott would have us do things in the Middle East that would have had your hair stand up on end’ (Walker 2015).

In his recent Quarterly Essay Brown (2016: 42-46) supports the above analysis. He writes:

In a little over six months, driven by Abbott’s unilateral instincts, the Australian government nearly committed troops to conflicts on three continents, and countenanced the riskiest of missions, including one arrayed against a global military power.

The three deployments in question were a deployment to Nigeria after 276 Nigerian schoolgirls were kidnapped by the terrorist group Boko Haram in April 2014; a range of options concerning the downed MH17 even more alarming than the deployment of a battalion which was discussed with the Dutch – these included deployment of a brigade to Eastern Ukraine, and the commitment of uniformed Australian logistics personnel to help the Ukrainians improve their systems, which would have made them legitimate targets for Ukrainian separatists; and the possibility of unilaterally deploying an Australian brigade to Northern Iraq.

Conclusion
Far from exercising military power judiciously and treating it as a last resort, Tony Abbott seemed to regard it as a first resort, and a crutch upon which he could rely as his fortunes declined in the wake of the 2014-15 budget. One of the legacies of his time in office will be the commitment of the ADF to yet another war in the Middle East in respect of which it is difficult to see the aim, the end-state to be achieved, or how to withdraw gracefully. In his instinct for unilateral action beyond Australia’s capabilities and without due regard to likely outcomes, he violated both of the dicta cited at the head of this paper: he spoke loudly when possessed only of a small stick, and he would have had us enter wars which we lacked either the capability or the will to win.

Mr Abbott set up an ostensibly orderly process of review of the future needs and structure of the ADF, but the White Paper which emerged five months after he lost office seems to have required considerable rewriting, about which he is reportedly less than happy. His First Principles Review is just the latest in an ongoing circus in which incoming Governments conduct a review of the long-suffering Department of Defence, impose upon it a new set of instructions about how to go about its business, and declare there are major savings to be had.

Mr Abbott has left behind him several major loose ends that require the careful attention of the Turnbull Government. It needs to pose some searching questions about the legal basis under which Australia is conducting or supporting military operations in Syria. The Government should ask the Solicitor General to address this question, and table the advice in the House of Representatives, so that we can all be sure what, if any, legal foundation these operations have, and what the limits are. Any operations found to be without sound legal foundation should cease forthwith.

The Government should promptly demand of the Government of Iraq that it negotiate with us a Status of Forces Agreement to establish treaty-level understandings concerning the legal basis for the Australian Defence Force to conduct military operations and training inside the sovereign territory of Iraq.

Most importantly it should ask probing questions of our American ally regarding the US military strategy for a desirable resolution of the current mess in Iraq and Syria. From outside the US, that policy appears both purposeless and confused – a matter of being seen to be doing something without having a clear idea of what end-state is to be achieved or how to achieve it. This is a very poor basis for putting the young men and women of the ADF in harm’s way, or adding to the extreme violence in Syria that is terrorising millions of civilians.

Operation Sovereign Borders should be brought into conformity with our international obligations and scaled back to the point where it does not impact adversely on the prime military functions of the ADF.

Finally, the Minister for Defence should ask the Defence Secretary to advise without fear or favour how much of the First Principles Review he would recommend be implemented. Whether he answers all of it, none of it, or something in between, it will be his decision so that responsibility and accountability can then rest where they belong.

Above all, the incoming government needs to find a better way for Australia to go to war. Under the current system, too much authority rests with the Prime Minister of the day,
and the nation is exposed to the risks of decisions which reflect small group decision making and/or the quirks of the Prime Ministerial personality.

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EXODUS

In the dark quilt of witching hour ravens stir black on midnight blue a full moon lights their way Bomb tired bullet weary most wait for thistles of daylight The sun rises on a sea of masks set in grief a blanket a bundle a child clutched to chests Some with not a person left in this world

LIZZ MURPHY, BINA LONG NSW

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Abbott’s War on the Environment and Turnbull’s Hot Air

KARIN VON STROKIRCH

Tony Abbott’s Coalition government gained notoriety for taking a wrecking ball to Australia’s policies on climate change. In a world first, Australia dismantled a fledgling carbon pricing scheme and downgraded an effective renewable energy target. The Department of Climate Change and the Climate Commission were axed while key agencies researching climate science such as CSIRO had funds and staffing decimated. Environmental non-government organisations came under siege in terms of reputation, legal rights and funding status. The renewable energy industry was further undermined as federal funding bodies were threatened with extinction. Conversely, the fossil fuel industry was rewarded with removal of the carbon price and resource super profit tax as well as continuation of generous subsidies. Another mega coal mine was approved. These policies ran counter to the clarion call for action on climate change by national and international experts in science, economics and security. They forecast Australia would pay a heavy price even with two degrees of warming; a level the world is set to surpass with minimalist emission reduction targets akin to those of the Abbott Government. The Coalition’s conduct in this domain was motivated by climate scepticism, cynical wedge politics, a traditional ‘quarry’ view of prosperity, and narrow conceptions of national interest privileging a powerful section of corporate Australia, namely the fossil fuel industry. Despite a promising change in tone, climate policy settings barely changed after Malcolm Turnbull took power in 2015. Australia trails the pack of comparable countries in climate action and pledges.

Climate change, Australia, Abbott government, Renewable energy, Diplomacy

From 2013 to 2015, Tony Abbott’s Liberal National Coalition mounted a determined, systematic assault to dismantle, defund or discredit policies, institutions and research on climate change. Targets were scientific monitoring, mitigation to climate warming such as renewable energy, and adaptation to inevitable effects. After a long battle in the Senate, the key goal of repealing the set price on carbon was achieved and the emissions trading scheme due to take effect in 2015 was abandoned. These policy measures were replaced by a questionable taxpayer funded Emissions Reduction Fund to pay corporations $2.5 billion over several years to reduce pollution.

This article examines the Abbott Government’s climate change stance across the fields of science, security, economics, electoral politics and international diplomacy. Climate change scepticism underpinned rejection of the science and its advocates. This created the Coalition’s complacent or even cavalier attitude to forecast impacts of climate change on security and the economy. Two significant political rewards stemmed from this chosen course. The partisan scare campaign on carbon pricing swayed voters. It also resulted in sustained support from the fossil fuel industry. Internationally, Australia fell far behind comparable states in climate action and pledges, including key allies. Climate policy under Turnbull, despite initial promising rhetoric, has lacked in courage, vision and substance.

The climate change ‘argument is crap’, or the science is out

Tony Abbott presents as an archetypal climate change denier. Apart from his infamous pronouncement that the science of climate change is ‘crap’ (Abbott 2009a), Abbott has frequently voiced scepticism about global warming, including in his autobiographical tome Battletlines, where he describes future effects as ‘unknown and perhaps even benign’ (2009b: 170). But he is not alone. Many in the Coalition share Abbott’s perspective.

An Abbott minister, Barnaby Joyce, now Nationals leader and deputy Prime Minister, dismissed it as ‘an indulgent and irrelevant debate because even if climate change turns out to exist one day, we will have absolutely no impact on it’ (Taylor 2012). Liberal Senator Ian Macdonald said the ‘new theory’ of anthropogenic climate change was ‘farical’ and ‘fanciful’, claiming that children were being ‘brainwashed’ in school about the need to act on the issue (Davey 2015). These politicians represent a discredited yet vocal minority of climate change sceptics.
in Australia whose views are disseminated by the fossil fuel funded Institute of Public Affairs (Readfern 2015).

The Abbott-led Coalition was unmoved by the global consensus on anthropogenic global warming adhered to by 97 per cent of climate scientists (NASA 2016). No credence was given to the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports (IPCC 2007, 2013, 2014), which emphasise human causes of climate change, document the extent of warming and provide modelling of catastrophic consequences for ecosystems and humans in the absence of urgent mitigation.

Similarly, the Coalition showed disregard for the climate work of Australia’s peak scientific agencies such as CSIRO, Bureau of Meteorology and the Climate Change Authority (CCA). Indeed, science agencies were subjected to severe funding cuts. CSIRO alone incurred losses of $110 million equating to over 20 per cent of its staff in the 2014 budget (Duffy 2014). In its first week in office the Abbott Government announced its intention to abolish the CCA. As the Senate prevented it from doing so, instead the government saved money by not replacing four of its members for a year.

Not surprisingly given the scepticism, the Department of Climate Change was immediately shut down. Nor did the Abbott Government have any time for independent institutes critical of its policies such as the non-government Climate Institute and the Climate Commission, the latter established by the Gillard Labor Government. All federal funding to the Commission was cut as soon as Abbott took office, but public philanthropy rallied and saved the reconstituted Climate Council.

All the above agencies issue regular major reports on Australia’s climate change trends, policy challenges and how to address them. In particular, along with the IPCC, they have provided comprehensive accounts of the extremely adverse impact of climate change in Australia, to date and in the future, in areas such as biodiversity, health, agriculture, water and damage from disasters including bushfires, storms and inundation of coastal infrastructure. As one they have called for urgent national action to mitigate climate change.

Environmental non-government organisations (NGOs) were viewed as hostile to Coalition policies simply by virtue of lobbying for action on climate change (as well as against poorly regulated mining, land clearing and dredging in the Great Barrier Reef). These included inter alia the Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth and the Bob Brown Foundation. Over one hundred such NGOs had their charitable status threatened, and hence their ability to function and protest without fear curtailed by a government-dominated tax deductibility enquiry launched in 2015 (Staples 2014, 2015). The enquiry lapsed without reporting when the election was called in 2016.

While the Abbott Government cut funds for research by climate change ‘alarmists’ with the pretext of reducing the budget deficit, money was found to cultivate its preferred climate discourse. Early in 2015, the government offered the University of Western Australia (UWA) a four million dollar inducement to set up a research centre with Bjorn Lomborg, the self-proclaimed ‘sceptical environmentalist’, as its head. This caused a furore and was rejected by UWA. The initiative in search of an institutional home was finally dropped the week after Malcolm Turnbull became Prime Minister (ABC News 2015c).

The Abbott Government rejected expert input, including from its own advisor, the CCA, on optimal targets for greenhouse gas emission cuts to be offered as Australia’s pledge at UN climate talks in Paris in December 2015. Whereas the CCA called for a reduction in emissions of 40-60 per cent from 2000 to 2030, the government’s target was only 19-22 per cent. Bernie Fraser, a former Reserve Bank Governor, resigned as inaugural head of the CCA in September 2015 in protest at the government’s lacklustre efforts on climate change and complete disregard for the CCA’s advice (Fraser 2015).

Abbott’s extreme views on climate science and resultant policies suggest that he is anti-intellectual, un receptive or simply unable to process new information and patently unwilling to accept expert climate science advice. But it is worse than that. Not only did Abbott reject the views of scientific messengers but gunned them down by removing funds, censoring those on the government payroll, only offering research dollars to those with the right message and threatening NGOs who had the temerity to object. He dismantled policies that were in line with the goal of keeping global warming below two degrees. The science is in, but he and his cabinet refused to see it. The blinkered vision extended to the effects of climate change on security.

The Abbott Government prided itself on prioritising defence and national security. This was evident in the quarantining of defence from budget cuts and the restoration of past cuts to defence under Gillard. There was even a commitment to steadily increase funding for defence and related security agencies. The priority accorded to national security was prominent in rhetoric and expenditure on border security and counter-terrorism. This was in part due to Abbott’s perception that being strong on security ‘is running our way out in voter land’ (Kenny 2015).

Kevin Rudd was the first Australian prime minister to depict climate change as ‘a most fundamental national
security challenge' requiring ‘formal incorporation’ into national security policy and analysis (Rudd 2008). It was thus factored into Australia’s strategic outlook in both Rudd’s and Gillard’s Defence White Papers (DOD 2009; 2013). Conversely, Tony Abbott and his government did not view climate change as a security issue. The Prime Minister did not even mention it in his Statement to Parliament on National Security (Abbott 2014).

To draw a link between climate change and national insecurity is not new. For Australia, the threats were detailed a decade ago in a book by Dupont and Pearman (2006) and later Christoff and Eckersley revisit the issue (2013). A 2015 report by the Climate Council, with a retired admiral and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) chief as an author, updates how climate change is a threat multiplier in relation to food and water scarcity, ill health, extreme weather, rising tensions and conflict, and hence mass migration (Barrie et al. 2015:18-45).

Already the ADF is burdened with new tasks responding to natural disasters of increasing severity due to climate change such as bushfires, floods and cyclones, both at home and in the Asia Pacific region. Sea level rise coupled with storm surges cause burgeoning damage to dwellings and infrastructure on the coast where most Australians live.

Ironically, despite the Coalition’s characterisation of refugees arriving by boat as a major threat, there is no comprehension that climate-induced food scarcity and rising sea levels in densely populated areas will contribute to future mass movements of people in inconceivable numbers. Pacific microstates will be in the first wave but an exodus of millions of refugees will originate from low-lying deltas in South Asia and coastal cities in Southeast Asia (Barrie et al. 2015: 38-40). The Abbott Government was not alone among developed countries to avoid acknowledging climate refugees due to fear of liability for compensation (Morrissie 2012: 39).

In addition to border issues, climate change is set to undermine defence capability in preparation, readiness and sustainment. Critical ADF infrastructure such as bases, ports and airstrips as well as personnel are at risk of being compromised by extreme weather. A plethora of institutes in Australia advised of the adverse ramifications of climate change for national security, and for the ADF’s role and capability, but the Abbott Government did not heed them. Many researchers are from strategic studies’ think tanks, such as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, hardly hotbeds of green radicalism (eg. Press et al. 2013).

Furthermore, the Pentagon, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and G7 major economies have identified climate change as a significant threat to national security. For a decade, militaries of the US and UK have planned for high-risk climate-related contingencies. These militaries are leagues ahead of the ADF in the preparation for climate effects on planning, operations, training, military estate as well as acquisition and supply. Beyond adaptation and resilience they have invested in mitigation to reduce military contributions to greenhouse emissions. The US aims to draw half the military’s energy supply from renewable sources by 2020. The defence forces were encouraged by their political masters, with climate change featuring in top level directives and national security strategies (Barrie et al. 2015: 65-74).

Not only has the Coalition failed to direct the ADF to manage climate change risks, it has inculturated a marked reluctance in the military to address the threat in a systematic, high profile way due to its politicised nature. One critic characterised as a ‘serious indictment’ that national security policy has become ‘hostage’ to the partisan politics of climate change (Thomas 2015: 117). The Coalition has its proverbial head in the sand about threats to security posed by climate change. It has ignored a decade of warnings by experts in security and lags behind our foremost allies in preparedness. Their interdependent relationship with the fossil fuel industry helps explain why.

‘Coal Is Good For Humanity’ and the Economy or Is It?

The second policy area on which the Abbott Government claimed to place high priority is the economy. The emphasis has been on growth, notably of favoured partners in the corporate sector. The Abbott Government was loath to see limits on fossil fuel profits hence their quest to remove Labor’s price on carbon along with the reviled Resource Super Profit Tax (RSPT). Concern about perceived costs to profits also fuelled Coalition resistance to ambitious targets for emissions cuts in UN climate agreements.

The Coalition places undue emphasis on the mining and energy sector given that it is an enclave economy which contributes disproportionately to climate change, has limited added value, creates relatively few jobs and damages the local environment (air, ground water, coral reefs). Indeed, mining often incites protest by the affected community and economic sectors, including agriculture and tourism (Lloyd et al. 2013). Protests extend to state, national and international level depending on the environmental values at stake.

Faith in the mining industry as the engine of Australian economic growth and prosperity has persisted in spite of the mining boom ending in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, slower growth in China and a discernible global shift to cut carbon emissions by reducing coal-fired power and developing renewable energy. While they implemented more proactive climate action policies from 2007 - 2013, Labor governments mirrored the Coalition reliance on fossil fuel exports, albeit in a lower key way (Christoff 2013).
For a decade, economists have issued dire warnings about climate change. A landmark report by the UK’s Sir Nicholas Stern argued cogently that business-as-usual emissions would cause an economic downturn on a par with the two World Wars and the Great Depression (Stern 2006). Closer to home, coastal flooding linked to a 1.1 metre rise in sea level would damage $226 billion of infrastructure in Australia. Already, heat waves cost Australia $8 billion in 2013/2014 while the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires cost $4.4 billion (Steffen et al. 2015: 40-42). Longer, more intense droughts dramatically reduce agricultural output. The demise of the Great Barrier Reef risks the loss of one million visitors and $1 billion in foregone expenditure a year (Swann and Campbell 2016).

Stern maintained that deep cuts in emissions are compatible with growth and prosperity. Yet it is deemed vital that measures be adopted now to reduce prohibitive long-term costs. A leading Australian economist, Ross Garnaut (2008, 2011), drew similar conclusions in reports commissioned by Labor. The consensus among many economists, including Garnaut, is that a capped emissions trading scheme whereby companies buy the right to pollute at a price set by the market is the most cost-effective means of reducing emissions. The levelling of the energy playing field then facilitates growth in renewable energy.

Recommendations by eminent economists fell on deaf ears with the Coalition. Nor did the manifest success of the fledgling carbon price sway the Abbott Government. O’Gorman and Jotzo (2014) from the Australian National University reported that the two-year scheme had significantly reduced electricity demand, emissions intensity of power supply, and national emissions. Unfazed by the evidence, the government dispatched the carbon price in mid-2014 just after the ANU report was issued.

Instead of a self-funding carbon price that did not adversely affect the budget bottom line, the Abbott Government introduced an emissions reduction fund (ERF) paid for solely by taxpayers. The combined effect is estimated to cost $24 billion by 2020, without even meeting Australia’s modest target of five per cent reduction in emissions since 2000. Meeting the target would require replenishment of the ERF bringing the total cost to an estimated $40 billion (Climate Institute 2015). This is a curious policy setting for a government ostensibly preoccupied with reducing the budget deficit.

Not only was the carbon price abolished and the emissions trading scheme cancelled, but also the promising renewable energy industry was sabotaged. The Abbott Government reneged on its own election promise to fund a million solar roofs for low-income families (Flannery et al. 2014: 40). The Australian Renewable Energy Agency and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which make grants for research and development, were both to be axed; however, this was blocked in the Senate (ABC News 2016).

The Coalition instigated a controversial review of the Renewable Energy Target (RET) led by avowed climate sceptic, Maurice Newman (Newman 2015). The successful RET had ‘encouraged significant new renewable electricity generation which has almost doubled as a result of the scheme’ according to a commissioned report to government (Warburton et al. 2014: i). Yet Abbott’s review ultimately imposed a major reduction to the 2020 target from 41 thousand to 33 thousand gigawatt hours (ABC News 2015b). The industry’s response to research and development funding cuts, the likely downgrade of the RET and profoundly uncertain prospects was a 70 per cent slump in renewable investment after just one year of Abbott government (The Guardian 2014).

The final insult came with the complete removal of federal government financial support for wind farms in mid-2015 because Abbott found them ‘visually awful [and] they make a lot of noise’. His perception was shared by Treasurer Joe Hockey who described them as ‘utterly offensive … and a blight on the landscape’ (Bourke 2015). This hostility to wind power was reinforced by radio shock-jock Alan Jones who holds a firm belief that wind farms are damaging to the health of local residents, despite the National Health and Medical Research Council finding no evidence to support this claim (Bourke 2015).

The attack on renewable energy was hard to fathom. Even for climate sceptics, reducing land and water despoliation by mining and air pollution from carbon emissions should be a no regrets measure. The same principle applies to decreasing reliance on finite fuel sources. For a party apparently bent on supporting capital it made no sense to put the brakes on a sunrise industry with enormous potential in an aspiring carbon neutral world. Part of the explanation lies in a traditional, outdated mindset that views Australia merely as a quarry. Its proponents are deeply suspicious of any agenda with a green tint no matter how moderate. Pearse et al. detailed a very ‘close behind the scenes cooperative relationship’ between ‘big coal’ and the government, particularly with the Liberal National Coalition (2013: 150-155).

An incentive to favour fossil fuels relates to the financial clout of the sector. In the mid-2000s, mining and energy companies steadily increased donations to political parties, but the Coalition received considerably more. The partisan gap widened dramatically in 2010 after Rudd announced the Resource Super Profit Tax (RSPT). The 2010/2011 financial year saw the Coalition receive three million dollars from the mining and energy sector while Labor got a paltry $50 thousand (Keane 2012). Following Gillard’s price on carbon in mid-2012, the Coalition netted two-thirds of the total $2.3 million in donations from mining and energy corporations in 2012/2013 (Ting and Begley 2015).
The price that Labor paid for not keeping the mining and energy industry onside was a lesson not lost on the Abbott-led Coalition, both in opposition and in government. The Coalition's relationship with the sector is bordering on symbiotic. In addition to axing the RSPT and the carbon price, the industry (notably coal) still receives generous subsidies and tax breaks despite the contrived budget 'emergency' (see Ryan in this issue). The fuel tax credit scheme, from which the mining industry receives the lion's share, was the fifteenth largest budget item, far exceeding overseas aid in 2014/2015 (ACF 2015: 3).

In the face of the economic challenge posed by climate change, the Abbott Government adopted policy settings diametrically opposed to those recommended by commissioned experts, economists, think tanks and universities. The cost-effective carbon price was abandoned, replaced by an ineffective polluters' fund that deepened the budget deficit. Fossil fuels remained heavily protected and subsidised (adding to the deficit) while the quid pro quo of political donations was gratefully accepted. The renewable energy industry was subject to death by a thousand cuts with the wind sector singled out for vilification. The Coalition is in thrill of immediate corporate returns and false economies but shows reckless disregard for long-term costs that climate change will impose on the national economy and public purse. Yet, short-term financial gains would have been for naught were the Coalition to lose at the polls.

Wedge Politics Based On Fluctuating Polls

Abbott had campaigned heavily in opposition to axe the so-called tax on carbon and thus claimed a mandate to do so in government. But the extent of public support for his agenda was newly minted and far from solid. Moreover, the mandate did not extend to trashing the renewable energy industry. The public had ostensibly supported strong government action on climate in the 2007 election where it was the centrepiece of Rudd's campaign. Even in 2009, Abbott lamented that 80 per cent of the public believed in climate change (Abbott 2009a). Meanwhile, the Greens had increased their share of Senate seats from five in 2007 to nine in 2010.

Yet at some point Abbott must have decided there was enough wedge politics value in the carbon tax issue to be a political game changer. He would have perceived that climate change was closely identified with Labor. Rudd had, after all, pronounced it the 'greatest moral challenge of our generation' (Rudd 2007). In addition, the issue enabled Abbott to distinguish and distance himself from Turnbull. Abbott thus rallied climate sceptics in a 2009 leadership coup to oust Turnbull in retaliation for his offering of support to Rudd's doomed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Thence began the most destructive pattern of partisanship seen to date in Australian climate policy.

The Abbott opposition mounted a misleading scare campaign linking electricity price rises to the carbon 'tax' with Barnaby Joyce's memorable claim that it would result in '$100 lamb roasts' (Koziol 2016). A parallel campaign undermined confidence in renewable energy as a viable baseline power source. Decried as 'Juliar', Gillard's betrayal of a 2010 election promise not to institute the carbon 'tax' was milked for all it was worth. (Recall Abbott in front of a protestor's placard: ‘Juliar: Bob Brown's bitch’.) The electorate was thus influenced by the climate sceptic propaganda of the Coalition and likeminded media. Key News Corp papers expressed strong climate scepticism: The Australian 48 per cent of articles on the topic, Daily Telegraph 63 per cent, and the Herald Sun 67 per cent (Bacon 2013). Pro-mining policies also delivered a war chest of corporate donations to fight the 2013 election. Conversely, Labor failed to defend the merits of the carbon price or the RSPT. Internecine fighting debilitated the ALP leadership in the face of relentless offensives by the Coalition in concert with sections of industry.

Public opinion that 'global warming is a serious and pressing problem … [warranting] steps now even if this involves significant costs' last peaked at 68 per cent in 2006 (Oliver 2015: 13). Concern and support for strong action reached its nadir in 2012, dipping below 40 per cent. Since then, calls for action have inexorably grown. Any alleged mandate for business-as-usual lost weight with each passing year. In stark contrast to Coalition policy, 43 per cent of adults expect solar power to be the primary source of electricity in ten years' time. So for a few years the Coalition tail-wagged the dog of public opinion on climate but the tide had turned by 2015. In the lead up to the Paris climate summit, 63 per cent of Australians (70 per cent of 18-29 year olds) wanted the government to lead by example and 'commit to significant CO2 reductions so that other countries will do the same' (Oliver 2015: 13-14). It was not to be.

Refusal To Match, Much Less Lead, International Climate Action

Climate scepticism and reversal of domestic mitigation measures were mirrored by inaction, indifference and even worse in Abbott's diplomacy. As European, Chinese and American climate action gathered pace and Barack Obama aimed to make climate policy a key legacy (Barron-Lopez 2014), Abbott went in the opposite direction. In 2013, Australia had no minister at the annual UNFCCC climate conference. Abbott did not attend the UN Secretary General's New York summit of one hundred world leaders on climate change in 2014, even though he was in the US, pointedly touring coalmines. Also in 2014, Abbott refused a US request to put climate change on the G20 agenda in Brisbane but was forced to do so by delegates who gave it prominent mention in the final communiqué (Bamsey and Rowley 2015: 2).

The Coalition’s decision to make Australia the first country to abolish a functioning carbon market and reduce its
renewable energy target was baffling to the international community and out of step with global trends. By 2014, when Abbott ‘axed the tax’ 39 countries had a price on carbon, 144 countries had renewable energy targets while global investment in renewable energy had overtaken that in fossil fuels (Flannery et al. 2014: 27–30). When Abbott left office, Australia was at 24th place in OECD rankings for renewable energy with only 14 per cent of its power drawn from this source (Arup 2015b).

The Abbott Government also lagged in commitments, refusing to alter the greenhouse gas target of five per cent below 2000 levels by 2020 despite it being among the lowest in the OECD. This pattern was repeated leading up to the 2015 Paris UNFCCC conference of parties. Australia’s target of a 26 per cent cut in emissions from 2005 to 2030 (or 19 per cent from 2000) trailed eight comparable countries (including the whole EU) and only bettered Japan; not yet recovered from its nuclear disaster (Fraser 2015). The US pledged a reduction of 39 per cent for 2030 while Australia’s pledge is merely half the UK target of 49 per cent (Climate Institute 2015).

Australia’s target is not consistent with its stated commitment to limit global warming to two degrees. If others emulated Australia, warming would be three to four degrees. Australia’s reductions are measured against a very high baseline of 30 tonnes of CO2 equivalent per capita in 2005. By 2011, Australia still had 18tCO2e and the Abbott Government’s 2030 pledge would only reduce this to 16tCO2e compared to 5tCO2e in the UK (Climate Institute 2015). Thus in 2011 Australia was, and in 2030 it is set to remain, the second highest per capita emitter in the group of 20 top economies after Saudi Arabia. Many in the international community believe that Australia can and should do better.

The Abbott Government’s lack of enthusiasm for UN efforts to combat climate change was consistent with strongly held views in the Coalition that global warming is either not real, not anthropogenic or not serious. Another factor is longstanding realist pessimism, shared by Howard and Abbott, about the merits of multilateral cooperation in general and wariness of the UN in particular. Maurice Newman, Abbott’s economic advisor, went so far as to denounce climate change as an elaborate plot to create ‘a new world order under the control of the UN’ (Newman 2015).

There is resentment about UN oversight and Abbott (like Howard before him) does not like to be ‘lectured’ by the UN (ABC News 2015a). The dislike is reciprocated as Abbott’s anti-environment policies have provided grist to the UN mill for criticism. The Abbott Government showed profound disregard for the environment overall and not just a blind spot on climate change. Two years under Abbott saw the attempted removal of a forest from a World Heritage Area in Tasmania to enable logging, building coal ports and dumping dredge material in the Great Barrier Reef, cutting ‘green tape’ in part by devolving biodiversity protection from federal to state level, allowing states to accelerate tree clearing thus undermining UN emissions pledges (TWS 2016), and proposed mining in Marine Parks.

Prospects For Climate Action Under Turnbull

Prospects for a progressive policy on climate change under Malcolm Turnbull at first seemed quite good. He is a believer in climate change who had lent support to Rudd’s carbon pricing scheme (Koziol 2016). He is not a critic of the renewable energy industry, indeed his passion for ‘innovation’ would suggest quite the opposite (Turnbull 2015c). After taking the leadership, Turnbull displayed enthusiasm for climate diplomacy at the UN summit in Paris, with hints that national commitments to greenhouse gas reduction targets could be increased more in line with other countries.

On the downside, in order to win the leadership spill, Turnbull made a Faustian bargain whereby he sold his environmental soul to the right of the Liberal party and promised not to reintroduce a price on carbon. Turnbull’s first press conference as leader thus expressed fulsome support for the climate policy of his predecessor which he described as ‘very well designed ... a very, very good piece of work’ (Turnbull 2015a). This was despite the fact that Australia’s emissions have risen since the carbon price was removed and the Emissions Reduction Fund has been inadequate to the task of meeting even the modest five per cent Kyoto targets.

The initial retention of Greg Hunt as Environment Minister did not bode well for climate action as he did not defend, much less advance, his portfolio under Abbott. Aside from ‘axing the tax’ on carbon and allowing the renewable energy industry to be gutted, he approved two mega coal mines (Shenhua and Adani). This was contrary to peer reviewed science in Nature indicating that these vast reserves of coal must remain in the ground to prevent two degrees or more global warming (McGlade and Ekins 2015).

The ACF launched legal action against the Adani mine, arguing its carbon emissions would ring the death knell for the Great Barrier Reef. In early 2016 the court case played out during an unprecedented coral bleaching event. When Hunt heard that 50 per cent of the reef was affected he blithely referred to the half left as in a healthy state. A week later the extent of bleaching was revised to 93 per cent. Nevertheless, Hunt persisted in defending the Adani mine in court on the basis that it would have no ‘substantial’ impact on global warming or the reef (Slezak 2016).

Continuing the Abbott tradition of attempting to suppress inconvenient truths, the Turnbull Government censored a report authored by UNESCO, UNEP and the Union of Concerned Scientists on climate risks to World Heritage
Sites (UNESCO et al. 2016). It included a case study on the fate of the Great Barrier Reef and its tourism sector. After the coral bleaching, Canberra insisted that any reference to Australian heritage sites be removed. This invoked déjà vu of the Abbott Government’s diplomatic frenzy in 2015 when it spent half a million dollars lobbying 11 countries to dissuade a UN committee from declaring the Great Barrier Reef ‘in danger’ (Steffen 2016).

The elevation of arch climate sceptic, Barnaby Joyce, to Nationals leader and deputy prime minister represented another setback for enlightened climate policy. Joyce’s policy perspective did not change despite the mournful reflection on his drought-stricken family farm that ‘climate change might really be happening’ (Hunter 2016). Yet Turnbull personally reaffirmed his belief in climate change science and long-term predictions about its devastating effects. In his Paris speech he averred: ‘We do not doubt the implications of the science, or the scale of the challenge.’ (Turnbull 2015b). Further, he emphasised the role of innovative science and technology in meeting that challenge.

There was a yawning gap between Turnbull’s rhetoric on the global stage and the reality for Australian scientists. Not only did he fail to redress Hockey’s savage cuts to climate research, but in the New Year of 2016 stood by as the science flagship CSIRO incurred another swathe of threatened cuts of up to 350 staff; many vital to monitoring climate in Australia’s oceans, atmosphere and Antarctica. The CSIRO boss, Larry Marshall (appointed under Abbott), said there was no need to monitor climate because the question had been resolved. CSIRO managers targeted programs for abolition including: global emissions, sea level rise and multi-decade climate modelling. They proposed a ‘clean cut’ to get rid of ‘all “public good” government funded climate research’ (Morton and Hannan 2016).

Turnbull’s commitment to science was sounding distinctly hollow. The flagged CSIRO cuts were denounced by the opposition, the Bureau of Meteorology, universities and internationally by world media (The Guardian and New York Times), as well as the UN World Meteorological Organisation and three thousand world scientists (Morton 2016). In its defence the government said that CSIRO is an independent statutory agency but the opposition mounted a Senate enquiry into its management.

Abbott fervently believed in the future of fossil fuels. Turnbull offered rhetorical support for renewable energy, but by no means restored funding decimated under Abbott. Nor was there any revisiting of the diminished renewable energy target. Instead, another massive coal mine was approved on Turnbull’s watch – Adani in Queensland. Moreover, in Paris, Turnbull refused to sign an OECD initiative, led by New Zealand, to stop government subsidies of fossil fuels (Arup 2015a). Turnbull did remove Abbott-era draft legislation to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency. Yet their terms of reference were changed from grants to loans and funding greatly reduced (ABC News 2016).

The Climate Change Authority, on the cusp of issuing a report to the Turnbull Government advocating a mandatory carbon price as the most cost effective option (in line with successive Labor policies) saw its funding disappear altogether in 2017 federal budget projections (Hannan 2016). In the lead up to the 2016 election, there was a reprise of Abbott’s 2013 scare campaign in response to ALP leader Bill Shorten’s emissions trading scheme (ETS) policy. Turnbull derided the proposed ETS as a ‘job destroyer’ and an ‘economic handbrake’ that would push up electricity prices while Greg Hunt charged it would ‘inflict pain’ on families, farmers and small business (Koziol 2016). In the past both men had supported an ETS.

Abbott placed little value on UN diplomacy and refused to participate in global action on climate change. By contrast, Turnbull is ostensibly an internationalist. He and ministers Julie Bishop and Greg Hunt talked the talk at the 2015 climate summit in Paris. In a welcome symbolic, albeit somewhat tokenistic, gesture Turnbull committed Australia to ratify the second round of the Kyoto treaty to the existing low target of 5 per cent emissions reduction from 2013 to 2020. With creative accounting that includes a surplus from the previous accounting period, Australia’s carbon emissions may increase and still meet the target. Significantly, the Coalition did not allow Turnbull’s delegation to Paris leeway to alter Australia’s greenhouse gas targets designated in the dying days of the Abbott Government (Turnbull 2015a). Australia’s voluntary pledge thus remains unchanged at an underwhelming cut of 26 per cent from 2005 to 2030. The government signed the final Paris agreement in April 2016 but the international community must have been perplexed at the lack of climate action during Turnbull’s first half year in office (Climate Institute 2016).

Conclusion

Multiple factors drove the Abbott Government to dismantle a suite of key national policies on climate change contrary to a mass of authoritative, multi-disciplinary evidence based research. Profound climate scepticism coupled with a narrow, short-term view of the national interest contributed to dismissiveness towards predicted future impacts of climate change on the economy, security and society, never mind the environment.

The Coalition under Abbott used climate change, in particular alarmism over power costs, as a ploy to denigrate Labor in order to get elected and stay in power. Regrettably, this continued in Turnbull’s response to Labor’s ambitious emission targets and revamped carbon price in the 2016 election campaign. For its part, the
Coalition continued to promote the mining industry via subsidies and shield it from onerous taxes and ‘green’ tape. The *quid pro quo* was Coalition coffers awash with corporate donations. Despite the rhetoric of moving Australia into innovative industries after the mining boom (Turnbull 2015c) in reality Turnbull approved a major coal mine and maintained the subsidies on fossil fuels.

The assault on renewable energy in the form of reduced research grants, downward revision of the RET and removal of subsidies for installations is the contrary aspect of support for fossil fuels. Yet it also relates to the fledgling industry’s perceived ideological association with environmentalism, the Greens party, green NGOs and activists for whom the Abbott Government held great hostility. The Coalition under Abbott mounted visceral attacks on environmental advocates with the Greens party described by Abbott in a speech to forestry workers as ‘the Devil’ (Brown 2014). The corollary was an attack on the funding and legal rights of green NGOs.

Abbott’s legacy is one of long-lasting, immeasurable damage to Australia’s climate change institutions, research and renewable energy industry as well as to public opinion and the quality of debate. It will not be a quick or easy task to reverse several years of fear mongering about a price on carbon and uncertainty for research and business about funding, legal and policy decisions. The extent of the cuts to date, coupled with the worsening budget deficit, augurs ill for timely and fulsome restoration of funding for renewable energy and climate science research.

Regardless of the mercurial Turnbull’s own inclinations, he is constrained by climate sceptic Coalition MPs and many captains of the fossil fuel industry who oppose the removal of fossil fuel subsidies and the reintroduction of a carbon price as well as ambitious national targets for emission reductions. For these reasons we have not seen much apart from hot air emanating from Turnbull on climate action to date and this is not likely to change any time soon.

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Troubled Waters: European and Australian approaches to Maritime migration during Tony Abbott’s tenure

VINCENT BLOKKER

Protecting Australia from an ‘invasion’ of irregular maritime migrants was one of the key policy objectives of Tony Abbott’s government from September 2013 to September 2015. Restricted to this specific period, this article compares Australia’s approaches to irregular maritime migration with the actions taken by the European Union (EU). By mirroring the journey of maritime migrants, the comparative analysis is structured around the ‘departure’ place, the ‘transit’ at sea, and the ‘arrival’. Under Abbott, Australia cut humanitarian aid to source and transit countries, intensified military deterrence against maritime migrants and sustained punitive offshore detention camps. Despite problematic factors for the EU such as the proximity of conflict zones, the sheer numbers of refugees, and the vexed issue of burden-sharing between member-states, it advocated a humanitarian approach to the migration crisis. By providing a stark contrast between Australian and EU approaches to a humanitarian crisis, this article contends that the Abbott Government took exceptionally cruel measures to curtail the flow of people travelling to Australia by boat to seek refuge.

Introduction

The Australian Government under Tony Abbott exhibited a narrow conception of the national interest and disregard for international law by turning back or deterring migrants travelling to Australia by boat. In an earlier issue of this journal, Glendenning (2015) wrote a powerful critique outlining successive Australian governments’ institutionalised cruelty that undermines the human dignity of these migrants. In this article, I will demonstrate exactly how cruel Australia’s deterrent policy choices are by contrasting them with the European Union’s actions towards irregular maritime migrants. The Abbott Government slashed aid to source and transit countries, militarised border security at sea, and ensured the punitive element in offshore detention and resettlement was harsher than ever before. Meanwhile, the EU displayed a greater sense of compassion by providing aid to both war-torn countries and those transit countries hosting refugees; actively searching for migrants at sea; and offering protection to those who arrived at the EU’s doorstep. The strategy pursued by the EU was by no means saintly and was wedged between member-state interests and humanitarian values. The migrants, including children, who continue to die at sea, are also a matter of grave concern. Yet, comparatively, the EU’s approach is morally superior to Abbott’s deterrent measures. Only the period during which Abbott was in government will be analysed in this short article. The argument will be presented in three parts representative of the journey, from departure, on-water experience, to arrival of refugees. Firstly, the approaches of both Australia and the EU towards migrant source and transit countries will be compared. Then Australian and EU practices at sea are analysed, before turning to the treatment of maritime migrants after arrival.

Departure: Control vs Engagement

Rich, politically stable and secure Western states are attractive destinations for refugees to rebuild a new life. The challenges of the global migration crisis require these states to respond to the migrant situation in both source and transit countries. Australia’s response under Abbott was securitised and militarised, while the EU focused more on humanitarian engagement.

Sectarian conflict and civil war are among the main causes leading to irregular mass migration. The protracted wars in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Libya (2011) and Syria (2011) have given rise to unprecedented numbers of refugees. Many of them have attempted to reach the EU, while others sought protection in transit countries before returning or moving onwards. Countries now locked in civil war were once transit countries. At the end of 2010, Syria hosted well over 1 million refugees from elsewhere (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2011: 12). Libya hosted over 1.5
Cuts. Hardly coincidental, those who have remained Other regional countries were spared such severe budget border policy, cutting aid would appear counter-intuitive Abbott wanted Indonesia to join forces in its controversial Indonesia by 40% from $605 million to $366 million. If announced that it would reduce its annual funding to amidst major foreign aid cuts across the board, Australia key recipients such as Afghanistan and Indonesia at the end of 2014. Because Iraq was not within Australia’s ‘region of interest’, aid was reduced to zero (Ware 2015: 52). Overall, cuts to Australia’s foreign aid budget of 20%, or $1 billion from 2015-2016, were the largest ever recorded (Howes and Pryke 2015; Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) 2015: 3). These savings were then earmarked for national security (McDonald 2014). The few countries where Australian foreign aid had increased were those ‘contracted’ for offshore detention or for resettlement programs.

Both Australia and various EU member-states have contributed to the refugee crises with their involvement in regional conflicts. While the EU maintained and increased substantial humanitarian aid to source and transit countries, Australia under Abbott slashed aid to key recipients such as Afghanistan and Indonesia at the end of 2014. Because Iraq was not within Australia’s ‘region of interest’, aid was reduced to zero (Ware 2015: 52). Particularly since Abbott came to power, Australia has used its financial capacity to ‘protect’ itself from the migration crisis and has employed aid as a bargaining chip to facilitate the controversial asylum seeker policy. Conversely, the EU has taken a more engaged regional approach with source and transit countries that does not predominantly rely on military protection from maritime migrants. Where Abbott favoured a military solution to the maritime migration crisis, the European Commission (EC 2015a), which is the EU’s executive arm, specifically called for further engagement with source and transit countries. Focusing on the maritime aspect of migration, I will provide some insight into the EU’s engagement with those countries which feature in the irregular migratory process by sea: Libya as both source and transit country and Turkey for its role as host to 1.9 million Syrians.

Irregular maritime migrants coming from Libya accounted for well over 300,000 arrivals to the EU in 2014 and 2015. The budget allocated by the EU from 2013-2015 was $85 million (UK Parliament 2014a) to support the Libyan authorities, mainly through the transfer of knowledge, to develop capacity for enhancing the security of their borders and maritime search and rescue operations. A further $13 million was provided in direct humanitarian care, such as protection, access to health care, as well as non-food and hygiene items (EC 2015b).
External engagement with Libya has been problematic with its two rival governments. This factional conflict in Libya means that active engagement with those in power is limited, making capacity building a challenge. Consequently, people smugglers and migrants exploit the power-vacuum. Libya’s lack of border control along with current international maritime conventions that prescribe search and rescue activities for people in distress at sea make the Mediterranean the most porous border of the EU. Southern EU member-states have coordinated large-scale rescue operations, rejecting warnings from the United Kingdom that this practice would open the flood gates (UK Parliament 2014b).

In the face of overwhelming numbers of boat arrivals in May 2015 (at times well over 1,000 people a day) and associated mass-drowning, parts of the EU demanded stronger action against maritime migration. Under foreign affairs and security chief Mogherini, the EU took a desperate turn by requesting the UN Security Council’s (UNSC 2015: 2-4) permission to employ exceptional measures to destroy boats on Libyan shores in an attempt to disrupt the ‘business model’ of people traffickers. This plan, however, faced criticism. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon referred to it as ‘not appropriate’ and NGOs highlighted the inherent flaws in pursuing a militarised approach to a humanitarian crisis. Indeed, this would have led to an unconscionable situation where refugees would be forced to remain in a war-zone. With the unlikelihood of UNSC or Libyan permission for military action within Libyan territorial waters, the sea lanes remained open for irregular migrants.

It was not the feared ‘pull factor’ of search and rescue at sea, but ‘push factors’ caused by regional conflicts that prompted a mass exodus of maritime migrants. People fleeing from Turkey to Greece reached well over 800,000 in 2015 alone (IOM 2015a: 4). The civil war in Syria up until late-2015 has thus far resulted in over 4 million registered refugees, of whom nearly 2 million are in Turkey. The remaining 2.1 million spread out across Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon (UNHCR 2015a). Since 2011, EU humanitarian assistance to Syria and third countries in the region hosting Syrian refugees, had reached over $5.75 billion in total by September 2015 (EC 2015c). This response included support to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

This policy of providing humanitarian aid to refugees and capacity building in neighbouring countries suggests a strategy to keep refugees from fleeing further from the conflict zone, notably towards the EU. In contrast with Libya, in which the war led to an exodus to the EU, most Syrian refugees appeared to remain in neighbouring countries in the early years of the conflict. The EU’s political engagement with Syria’s neighbours, through aid donations and other funding, is the preferred way for the EU to prevent, or at least reduce, irregular migration into the Union.

Civil wars and sectarian conflict have increasingly pushed irregular migration onto the international political agenda. Desperately fleeing violence, an unprecedented number of migrants have come to the EU by boat. This has put strain on the EU with sections in fierce opposition to any measures which could ‘open the flood gates’ to irregular maritime migration. In an attempt to curtail the exodus of migrants from countries of transit like Turkey, the EU has significantly increased aid and assistance. In comparison, Australia cut its aid commitments to the Middle East and transit countries in its own region, like Indonesia. Under Abbott, Australia’s response to the international migration crisis has been dominated by a self-interested rejection of humanitarian engagement with source and transit countries. Instead of allocating much-needed humanitarian support with an aim to mitigate the causes for migration, the aid budget saw unparalleled cuts with most of the savings reallocated to border security and national defence. Abbott’s short-term tunnel vision viewed maritime migration as ‘queue jumping’ and a security issue, neglecting Australia’s international humanitarian obligations in favour of stopping any migration by sea.

**Transit: Deterrence vs Rescue at Sea**

The conflicting approaches between the Abbott Government and the EU were not only reflected in their engagement with third countries, but also demonstrated by the actions at sea. From 2011 onwards, civil war in northern Africa and the Middle East resulted in extraordinary numbers of migrants aiming to reach Italy. The EU, particularly since Italy’s altruistic Mare Nostrum rescue operations in 2013, placed an emphasis on proactive assistance to migrants at sea allowing them to arrive safely in Europe. Half way around the world, exactly one month after Mare Nostrum had commenced, Abbott’s victory as Prime Minister signalled a radically different trajectory, following his pre-election promise to deter irregular maritime migration to Australia. Not the preservation of human life, but a persistence to deter asylum seekers drove his migration policy of turning back the boats.

In accordance with UN Convention, states have a primary responsibility to render assistance to those in distress at sea. Those in distress must be taken to a place of safety, a place where the rescue mission terminates, where people’s lives are no longer threatened and where their basic human rights can be met (International Maritime Organization (IMO) 2004: 6-7). The Abbott Government’s turn-back policies have been fiercely criticised as contrary
to this objective, placing refugees in danger by sending them back to their place of departure.

Under Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), Australia surpassed the previous government’s attempt to curtail migration by sea. With the appointment of a 3-star general, the operation became inherently militarised and cloaked in secrecy including the rejection of scrutiny by intergovernmental organisations (IGO), non-governmental organisations (NGO) and the media. By equating OSB to a ‘war’ against people smugglers Abbott justified his government’s silence stating that ‘if we are at war, we wouldn't be giving out information that is of use to the enemy’ (Swan 2014). Abbott’s non-disclosure strategy was more an attempt to prevent domestic and international criticism. Two elements of OSB at sea are particularly worrisome: the ‘turn-back the boats’ approach and the ‘enhanced screening’ of potential asylum seekers.

The most controversial part of OSB was the reincarnation of previous turn-back policies under Howard (Craig and Schloenhardt 2014: 6-7), albeit with more ‘success’. Despite the high level of secrecy, the government did announce in August 2015 that in two years since the start of OSB 20 boats, with 633 asylum seekers, had been turned back to Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam – none of which are signatories to the Refugee Convention (Hasham 2015). Contrary to Australia’s international obligations as signatory to the Refugee Convention, it sends people back to countries which may not provide sufficient care or from which they may be expelled again to more dangerous places.

Before irregular maritime migrants are sent back, immigration officers on vessels that intercept boats carrying asylum seekers conduct an ‘enhanced’ screening. Those screened ‘out’ are turned back to where they transited from, generally Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Those screened ‘in’ as potential bona-fide refugees are placed in offshore processing centres on Manus Island or Nauru. This uncompromising approach to a vulnerable group of migrants has been sold to the Australian population as ‘safeguarding’ borders and protecting economic interests. Internationally, it is alleged that this measure saves lives and prevents illegal people smuggling.

The ‘Enhanced Screening’ procedure had been in place since October 2012, introduced by the previous Labor Government as a measure to decrease irregular maritime migration of Sri Lankans for alleged economic reasons (Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2013). Enhanced screening continued under Abbott but was applied even more rigidly and in more secrecy during OSB. In line with Abbott’s policy of strict deterrence to prevent maritime migrants ever reaching Australia, onshore processing was not considered as an option. Yet, full assessments of asylum claims cannot be done in mere hours. In any case, it is impractical for these to be conducted on board an Australian naval vessel. Superficial screening resulted in ‘screening out’ those migrants, for example to Sri Lanka (Jayasinghe 2015) where they are at risk of being subjected to serious harm, arbitrary detention, torture or persecution. This breaches Australia’s non-refoulement obligations under the Refugee Convention, as well as the Convention against Torture and other international agreements.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) is ‘profoundly concerned’ about this expedited assessment method; Human Rights Watch (2014), in a joint statement, condemned Australia’s international law violations with reference to inadequate asylum assessments; and the UNHCR, although not explicitly naming Australia, stated that ‘[p]rotection screening and refugee status determination should not take place at sea’ (2014: 4, emphasis added). Yet, the Abbott Government seemed blind to any of these concerns.

In the face of domestic and international criticism, the Abbott Government maintained that its policies of deterrence and OSB practices on water prevented deaths at sea. This logic is essentially flawed: as Glendenning (2015: 29-30) rightly pointed out, Australia’s current policy has resulted in the prevention of loss of lives at sea near its own shores, but asylum seekers are by no means safe. Deaths simply occur somewhere else. Australia should, in part, take responsibility for this. In South-East Asia, Australia’s ‘own’ region, the UNHCR (2015b: 2) has estimated that between early 2014 and mid-2015, 94,000 refugees took to sea to seek a safer place. Of these, 1,100 have reportedly drowned. There are two key ways in which Australia refused to take responsibility.

Firstly, Australia’s harsh attitude towards those who attempt to cross the sea left refugees such as the Rohingya Muslims, but also refugees from further afield, stranded in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia – none of whom are signatories to the Refugee Convention. Abbott’s infamous response to a plea for emergency assistance was an unsophisticated ‘nope, nope, nope’, continuing that those who ‘want to start a new life’ should ‘come through the front door, not through the back door’ (Cox 2015). It is unclear how the Rohingya, who have been ostracised, subjected to government inflicted suffering and denied full citizenship for decades, could ‘come through the front door’. Most refugees aim to settle in Malaysia, where conditions are seemingly better, yet as unregistered migrants they lack any essential legal rights and are offered little protection against institutionalised abuse (Hoffstaedter 2015). Some moved on to Indonesia, which
offered a departure point for further travel to Australia (Newland 2015: 7). With Australia’s maritime border hermetically closed to maritime migrants from Indonesia, they are yet again left in limbo.

Secondly, Australia set a very poor example with its policy to stop and turn back boats, which was briefly emulated by Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. May 2015 saw a mass exodus of Rohingya asylum seekers take a dangerous journey by boat in search of safety. A refusal by Australia’s neighbours to offer a place of disembarkment to thousands of refugees stranded in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea resulted in many unnecessary deaths (UNHCR 2015b: 4).

In short, Abbott’s highly militarised OSB virtually rejected any form of humanitarian responsibility in its actions at sea. Cloaked in secrecy, naval and immigration personnel returned desperate people to their places of departure, deliberately risking violations of Australia’s non-refoulement commitments. This set a terrible example for regional countries in the light of Southeast Asia’s own migration crisis. Whilst the loss of lives at sea by migrants aiming to reach Australia has allegedly been reduced to zero, migrants simply die somewhere else. Yet, with reference to his ‘life saving’ policy, Abbott, stating that ‘the only way you can stop the deaths is, in fact, to stop the boats’, even attempted to persuade the EU to replace their rescue operations with an equivalent of Australia’s policy (Coleman 2015). To date, the EU has refused to follow Australia’s example and not only continues to provide assistance to migrants at sea, but also allows them to disembark in the EU.

In the wake of the tragic death of 350 maritime migrants on 3 October 2013, coincidentally only weeks after Abbott was elected, Italy initiated Operation Mare Nostrum, which rescued 150,810 migrants over a one-year period (Ministero della Difesa, nd.). The achievements were庆典 by non-government organisations (IOM 2014; HRW 2015b: 2), but the operation was terminated as a result of funding constraints. Operation Triton replaced Mare Nostrum in November 2014. This smaller scale operation, conducted by the EU’s border security agency Frontex, was initially allocated a monthly budget of $4.3 million – less than a third of Mare Nostrum’s cost. Whereas Mare Nostrum aimed to proactively search for, and save migrants at sea, Triton primarily focused on border management and border control with a much narrower geographical scope (European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2014).

The increasing death toll at sea, in addition to raised public awareness and concerns voiced by the UN and human rights organisations, contributed to a re-evaluation of Triton. In April 2015, the EU tripled funding for Frontex’s operations at sea, to allow for the deployment of more vessels and aircraft, and to expand the geographical scope of search and rescue operations to match that of Mare Nostrum (EC 2015a: 3; 2015d). Individual member-states also deployed vessels and aircraft in separate search and rescue operations. The renewed emphasis on searching for migrants at sea was crucial for saving lives.

The EU’s approach since 2013 has received acclamation from the UN and NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch (2015b: 24), but there is some discord between member-states. The Eurozone financial crisis and the increasing numbers of refugees have contributed to rising anti-EU and anti-migration sentiment. These xenophobic trends have also been raised as a concern by the special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau (2015: 6). In May 2015, the European Council approved Operation Sophia, a European Union Naval Force in the Mediterranean to target vessels suspected of being used for human smuggling or trafficking. This highly militarised operation aims to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks (Tardy 2015: 1-2). This certainly bears a strong resemblance to Abbott’s demonising grandiloquence. It also faced criticism for the potential to limit the avenues for migrants seeking refuge in Europe. Yet, migrants found aboard smuggling vessels are still guaranteed disembarkation in the EU.

Australia’s Operation Sovereign Borders disregards many obligations under the Refugee Convention and under Abbott initiated a process of dangerous deterrence, rather than active search and rescue for desperate people in peril at sea. The ‘enhanced screening’, ‘turn-back’ and militarised border protection tactics under OSB have led to condemnation from the international community. It also set a fatal example for Australia’s regional neighbours who briefly followed suit. Conversely, when the EU faced large numbers of refugees, their approach was less punitive and far more compassionate. The EU maintained an agenda to prevent deaths at sea and continued to call for member-state support, solidarity and respect for refugee rights. Admittedly, the sheer number of irregular maritime arrivals in conjunction with economic conditions resulted in internal debate and controversy over the direction of migration management. The introduction of Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean shows a significant shift towards securitising the refugee crisis. Nevertheless, whereas Abbott’s government focused solely on protecting Australia’s maritime borders from any migrant intrusion, the EU initiated security measures against people smugglers and traffickers alongside humanitarian rescue missions.

**Arrival: Punitive vs Sympathetic**

Unfortunately, a safe and secure environment is not guaranteed for irregular maritime migrants on interception
or arrival. Australia vowed to stop irregular maritime migrants heading to its shores and even if they were accepted as refugees, they would never be resettled in Australia. Even those who receive a positive ‘enhanced screening’ at sea are almost invariably taken to a detention camp on Manus Island or Nauru. These camps quintessentially display Australia’s punitive measures against those seeking protection in an irregular way. Because irregular maritime migrants often cannot obtain valid travel documents before fleeing a war zone, Australia’s mandatory detention imposes an unequally harsh measure. While Australia’s deliberately callous stance towards migrants is contrasted by the EU’s relative sympathy towards these vulnerable people, the vast number of refugees produced disagreement between the member-states where some seemingly abandoned the solidarity principle on which the EU was founded. Desperate men, women and children fleeing a war-torn home and risking treacherous seas are thus forced to overcome one final test: the arrival and settlement.

Under Abbott, Australia’s principal warning to irregular migrants who intended to travel by boat was that they would never be resettled in Australia. The multi-million dollar ‘No way: You will not make Australia home’ graphic poster campaign warning migrants made this stance very clear. However, this hard-line policy proved problematic for legitimate refugees who could not be sent back, but were also not permitted to settle in Australia.

Offshore detention was not novel to the Abbott Government. Since the Howard Government irregular maritime migrants, even legitimate refugees, have been subjected to cruel and punitive detention conditions, restricted legal rights, and less optimistic prospects for permanent safe resettlement. Under Abbott, it was more of the same, but worse. One dubious innovation was the Abbott Government’s decree that no refugees in Indonesia registered after July 2015 with the UNHCR (that is, waiting in queue) would ever make Australia home, even if they did not attempt the hazardous boat trip. This was to deter refugees from going to Indonesia en route to Australia.

Conditions in offshore camps have raised serious concerns, because migrants have been detained indefinitely with the Australian Government refusing to grant them visas. This increased the suffering of people, including children, who are already traumatised (Newman et al. 2013: 316). In addition to scathing criticism from human rights organisations, the UN’s special rapporteur on torture, Juan Méndez, concluded that Australia breached its commitments to the Torture Convention because it had failed to provide ‘adequate detention conditions, end the practice of detaining children, and put a stop to escalating violence in processing centres’ (Méndez 2015: 8). Abbott responded by stating that Australia was ‘sick of being lectured to by the UN’ (Brown 2015).

The restriction of legal rights hides the desperate situation in which asylum seekers find themselves on Nauru or Manus Island while hidden from public view. Facing a possible two-year imprisonment under the Border Force Act introduced by the Abbott Government, all government agents, contractors and aid workers were ‘gagged’ from disclosing information (Dudley 2016: 16-17; Hoang 2015: 79). Sexual abuse, medical neglect, violation of LGBTI rights, and deaths are no longer subject to public scrutiny. Not only was Abbott sick of being lectured to by the UN, any negative attention was avoided. These cruel conditions were all part of an attempt to create an unwelcoming, harsh environment aiming to deter any irregular maritime migration to Australia. For migrants and refugees already in Australia’s offshore camps, Abbott strengthened his commitment that refugees would not be resettled in Australia.

Reducing prospects for permanent safe resettlement, in 2014 Australia gained Phnom Penh’s agreement to resettle an undisclosed number of refugees from its Nauru offshore detention facilities to Cambodia. The Abbott Government perceived this as a win for Australia because it could uphold its promise never to resettle irregular maritime migrants in Australia. An additional $40 million in aid and $15 million towards resettlement costs was also a lucrative win for Cambodia, one of the world’s poorest countries (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2015: 10). This ‘deal’ was condemned by the UNHCR (2014), as well as Cambodian and international NGOs due to the terrible and tenuous status of refugees in Cambodia. Yet, despite criticism Cambodia was spared the arbitrary 40% aid cuts Australia made to other Asian countries and was the only Asian country to receive a 20% increase (AFCID 2015). In effect, the Abbott Government bought resettlement places in foreign countries, but at a high price.

In contrast to Australia, the EU has been inundated by refugees, due to its vicinity to war zones and short sea crossings. Nearly 60,000 refugees arrived by boat in 2013; and 219,476 in 2014 (Frontex 2015: 16). The total of sea arrivals over 2015 exceeded a staggering 1 million (IOM 2015b). Of these, the vast majority departed from Turkey and arrived in Greece. These large numbers have put a strain on Italy and Greece to receive and process all irregular maritime migrants, as they are required to do under the Dublin Regulation.

The Dublin Regulation, which came into force in 1997, has become a pretext for several EU member-states to curb migrants from Italy or Greece from travelling onwards. This
regulation requires member-states, where an irregular migrant first arrives, to make a determination on the status as a legitimate refugee, and hence their subsequent right to remain in the EU. Migrants found to have travelled through a first arrival country, such as Italy or Greece, can be deported back to that member-state for a determination of their status as refugee. The bureaucratic procedures and sheer number of arrivals are hindering the speedy assessment of maritime migrants, have created backlogs and, at times, impinged on human rights such as adequate shelter and basic needs. Yet, however slow and imperfect the practical implementation of policies are, the EU has displayed considerable sympathy towards refugees and tries to accommodate them.

The arrival processes and accommodation of migrants arriving in a EU member state are diverse, complex and often ad hoc. Those arriving on Italy's shores are subject to the Italian asylum system, 'which is focused more on reception rather than detention' according to the UNHCR (Crépeau 2015: 12). These immigration centres are predominantly aimed at accommodating migrants until their status is determined. However, Italy is justly concerned that some EU partners are less willing to share the migrant burden. Like Greece, Italy's 'reception' centres are overcrowded. Many migrants aim to reach Germany, Sweden or other EU member-states where they have relatives, friends or where their prospects of finding employment are better.

As a result of the EU's Agenda on Migration adopted in May 2015, EU member-states agreed in September of that year to collectively absorb 160,000 asylum seekers from Italy, Greece and other border-states over the 2015-2017 time period (EC 2015e). This process was subject to internal disunity and criticism from some quarters. Numerous conflicting national interests make this process extremely slow, adding to the uncertainty many asylum seekers already face.

In spite of these bureaucratic shortcomings, lack of institutional capacity in receiving states, and insufficient burden-sharing in the EU, maritime refugees are generally received and hosted humanely. This stands in stark contrast with Abbott who pursued an offshore detention practice that was harsh, punitive, unfair and possibly illegal. Like the practices at sea, Abbott was more concerned to 'stop the boats' and protect the borders, than to honour Australia's international humanitarian obligations.

Conclusion

The Abbott Government was rightly subject to frequent and intense criticism over its quest to keep refugees out. Exactly how cruel these policies were has become obvious by contrasting them with the initiatives taken in Europe during the same period. Punitive measures are ordinarily taken against people who break the law, but refugees, regardless of their method of arrival, do not break international law. The Abbott Government spent billions of dollars creating conditions for refugees that other countries wish to alleviate. It could have redistributed foreign aid to mitigate the causes of flight from war zones, assisted transit countries who had taken in millions of refugees or provided suitable avenues to claim asylum. Indeed, in an attempt to limit irregular migration, the EU engaged with source and transit countries and provided financial aid. Instead, the Abbott Government reallocated funding to its militarised approach to securing Australia's maritime borders. It also ensured that those in Australian-sponsored offshore detention camps potentially suffer indefinitely under inhumane conditions as a deterrent to those considering the journey to Australia by sea.

This starkly contrasts with the EU's humanitarian approach to proactively search for, rescue and accommodate migrants who come by boat. Perhaps the EU's policies are also a product of circumstance and borne out of necessity because of its proximity to conflict zones and transit countries. The sheer number of arrivals in the EU with many more at its doorstep, in conjunction with economic pressures and internal strife between member-states resulted in a slight policy shift in an effort to mollify anti-migration sentiments. A military approach to Mediterranean people smugglers adopted since mid-2015 is an example of this. That the EU cannot be regarded as beyond reproach is further demonstrated by its problematic management of irregular maritime arrivals with many member-states demonstrating an aversion to burden-sharing.

Nevertheless, as opposed to Abbott's unprecedented cuts to Australia's aid budget, the EU engaged with, and increased aid to, source and transit countries. Instead of deterrent 'push-backs' of desperate people potentially into harm's way, the EU searched for and rescued migrants. Finally, Abbott's punitive offshore detention camps are contrasted by the EU's largely sympathetic arrival process. Indeed, compared with the EU, Abbott's hardline stance against migrants during his two years in office set a terribly cruel example that was briefly emulated by regional neighbours with tragic consequences. One can only hope that the EU will not resort to these tactics and voice a clear 'nope, nope, nope' to ruthless deterrence of irregular maritime migrants. The strategic use of aid to support countries closer to conflict zones and a regional approach to asylum seeker reception are aspects of the European policy that point to the seeds of an alternative position future Australian Governments might adopt that would enhance regional cooperation to a humanitarian problem.
This article focuses squarely on a comparative analysis of maritime migration policies in the EU and Australia whilst Abbott was in government. Unfortunately, for all intents and purposes the Turnbull Government offers more of the same. Only the emotive, demonising rhetoric has been toned down.

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tiny workshop

the tiny etching print of Kevin Little’s workshop is something I can stare at endlessly reminiscing about my great grandfather’s stained glass workshop grimy and black when all of Dixon Street was blackened before everything was cleaned up the lead dust all over the tables as we ate our sandwiches probably sweeter with leaded fingers the stacks of ruby glass and amber purple glass for the robes the fiery kilns with flames that leapt into the room and out of this grime came the glowing jewel-like windows lying buried in churches and chapels we never visited

Anna Couani, Sydney, NSW
Public Diplomacy and Australian Practice

ALISON BROINOWSKI

Australia is a relative latecomer to the practice of public diplomacy, and the resources devoted to it by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have been less than those of comparable countries. Australia has long had an ‘image problem’, particularly in the Asian region, yet it has never addressed it by establishing an institution to promote knowledge and appreciation of Australia, as other countries have done. Making a bid for election to the United Nations Security Council is a particular test of a nation’s public diplomacy, and Australia undertook this in 2012 with a coordinated campaign which, in spite of its late start, surprised even its participants by succeeding. The article considers the factors which contributed to its success, Australia’s performance as a member, and its prospects for re-election. It also discusses Australia’s candidacy for the United Nations Human Rights Council, what Australia will do to deserve election, and the likely outcomes for Australia. These include wider public awareness of the work of the UN and of Australia’s international obligations.

The conduct of traditional diplomacy involves communication, negotiation, compromise and persuasion, and mainly occurs in private, or even in secrecy. In contrast, public diplomacy necessarily occurs in the public sphere. If practitioners of public diplomacy are understood to ‘conduct foreign policy by engaging with a foreign public’ (Cull 2012), they have many means at their disposal, such as mounting international expositions, branding campaigns, or the promotion of a nation’s language and culture abroad. Because the use of social media is an important asset in public diplomacy, it sometimes tends to be mistaken for public diplomacy itself, obscuring the fact that the fundamental tools of both traditional and public diplomacy, and their national purposes, overlap and are often the same.

Public diplomacy might be expected to be among Australia’s highest foreign affairs priorities. Located in a region where English is not a majority language and where many of Australia’s neighbours know little about its culture, Australia has both a particular challenge and a special opportunity to make a positive impression. But an ‘image problem’ has affected Australia’s reputation among its neighbours (Evans and Grant 1991: 70). Compounded by the racial exclusion policies of the past, their recrudescence in the current offshore detention of refugees and asylum seekers, and Australia’s perennial lack of independence in foreign and defence policy, it sets a high bar for those seeking to create effective public diplomacy. Yet far from redoubling its efforts, Australia does not even match comparable countries with which it competes for influence in the region.

Australian public diplomacy – which was for long called ‘cultural relations’ – still resides in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), where it has several times been moved from one part of the organisational structure to another, and even to other buildings. The resources devoted to it, the means of its delivery, and even the understanding of what public diplomacy is, have always been limited (Senate 2007; Byrne 2010; Broinowski 2012). In creating a Public Diplomacy division in 2014, DFAT reflected not just the change in linguistic fashion but the ways in which nations now seek to influence each other. ‘Public diplomacy’ and its siblings – cultural, citizen, sports, grassroots diplomacy, and so on – can be seen as the cousins of Joseph Nye’s ‘soft power’ (Nye 2004: 5). In these new forms of diplomacy, practitioners seek to be more inclusive and populist than their traditional predecessors, and make more use of social media (Cull 2012). They include actors who are not professional diplomats.

In response to new government priorities, technological change, international trends, and fashions in popular culture, public diplomacy has recently undergone further transformation. However, most Australians, are unaware of these developments since, paradoxically, Australian public diplomacy is rarely discussed outside government. Here I will first consider Australia’s record in public diplomacy and then examine as a specific example our recent performance at the United Nations under both Labor (2007-13) and Coalition governments (2013-16), and our candidacy for future seats.

Australia’s Record in Public Diplomacy

Coalition Foreign Ministers Richard Casey (1951-60) and Paul Hasluck (1964-69) were notable for taking an active interest in cultural relations. Casey, from his experience
as Governor of Bengal, understood the importance of the press and radio in projecting Australia into Asian countries (Casey 1954), and Hasluck had been a journalist and war historian. But Australia had no equivalent of the British Council or other countries' similar institutions. In 1967, under Hasluck, a national overseas cultural policy was drafted and an offshore organisation was planned with dedicated staff and an initial budget of £12,500, but in 1969 it was killed off by an inter-departmental committee (Manton 2003: 37-8). In 1974, Alan Renouf as Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs under Gough Whitlam (Prime Minister 1972-75), renewed the suggestion that Australia might establish an 'Australia Foundation', but received no support from his Minister. Having been Ambassador in Paris and observed other countries' efforts there, he deplored Australia's minimal impact and DFAT's marginalisation of 'cultural activity' (Manton 2003: 53-57). From time to time, the proposal for an 'Australia Foundation' has since been revived, but governments have always had other priorities. Lacking such a recognisable, consistent international showcase, Australia continues to present mixed messages and lags behind comparable countries, particularly those which have a unique language to preserve, a diaspora to cultivate, or a reputation to improve.

So Australia's 'image problem' persists. Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant devoted a section of their *Australia's Foreign Relations in the World of the 1990s* (1991, revised 1995) to public and cultural diplomacy as means of addressing it, emphasising their importance but, in words which continue to resonate, admitting that:

... over the years there has been in Australia a certain ambiguity about the meaning of Australian culture, at least as regards its suitability for export. We have as a community also been ambivalent towards 'high culture', and about how it should relate to popular culture, in creating an Australian national identity.

Our neglect of public diplomacy has no doubt also reflected scepticism about its measurable returns. People can understand the openly persuasive role of public diplomacy, or the value of trade promotions or scholarships. But other aspects – image promotion, general facilitation and so on – are vulnerable to the barbs of the sceptic (1991: 69-70).

Public diplomacy is briefly mentioned by Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley in their *Making Australian Foreign Policy* as a means of promoting Australia's national image, but they provide no detail about what it involves or how to assess whether or not it is well done (2003: 126). A Senate inquiry into Australia's public diplomacy in 2007 found considerable ignorance and indifference to it among both parliamentarians and the public (Senate 2007). The Lowy Institute commissioned several papers on the general theme of Australia's 'diplomatic deficit', which showed how bipartisan policies had starved DFAT of funds, including its budget for public diplomacy (*inter alia* Lowy 2009; Hanson 2010, 2012; O'Keefe and Oliver 2010; Oliver 2012; Wesley 2011). Belatedly, Australian academics have joined authors in other countries in theorising about public and cultural diplomacy, and their application in practice (for example Chitty 2007; Cooper, Hocking and Maley 2008; Byrne 2010; Chey 2010; Cooper, Heine and Thakur 2013; Kerr and Wiseman 2012; Green 2012).

The nation has risen intermittently to the challenge of promoting its own culture at peak showcase moments like the Melbourne (1956) and Sydney (2000) Olympic Games, various Expos, Venice Biennales, special 'Year of' single-country events, and Australia's recent campaign for a seat in the UN Security Council (UNSC). At such times, national purpose enlivens political will, unleashes official purse-strings, and stimulates diplomatic efforts to great effect. But in between these high seasons are low periods when budget stringency undermines the effect of past achievements. Public diplomacy programs are always easier to slash than other ‘more important’ options. If Foreign Affairs generally has a small supportive constituency in the Australian electorate, public diplomacy’s appeal to voters and politicians is even smaller.

Under the Abbott Government, Ministers began referring to Australia as a ‘top 20 country’ – one that hosted the G20, survived the Global Financial Crisis better than most, and in the pugnacious cliché, ‘punched above its weight’. Just as when Bob Hawke (Prime Minister 1983-91) declared Australia ‘the clever country’, these were statements of self-congratulation for domestic effect, not exercises in public diplomacy to impress foreign publics. The mainstream media generously gave successive prime ministers credit for global statesmanship, but their performance generally resonated more at home than abroad. John Howard, for example (Prime Minister 1996-2007), repeatedly asserted that Australia did not have to change its identity in response to its Asian neighbours’ criticisms, and he alone among regional leaders sent troops to invade Iraq in 2003. Kevin Rudd (Prime Minister 2007-10) revealed his personal contempt for China, despite his knowledge of Mandarin, and floated a misbegotten proposal for an Asia Pacific community. Julia Gillard (Prime Minister 2010-13) gratuitously fawned upon President Obama in Washington and in Canberra offered to base US marines in Darwin, an unnecessary move which irritated Indonesia. International projection of Australia was not a strong point for Tony Abbott (Prime Minister 2013-15), although he seized the opportunity to project military force in Iraq (again) and in Syria. His Attorney-General had to be forced by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to return legal documents seized from East Timor’s solicitor in Canberra, and to cease spying on him; Abbott threatened to ‘shirtfront’ President Putin over events in Ukraine; and he provocatively called Japan ‘Australia’s best friend in Asia’. After earlier Australian bugging of presidential phones in Indonesia was revealed, Abbott made no apology, and a public diplomacy focus ‘Year of Australia in Indonesia’ was quietly cancelled.
In 2014, seven years after the Senate report, DFAT ended the anomaly of embedding public diplomacy with passports and consular services. Reintegration of AusAID into DFAT brought new staff, and the Division's budget for that year was increased from $4.5 million to $7 million. The National Museum of Australia was engaged to support posts with Indigenous resources, a timely acknowledgement of the fact that for many foreign observers, Aboriginal culture is the only aspect of Australia that significantly differentiates it from any other Western nation. These and other changes flow from Australia’s public diplomacy strategy for 2014-16 (DFAT 2014, 2015). Its objectives include: to improve domestic understanding of DFAT’s role; to underline Australia’s credentials as a destination for business, investment, tourism and study; and to emphasise Australia’s engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. Not only are the government’s political and economic priorities reflected, the strategy’s regional emphasis is also in effect a gesture – not explicit, of course – towards Gillard’s Asian Century White Paper which called for deepening relations with five priority Asian countries (Australian Government 2012). Under her successor, the White Paper was erased by ‘electronic book-burning’ (Plibersek 2016). But the strategy’s focus is predominantly domestic, as is its emphasis on Australia’s existing capacities, not their expansion or change.

The strategy, not surprisingly, makes no mention of any image problem, nor of negative perceptions in countries to which Australia’s policies, past or present, may have contributed. Nor under ‘Media Engagement’ does it mention social media or discuss the delivery of television to the region. Conceived by the ABC’s David Hill and Mark Armstrong, and launched by Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1993, Australia Television International was run as an international satellite television and digital service by the ABC, broadcasting 24 hours a day and seven days a week to some 44 countries in Asia and the Pacific, mostly by cable and satellite, with a mix of content similar to ABC television, but including commercials. From 1998 to 2002 Channel Seven ran it at a loss, after which ABC won back the contract, but included programs from Channels Seven and Nine and Sky News. In 2005, ABC was re-awarded the contract, and dropped Sky News. Two decades of vacillation, and three rebrandings in 13 years as ABC Asia Pacific, Australia Network, and Australia Plus resulted from political fluctuations in Canberra and did nothing for the name recognition of the service in the region. Following what the Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, said was Australia Network’s ‘failure to deliver’, the contract for Federal funding through DFAT was broken and paid out in Abbott’s 2014 budget. This was in spite of Abbott’s pre-election promise of no cuts to the ABC and a few days before Australia Network was to sign an agreement with Shanghai Media Holdings, which would have made it only the third foreign broadcaster with access to China. Australia Plus took its place, bringing ‘Australian stories and conversations to audiences around the world online, on mobile, via social media’, as well as connecting expatriate Australians with home. As none of these services was screened in Australia, their quality is difficult to compare, but the content on the Australia Plus website appears thinner than its predecessors (www.AustraliaPlus.com).

Australia, Public Diplomacy, and the UNSC

Australia’s international image suddenly came to the fore when Kevin Rudd in 2008 decided Australia should campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2013-14. While other states including Germany, Japan, India, Canada, and New Zealand can usually expect regular re-election (almost every ten years in the case of the last two), Australia’s record was erratic. Having held a seat in 1946-47 and 1956-57, a 17-year gap followed before Australia was re-elected for 1973-74 and again for 1985-86. Another gap of 27 years ensued, during which Australia was defeated in 1996 and withdrew its candidacy in 2006. Only once has Australia held a seat under a conservative government, and the long gaps have mainly coincided with periods when the Coalition was in power: Labor, with its traditional commitment to the UN, is more supportive of multilateralism than the conservatives. Rudd’s renewed commitment to international law and multilateral engagement strengthened Australia’s candidacy (Langmore 2013). As Opposition leader, Tony Abbott declared the cost of the latest bid, which he estimated at about $34 million, a ‘waste of money’ and threatened to cancel it when elected. (He did not object, however, to larger sums being spent on such fruitless efforts as a bid to host and compete in World Cup soccer, the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, the war in Afghanistan, and detaining refugees on and off shore.) Abbott inherited the distaste of his conservative predecessor John Howard, and his Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, for the UN. The Howard Government refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, defied the UNSC by joining the invasion of Iraq, and disparaged UN Human Rights inspectors. Downer described multilateralism as “ineffective and unfocused policy involving internationalism of the lowest common denominator’, adding that the UN had no role in economic or social affairs (Downer 2003). Even while Australia was helping to draft the UN Convention Against Corruption, the Howard Government, which ratified it in 2003, turned a blind eye to the rotting of the UN Oil for Food program in Iraq by the Australian Wheat Board, for which those Australians responsible went uncharged and unpunished for more than a decade. Australia refused to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (apparently because defence agencies recruited soldiers aged under 18), and the optional protocol on torture (because Australia had not set up an appropriate monitoring agency). It excised part of Australian territory in order to exclude refugees, suspended the application of the Human Rights Convention to indigenous people in the Northern Territory, and objected to adverse assessments by UN agencies on indigenous people, refugees, and the environment. It voted in the General Assembly along with small US-led minorities opposing Palestinian and Cuban concerns. While these were political decisions applied within the UN system, they had public repercussions, including changing Australia’s international reputation from what it had been under Labor.
Historically, Australia's UN activism has been more conspicuous under Labor governments, beginning with H.V. Evatt's role in 1945 as Minister for External Affairs in drafting the UN Charter. The two criteria for election of non-permanent members are their contributions to international peace and security and to the work of the UN, and 'equitable geographic distribution' (in practice, being nominated as one of two states by one of the five voting groups). In 2012, Australia's opponents in the Western European and Others Group were Finland, with its record of strong support of the UN and a high level of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), and Luxembourg, which had never held a seat. Both countries had announced their candidacies several years earlier, and received numerous pledges of support. Finland's public diplomacy even included a parade of girls in traditional dress, handing out gifts in the streets of New York.

The Rudd and Gillard governments rejected the strategy of the 1996 campaign, which had been personally led by UN Ambassador Richard Butler in a series of visits to uncommitted states. Instead, eight special envoys were appointed, with international experience, from both sides of politics. A task force in DFAT was headed by a senior coordinator, in collaboration with Australia's UN Ambassador in New York, whose staff was reinforced to deal with its expanded responsibilities. Ambassadors to the UN from key countries were invited to visit Australia. High-level foreign visits were programmed by the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, the Governor-General, and the special envoys. Heads of Australian diplomatic missions accompanied each envoy, with proposals for boosting agriculture, education, and trade, and offers of increased aid in line with Australia's commitment to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Australian Ambassadors in several posts visited all their countries of accreditation (eight each for Moscow and Mexico, and 11 for Nairobi, for example) carrying personal letters from the Prime Minister in appropriate languages. These visits were followed up, sometimes with envoys flying to just a single country whose vote was in doubt. Africa alone represented 54 UN votes, so with only four Australian posts there, five envoys were dispatched to African countries and for the first time, diplomatic relations were established with all of them. (In 1996, only one visit was made to Africa, and at the time much Australian aid had been withdrawn.) Rudd set out to double Australia's ODA in five years, making it the seventh largest in the world, and aiming to reach 0.5 per cent of GDP by 2015, even though this was short of the MDGs target of 0.7 per cent (Bookmiller 2013).

The envoys pointed to Australia's record of support of the UN since 1945, and its contribution to the first UN peacekeeping operation (PKO) in 1947. Australia's provision of some forty thousand military, police and civilians to more than 60 UN operations around the world since 1945 was noted, as was its contributions to UN disaster relief. They cited Australia's role in supporting UN-sponsored elections in Cambodia and East Timor. As its 12th largest contributor, Australia's timely and regular payment of assessments and additional amounts to UN agencies counted in its favour. Australia, the envoys recalled, had been a leading state in advocating global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and in developing the Responsibility to Protect principle (in both efforts, former Foreign Minister Gareth Evans was a leading participant). Rudd having ratified the Kyoto Protocol, Australia was supporting the international agreement to keep global temperature increases to 2 degrees Celsius. In 2008, Rudd told the UN General Assembly that 'our national interests are invariably best served by the simultaneous prosecution of the international interest.' His successor, Julia Gillard, addressing the UN in 2012, stressed that Australia stood for 'high ideals' (Gowan 2014).

The bid had eight key elements: a record of commitment to the UN and its agencies, and to peacekeeping; efforts to resolve disputes, develop conventions limiting weaponry, and foster nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament; an expanded aid program and support of the MDGs; contributions to global action on climate change; commitment to UN reform; provision of a voice for small and medium sized countries; aims to advance the interests of indigenous peoples around the world; and participation in interfaith and inter-religious dialogues. These elements combined diplomacy within the UN system, and diplomacy designed to influence publics. Together, they constituted a manifesto against which Australia's performance in the UNSC can now be evaluated. 'Australia's history in the UN is that we do what we say', the campaign proudly asserted [emphasis added] (UNAA 2014a, 2014b).

Nonetheless many, including the new Foreign Minister Bob Carr (2014: 152), were surprised when Australia was elected to the UNSC in the first round, with 141 votes, a result only the most optimistic thought possible. As well, Australia was appointed 'pen-holder' (diplomatic coordinator) on Afghanistan, and chair of the sanctions committee. Australia also secured a seat on the executive board of UN Women, the body charged with enhancing gender equality and empowerment of the majority of the world's people. The test then for the delegation was to live up to Canberra's campaign promise that Australia would 'do what we say'. The Australian Ambassador in Washington, former Labor Minister Kim Beazley, warned Carr: 'We can be seen as shifty. We say one thing in office, another out' (Carr 2014: 28).

Australia's public diplomacy portal for the campaign was headed 'We bring creativity, energy and a practical problem-solving ethos'. Consistency, experience and teamwork in DFAT paid off internationally, but as a declared public diplomacy exercise, the campaign fell short on the domestic front. As so often, inconsistency thrived in politics. In the years of the campaign and Australia's tenure, prime ministers and foreign ministers in Canberra changed three times. The conservative government, elected in September 2013, reversed commitments that favoured the majority view of the
General Assembly, such as those on climate change, human rights, and the status of Palestinians. A policy of sending refugees to offshore detention resumed under Gillard, and aid expenditure, which Rudd had dramatically increased and she had cut, was further reduced by the Abbott Government. Labor diverted $750 million from the aid budget to pay for offshore processing of asylum seekers, a practice increased by the Coalition, whose 2015 budget also cut contributions to Africa by 70 per cent and to Indonesia by nearly half. The UN targets for ODA and the MDGs were virtually abandoned. AusAID was merged with DFAT to provide Foreign Affairs with more funds and staff, and little more was heard of Australia’s advocacy for middle powers or small Pacific Island states. In Abbott’s second budget, aid was further slashed. Apart from appointing an Ambassador for Women and Girls and endorsing women’s participation in PKOs, the Abbott Cabinet, whose only female member was the Foreign Minister, displayed scant enthusiasm for what Carr, her predecessor, had called ‘the important leadership role women can play in ensuring long-lasting peace in fragile post-conflict societies’ (Shepherd and True 2014). When the Prime Minister chose not to attend the General Assembly in September 2014, Julie Bishop took his place and chaired the UNSC. Australia’s commitments under Labor to ‘good international citizenship’, significant reform of the UNSC, and the MDGs were not mentioned.

Australia’s undertakings for indigenous peoples and interfaith dialogue seemed to be dormant (Shepherd and True 2014). An observer of the UNSC might well conclude that if Australia did ‘what it said’ during the campaign, that was no longer true once the seat was won. In this respect, Australia’s post-election behaviour reflected the performance on both sides of domestic politics. But under Abbott, Australia reverted to ostentatiously putting the US ahead of the UN on refugees, climate change, nuclear disarmament, Palestinian statehood, Iraq and Syria.

Through the campaign Australia successfully persuaded many states that it would do what it said. What it actually did in the UNSC is less easily identified. The media rarely cover the arcane processes of the UNSC, let alone publish report cards on Australia’s effectiveness. DFAT established a UNSC hashtag for twitter users (https://twitter.com/australianun), regularly updated its UNSC website (http://australia-uns.gov.au), and sent updates on key events to those on its distribution list. DFAT’s public diplomacy assured the domestic audience that Australia deserved the seat, but the mainstream media reported the issues meagrely. Long acculturated to protecting official secrets and those of its allies, the Department had particularly clamped down in the Howard years on public statements by diplomats, and had become even more cautious after 2001. The faces and names of key actors in the campaign were unknown to most Australians. Openness from diplomats in the midst of negotiations at the UN may be too much to expect and most ministers prefer personality stories to focus on them. Yet a country looking ahead to secure regular election to the UNSC every decade might have found it useful occasionally to report back on its performance to the member states which backed it in 2012, as well as to the Australian people who paid for it and whose engagement with the UN clearly needed strengthening. In 2013 DFAT began holding a series of in-house ‘civil society consultations’ with invited participants, although the agenda item on Australia’s achievements in the UNSC was merely one among many. To its credit, DFAT gave a researcher from the Lowy Institute access to Australia’s UN mission and he published a paper on its activities in the UNSC in the 18 months to June 2014 (Gowan 2014).

Gowan lists what an outsider unfamiliar with the tiny, technical triumphs of UNSC diplomacy might consider unspectacular achievements by Australia. Some of these have since, in diplomatic parlance, been overtaken by events. They include: securing a high-level review of UN sanctions, ways to make them fairer and help states implement them; working with a coalition of states to improve accountability, coherence and transparency in the UNSC; obtaining mandate for US-led international forces to remain in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of ISAF; negotiating a resolution for control of small arms and light weapons to follow the ratification of the Arms Trade Convention; co-sponsoring a UNSC meeting to discuss the Commission of Inquiry led by retired judge Michael Kirby on North Korean human rights abuses; and arguing for UNSC attention to instability and war crimes in several African countries. The delegation facilitated agreement by the US and Russia to a UN-mandated process to dismantle Syria’s chemical arsenal, which was largely successful. On 14 July 2014 the UNSC unanimously passed a resolution drafted by Australia, Jordan and Luxembourg aimed at more effective delivery of humanitarian aid to North Korea, Southern Sudan, and Syria.

Gowan cites as Australia’s central achievement its co-sponsorship of a resolution aimed at getting basic aid to starving victims of the civil war in Syria (another measure overtaken by later events). In record time, the UNSC approved a resolution tabled by Australia, demanding a ‘full, thorough and independent investigation’ into the destruction of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine on 17 July 2014. The results did not convince some observers (O’Neill 2016). In international affairs few problems are resolved quickly, so most of these efforts continued to preoccupy the UNSC after Australia had relinquished its seat.

When Australia resumed the Presidency of the UNSC in November 2014, Foreign Minister Bishop stated that the delegation would seek to combat terrorism by tackling the threats of violent extremism and foreign fighters, would make police deployments in PKOs more effective, and improve the implementation of UN sanctions. Still awaiting a formal invitation from the government in Baghdad, Australia in October had secured agreement for Special Forces personnel to enter Iraq on diplomatic passports (Tanter 2014). Late in 2014, sanctions imposed on Russia after the MH17 crash (under Australia’s leadership of the sanctions committee) were seriously affecting the
Russian economy. On 31 December, Australia ended its term on the UNSC by joining the US as the only two states opposing Jordan’s resolution for an end to Israeli occupation of pre-1967 Palestinian territory within three years, and for East Jerusalem to become the capital of the Palestinian state within a year. Palestinian representatives anticipated a more amenable UNSC in 2015, when New Zealand would replace Australia, and when moves to charge Israel for war crimes were predicted.

In the UNSC, Gowan concluded in June 2014, Australia had not changed the world and was never likely to, but had displayed independence and agility and ‘acquitted itself well’. Those claims became harder to sustain in the last six months of Australia’s membership. Gowan’s assertion that ‘[i]n the process Australia has solidified its reputation as a good international citizen and a serious country’ overlooks the campaign promises Australia broke as a member of the UNSC. The record unsurprisingly confirmed that for the Rudd, Gillard, and Abbott Governments alike, the US relationship was central to Australian foreign and defence policy, though Rudd held that the US, the UN and Asia were equal priorities. Clearly, Australia had not achieved the ‘strategic independence’ advocated by Malcolm Fraser (2014). But the capacity of any single non-permanent member of the UNSC to radically change the course of world affairs, or indeed its own behaviour, has always been limited. In 2013-14, and in spite of what it claimed, Australia was no different.

As an example of public diplomacy, Australia’s UNSC campaign can be judged a remarkable success and as a member it can point to some unexpected achievements. In seeking re-election to the UNSC, however, Australia has some lessons to learn about the value in public diplomacy of consistency, particularly in sustaining bipartisan commitment to the UN under successive prime ministers. No amount of skilled public diplomacy can undo the damage when grand undertakings are made and governments break them. The Turnbull Government announced in September 2015 that Australia would again seek a seat for 2029-30, leaving a gap of 15 years. Bishop explained that Australia would not have a turn in the Western European and Others Group for an uncontested vacancy until then (though why we should not contest one sooner, she did not say), and that the public diplomacy effort required to contest for a seat was expensive (no comparator was mentioned). Perhaps in 15 years Australia’s broken promises will be forgotten, along with its readiness to go to war, its cuts in ODA, and its disregard of the human rights of refugees.

**Australia and the UNHRC**

Australia has been elected four times to the UN Commission for Human Rights, but never to the UNHRC which replaced it in 2006. In September 2015, with Malcolm Turnbull as Prime Minister, Bishop announced that Australia would stand for a seat on the Council in 2018-20. She said Australia, if elected, would particularly devote itself to abolishing the death penalty and empowering women and girls. The President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs, welcomed the promotion of human rights but pointed out that Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers, to which the Council had objected, would be of major concern (Triggs 2015). In July 2013, Australia was found by UN High Commissioner for Refugees to have committed 143 human rights violations relating to illegal indefinite detention of 46 refugees for more than four years (Vlazna 2014). Australians are denied information about the government’s ‘Operation Sovereign Borders’ to such an extent that citizens and journalists turn to such sources as the Jakarta Post for information about offshore detention and refugee boats at sea (Vlazna 2014). As Triggs often pointed out, Australia is the only OECD nation without a bill of rights or the equivalent, and the rights Australians have fall far short of international standards. As well, the condition of Australia’s indigenous people has repeatedly been criticised in UN human rights reports, most recently by Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (Robinson 2016).

No country elected to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has a perfect record, yet the Murdoch media in Australia habitually deride its members, and their cartoonists represent leaders of member states as unelected, corrupt human rights abusers. Australian public diplomacy could be used to better inform the public about the UN generally and Australia’s activities there in particular.

**Conclusion**

The prospective benefits to be gained from public diplomacy are difficult to quantify. Moreover, an Australian success with a focus year in one country can quickly be eclipsed by another nation’s soft power effort, or reversed by a change of government policy. But the costs and benefits of election to UN bodies, as well as the effectiveness of campaigns, can more accurately be evaluated. The expense can be justified by several benefits for Australia. Among these are increased public discussion and better informed media reporting of the issues involved. Australia, when it holds a seat, shares responsibility for UN councils’ decisions and outcomes, rather than being an observer on the sidelines, and acquires a reputation as well as experience in shaping and advancing policy. As well, it is in Australia’s interests as a middle power to collect as much international influence as it can, by securing a seat at many diverse tables and by being seen to be engaged. A further benefit may be that as an advocate for the principles of the United Nations and international law, Australia is obliged to live up to them and implement them as it expects others to do.

DFAT’s Public Diplomacy Division is now involved in campaigns for Australia’s election to the UN Human Rights Council and for a further election to the UNSC. The website does not allude to any domestic policy changes that may be needed to ensure that Australia merits election. In public diplomacy, as in foreign policy generally, Australia has many opportunities to lift its game.
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Abbott’s Immigration Policy: Open for business

HELEN WARE

During the two years of his prime ministership, Tony Abbott’s immigration rhetoric had a constant refrain of ‘stop the boats’. From his public utterances it is not clear that Mr Abbott has any firm and unchanging views on economic immigration provided that the immigrants arrive by plane. For his two-year incumbency, this paper reviews the areas of immigration numbers; 457 and other temporary visas; refugees and asylum seekers; and trends in the views of the Australian public on immigration. It also examines some of the claimed economic impacts of immigration and the role of free trade agreements in deregulating in-flows as well as the immigration reports of the Productivity Commission. Finally, it scrutinises Abbott’s changing views on multiculturalism contrasting them with those of his successor Malcolm Turnbull.

If we want to remain a prosperous, high wage, generous social welfare safety net, first world economy then, in this rapidly converging global economy, we have to be more efficient, more imaginative, more innovative, more technologically sophisticated … Our greatest natural assets are not below the ground but walking around on top of it and every sinew of national policy must be dedicated to the vision of ensuring that our human capital becomes the smartest and nimblest (Turnbull 2015).

Introduction

Tony Abbott is an immigrant from England. He was born in Lambeth south of the Thames and was not registered as an Australian citizen until 1981 when, aged 23, he wanted to take up a Rhodes scholarship which was exclusively available to Australian citizens. Abbott was Prime Minister just for the two years from September 2013 to September 2015. In so far as he acted on immigration issues during those 24 months, he appeared obsessed by border protection and gave very little attention to regular immigration. This was typified by his immediately changing from the Rudd preferred title of Department of Immigration, Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship to his own creation of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. His first Immigration Minister was Scott Morrison who stayed for 15 months, being replaced by Peter Dutton, a former policeman, whose background well suited the new paramilitary border protection image.

Most of Abbott’s significant statements on immigration and the question of a ‘big Australia’ were made when he was in opposition, before he became a prime-ministerial captive of three word-slogans. Individually, Abbott was aware of the strains imposed by population growth and of popular resistance to competition from immigrants, but he also accepted the business lobbies’ claims of a need for immigrants from particular groups. That this made him appear inconsistent did not seem to worry him. Thus before losing the 2010 election, Abbott declared that population and immigration would be big issues, that capital cities were ‘choking’ and population growth was putting the environment under pressure. Population, he said was ‘growing in an out-of-control and unsustainable way’. Immigration spokesman Scott Morrison backed him up by promising that the Coalition would erect ‘guard rails on growth’. They promised that in government the Coalition would turn the Productivity Commission into the Productivity and Sustainability Commission within three months and ask it to ‘establish a new benchmark of community attitudes on where to go from here on future population growth’ (Grattan and Dowling 2010). Results from public opinion surveys before the successive elections show that in 2010, refugees and asylum seekers ranked seventh with 6% of respondents naming this issue as most important, but by 2013 it ranked second with 13% naming the issue as primary. Thus in 2013 more voters were concerned with asylum seekers than with health and hospitals (10%) or climate change (9%) or education (9%) (Reece 2015: Tables 1 and 2). Unfortunately, the surveys did not ask just why these concerns were so strong so it is not possible to judge the impact of prior political campaigns.

When he eventually came to power, Abbott was able to leave the immigration program largely on autopilot because of the bipartisan support for a constant inflow of new Australians. Broadly speaking, all Australian federal governments, whatever their party affiliations, have been pro-immigration. Occasionally they have opposed particular groups of immigrants: Chinese in the 1900s and 2000s, Jews in the 1930s, Communists after the war, but broadly they have favoured continued growth through importing ever more people.
Certainly there was the post-World War II slogan: ‘The Best Immigrant is a Baby’. Also there was Peter Costello, the Treasurer who wanted Australian families to have a child for mum, a child for dad, and a child for the country. But these very slogans were evidence in support of a ‘Big Australia’. Given this position, very close to unanimity, Australia’s immigration debate focuses almost exclusively on ‘Australia’s disproportionate reaction to the small number of people who arrive here, [as refugees] which amounts to one per cent of all applicants for asylum worldwide’ (Menadue et al. 2011). Some would see this as targeted persecution (New Matilda 2014). In 1994-95 just 5.2% of the migration program entrants were refugees. This proportion peaked at 6.3% in 2012-13 after years of hovering in the region of 4 to 5%. It was due to sink to 3.2%, the lowest rate for more than 20 years, reflecting Abbott’s personal views, before the announcement that Australia would take 12,000 Syrian Refugees [now quietly expanded to include Iraqis] (Parliament of Australia 2015a; Savva 2016: 275). Attacking asylum seekers is a tactic that yields multiple rewards: fomenting paranoid security concerns; stoking xenophobia; keeping right wingers happy and taking attention from the real impacts of a quarter of a million authorised immigrants arriving by plane each year. Johnson (2016) argues that politicians evoke fear and anxiety to garner support for tougher border security measures, but it is equally plausible to argue for a different causal path with morally corrupt politicians provoking fear simply so as to garner votes.

As Prime Minister, John Howard, stung by the success of the One Nation Party, determined on a pact to cater for the baser instincts of voters. Asylum seekers were to be demonised which would simultaneously pander to the anti-immigrant right wing, and keep attention away from the elephant in the room, the continuing influx of more than a hundred thousand skilled migrants each year. Thus,

... for its 11-and-a-half years, the Howard government tried to use xenophobia for its political advantage while at the same time running a relatively high immigration policy. It was a tricky act, but John Howard was a skilful politician and ... he managed it very well (Richardson 2015).

With less skill, Abbott kept up this policy of turning back the boats and demonising asylum seekers whilst welcoming plane loads to join the Australian job market each week (Ghezelbash and Crock 2013). Commentators watched to see how Abbott would balance xenophobia with welcoming economic migrants. In opposition in April 2012, Abbott gave a key-note speech in which he was totally explicit about riding the two horses at once. Beginning with stopping the boats, he then went on to stress ‘the coalition has always been pro-immigration and pro-immigrant’ and claimed that ‘John Howard rebuilt a consensus in favour of immigration’ (The Age 2012). This support for immigration was inconsistent with Abbott’s earlier concerns about population growth but reflected his acceptance in government of the business lobbies’ pro-immigration stance.

Currently, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection website explains that ‘the purpose of migration is to build the economy, shape society [sic], support the labour market and reunite families’ (2016). There is no mention of asylum seekers or refugees.

**Temporary Visas**

Most Australians are probably unaware just how many people are here in Australia on temporary visas. In 2000-01, temporary migrants outnumbered permanent migrants for the first time. Unlike the permanent migration program, the level of temporary migration to Australia is not subject to quotas or caps, but is left to be demand driven. In 2013-14 the total number of temporary entrants was just under three quarters of a million (736,124) as compared with 190,000 permanent migrants and 13,750 refugees. Of the temporary entrants 40% were students, 33% working holiday makers and 13% were on 457 temporary skilled worker visas (DIBP 2016). The 457 visa holders are supposed to be paid a minimum of $53,900 plus superannuation per year and can stay for up to four years. It is estimated that more than 70% of 457 visa holders and 30% of student visa holders go on to become permanent residents (Productivity Commission 2015b: 75).

The 457 visas were introduced by Prime Minister Howard in 1996 to de-regulate temporary labour migration. This was then partially re-regulated by the ALP Government between 2007-13 (Campbell and Tham 2013). The political debate over 457 visas centres on three issues: whether visa holders take Australian jobs, whether they lead to reduced pay and working conditions for Australian workers and whether visa holders themselves are exploited (Howe 2015). Answers to these questions depend upon detailed research into individual industries in local areas. In May 2014, Change.org hosted a petition with over 30,000 signatures protesting against 457 visa holders excluding Australian-trained nurses from employment, because the in-comers had greater experience to offer, and were perceived as being more compliant with employers’ demands.

In 2012, in opposition, Tony Abbott argued that the 457 visa program was one of the Howard Government’s ‘most significant innovations’.

These are the best possible immigrants to Australia. They make a contribution from day one. From day one, they are immersed in the Australian way of life. They also help Australian businesses to make the most of their economic opportunities to build a prosperity which every Australian participates in (Flitton 2012).
Debate continues about low level skill requirements and the genuineness of the shortages of local workers to fill them. As Campbell and Tham (2013) pointed out, their survey showed that very few employers were willing to pay more to attract Australian workers to the positions taken by 457 entrants, which argues that the problem is often one of low wages offered, not the lack of skilled Australians. Visa holders can also bring in eligible family members who have unrestricted work and study rights in Australia. December 2015 Departmental statistics showed 85,900 primary 457 visa holders in Australia (DIBP 2016: 1). The June 2014 Audit by the Fair Work Ombudsman showed that 40% of the 457 visa holders were being paid below the statutory minimum wage or had been let go. Yet in October 2014 the Abbott Government announced that it would make it easier for businesses to use 457s by relaxing the rules for English language competency to ‘broaden the pool of potential workers from overseas’ (Giakoumelos 2014).

As bilateral free trade agreements come into force, some categories of employers have the freedom to bring in as many employees as they choose without skills or language tests. There is certainly no cap on numbers. So much for the 2001 Howard slogan: ‘We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.’ Now it is the Chinese who decide. Abbott signed up to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) with China which allows Chinese companies, often government owned, to bring in unlimited numbers of Chinese workers for projects worth $150 million or more. Very little thought appears to have been given to the likely social and economic impacts of these enclaves of non-English speaking Chinese workers. Will they bring their own hospitals? In September 2015, the Turnbull Government introduced the enabling legislation for ChAFTA which had been drafted for the previous Abbott Government. This provides that labour market testing, to see whether suitable Australian workers are available before bringing in Chinese employees, will not apply to certain categories of Chinese workers as set out in Annex 10-A to ChAFTA. Also, mandatory skills assessment is not needed for categories such as electricians, carpenters or motor mechanics.

Very occasionally opinion polls ask specifically about 457 visa holders (unless otherwise indicated, public opinion data cited in this paper are from Monash University 2016). The Lowy Institute Survey of February 2014 asked the 37% of respondents who said that the migrant intake was too high whether they agreed that ‘we should train our own skilled people, not take them from other countries’– 88% agreed alongside the 87% who felt ‘having more people could make unemployment worse’. In March 2013, the ANU’s Essential Report found that 58% of respondents felt that there were too many foreigners coming in with (Short Term) 457 visas (Monash University 2016). Writing for The Age, Mark Kenny commented that Julia Gillard’s claim that foreigners were pushing Australians to the back of the jobs queue was for the benefit of a particular group of potential Labor voters (Monash University 2016). However, the Fairfax Nielson Poll of 19 March 2013, which asked about ‘too many workers from overseas coming to work in Australia’, showed that Abbott had a better reading of the support base since it found 41% of Coalition supporters and 39% of Labor supporters (but only 15% of Greens) agreeing (Monash University 2016).

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

In considering Australian approaches to immigration, it appears that the level of political attention is inversely related to actual numbers arriving, so that 99% of the attention is devoted to the less than 3% of arrivals who are refugees and asylum seekers. In the past, in just three years, from 1948 to 1951, Australia resettled 160,000 refugees when our total population was only 8 million. Since World War II, some 800,000 refugees and displaced persons have settled in Australia. However, in the twenty-first century, as the Australian population reached twenty million, the usual allocation of visas for refugees and others with humanitarian needs has been just 13,750 places a year, most of which go to refugees in camps. Owing to a deliberate decision by the Howard Government to set one group of refugees against another, the more places within this 13,750 which are given to asylum seekers who are found to be refugees onshore in Australia (most of whom arrived by plane, not boat), the fewer places are available to refugees in camps. Indeed 2012-13 was the only year in which boat arrivals exceeded arrivals by plane (Parliament of Australia 2015c).

Australian politicians make great play of the fact that on a per capita basis Australia ‘settles’ more refugees than any other country except Canada. The critical qualifier is ‘settles’. Many developing countries host far more refugees per capita but they do not formally settle them. More than two thirds of the world’s refugees live in poor developing countries. Thus Jordan with 2.8 million, Lebanon (1.6 million or a quarter of the population), Turkey (1.6 million), Iran (0.9 million), Pakistan (1.5 million), and Kenya (0.5 million) all host numbers of refugees unimaginable to Australians (World Bank 2014). Compared with Western countries, Australia’s refugee numbers were in a different league as compared with France’s 250,000 or Germany’s 217,000 (World Bank 2014). Yet these figures were before 1,321,560 new arrivals claimed asylum in Europe in 2015, 476,000 of them in Germany. On a per capita basis there were 260 asylum claimants per 100,000 citizens across Europe, which would equate to many more claimants for Australia. One might query whether it is a consequence of being an island country or the Anglo-Saxon heritage that makes Australia and the United Kingdom both respond with such outrage to some of the smallest proportions of asylum seekers. Owing to the Australian policy of exporting our
asylum seekers to far poorer countries, one person in 20 in Nauru is now an asylum seeker, while Australia spent $55 million on settling just five asylum seekers in Cambodia, who did not stay.

For the past 15 years, approximately 13,700 places have been granted under Australia’s Humanitarian Visa Programme annually. Yet back in 1980-81, under the leadership of Prime Minister Fraser, our resettlement program peaked at 22,000 places per year, which would be equivalent to 34,000 on a per capita basis today. In 2012-13, the Gillard Government decided to raise the intake from 13,750 to 20,000 but this was immediately returned to 13,750 by Prime Minister Abbott, who cited ‘stopping the boats’ as one of his government’s most significant achievements. Abbott had continued Howard’s tradition of using the asylum seeker issue to deflect attention from overall immigration levels and to provide an aspect of security concerns that the Australian public can worry over without antagonising our Asian neighbours (McLean 2016: 14-15). Ever since the 2002 establishment of the Bali Process, jointly chaired by Australia and Indonesia to deal with people smuggling, Australia’s commitment has been supposed to be part of a regional plan to deal with refugees. This has never eventuated because Australia has not been able to persuade its neighbours to act in ways that serve Australia’s interests rather than their own.

In September 2015, days before being deposed in favour of Malcolm Turnbull, Prime Minister Abbott announced that Australia would permanently resettle 12,000 refugees from Syria as well as begin air strikes on Islamic State targets inside Syria within the week. Australian bombing raids have continued, but of the 12,000 refugees, as of May 2016, less than two hundred have actually arrived in Australia. It would appear that Abbott’s generosity, however limited, was a reaction to community agitation and pressure from NSW Premier Mike Baird and National’s Barnaby Joyce. Labor had pressed for a 10,000 intake. Allegedly Abbott, or Credlin, had to be persuaded that letting in Syrians would not dilute the electoral success of his ‘stop the boats’ message (Walker 2015). Abbott was also apparently affected by the New York Times editorial of 4 September 2015 calling his asylum seeker policies ‘inhumane, of dubious legality and strikingly at odds with the country’s tradition of welcoming people fleeing persecution and war’. The delays in actually welcoming the Syrians to Australia can worry over without antagonising our Asian neighbours. Hopefully, the Yazidis who are regarded as far worse than pagans by Muslims will also benefit.

Australian Views on Immigration

The ANU Poll on National Identity taken in March 2015 showed that, when asked an open ended question about ‘the most important problem facing Australia today’, immigration ranked third at 10% of responses, as compared to July 2011 when 20% were most worried about immigration (Monash University 2016). Asked about views on the current immigration intake (whether they knew the actual numbers or not) in March 2015, 42% felt that it should stay the same, 27% favoured an increase and 13% wanted to reduce ‘a little’ and 15% to reduce ‘a lot’. It is not clear what respondents who wanted a little reduction were thinking about, possibly road congestion or Sydney house prices. Overall views were very positive and 86% agreed that ‘immigrants improve Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures’, and 83% that immigrants ‘are generally good for Australia’s economy’ (Monash University 2016).

The Essential Survey in September 2014 asked: ‘When a family applies to migrate to Australia, should it be possible for them to be rejected purely on the basis of their religion?’. Fully 63% disagreed, which suggests that Australians are generally quite tolerant. Some 27% of Liberal/National supporters favoured religious discrimination as against 16% of Labor and 9% of Greens (Monash University 2016). The Greens stand out as having a distinctive policy maintaining that: ‘seeking asylum is a humanitarian issue rather than an issue of border security or defence, and people seeking asylum must be treated with compassion and dignity’. They also want to prioritise family migration over the importation of skilled workers which must not ‘substitute for training or replace our own’. The Greens’ policy of taking in the most refugees from Syria as well as begin air strikes on Islamic State also likely to bias the intake in favour of Christians and Mandaeans. Hopefully, the Yazidis who are regarded as far worse than pagans by Muslims will also benefit.

In opposition, Abbott did not hesitate to use mass immigration as a political tool. In August 2010 an Essential Survey informed respondents that: ‘Tony Abbott has proposed to cut immigration from around 300,000 a year to 170,000. Do you approve or disapprove of this cut to immigration?’. Fully 64% approved, 22% disapproved and 14% did not know. Remarkably, 91% of Liberal/National voters agreed as opposed to 51% of Labor and 38% of Greens. When asked ‘Which leader and party do you trust most to handle immigration issues?’ some 35% chose Tony Abbott (as compared to 64% approving his proposal), 23% went with Julia Gillard, but as many as 31% said that there was no difference and 10% said they did not know (Monash University, 2016).
Abbott wrote:

Battlelines, in his manifesto (Chisari 2014). up citizenship tests, in Australia it has proved to be the Howard and Abbott Governments found in drawing accept the national laws and values (Kymlicka 1999). As to find that in the contemporary world, what is required reflecting common descent and a common culture, only tends to work from a core ethnic view of nationalism as reference to British-born Australians suggests, Abbott to Asian women with no interest in team sports. As his or the football’ (Jones 2006). There was no reference still find it hard to barrack for the right team at the cricket born Australians who, 30 or 40 years after coming here, path for migrants into our society’. He pointed to ‘British-stressed: ‘The purpose of multiculturalism is to ease the expectation that Australian immigrants would abandon their own culture and become cricket fans. As Abbott stroked: ‘The purpose of multiculturalism is to ease the path for migrants into our society’. He pointed to ‘British-born Australians who, 30 or 40 years after coming here, still find it hard to barrack for the right team at the cricket or the football’ (Jones 2006). There was no reference to Asian women with no interest in team sports. As his reference to British-born Australians suggests, Abbott tends to work from a core ethnic view of nationalism as reflecting common descent and a common culture, only to find that in the contemporary world, what is required is civic nationalism, which encompasses all citizens who accept the national laws and values (Kymlicka 1999). As the Howard and Abbott Governments found in drawing up citizenship tests, in Australia it has proved to be remarkably difficult to define Australia’s distinctive values (Chisari 2014).

In his manifesto Batttlelines, published in 2009, Tony Abbott wrote:

As a journalist in the 1980s, I had attacked multiculturalism for eroding Australia’s distinctive identity. In fact, along with other contemporary critics, I had made the mistake of underestimating the gravitational pull of the Australian way of life. I was too defensive about western values, which have turned out to have near-universal appeal (Abbott 2009: 162).

In 2010 as Opposition Leader, Abbott was asked why he did not have an opposition spokesperson on multicultural affairs. He replied:

I think that it is important that we recognise the diversity of Australian society but these days on both sides of politics we tend to talk more in terms of citizenship and I’m happy to keep doing that, I think that it’s important that we acknowledge the diversity of Australia but I think it’s also important to focus on the unity of Australia (Koleth 2010: footnote 108).

The impact of 9/11 was to tarnish the validity of claims of the ‘near-universal appeal’ of western values. Even within Australia, debate about allowing burqas in Parliament revealed the limits to the acceptance of multiculturalism, and showed Prime Minister Abbott changing his mind twice (Bourke and Massola 2014). In 2016, Prime Minister Turnbull is again arguing for the virtues of multiculturalism: ‘barely a day goes past when I don’t celebrate that we are the most successful and harmonious multicultural nation in the world’ (Turnbull 2016).

The Economics of Immigration

Ged Kearney ACTU President stated ‘Unions are not opposed to overseas workers, we are opposed to their exploitation and the subsequent undermining of local jobs, wages and conditions’ (Toscano 2015).

There is a highly specialised literature relating to economics of immigration (Fichen and Pellizzari 2014; Fitzgerald, Leblanc and Teets 2014; Hatton 2014). There are two core and related questions: the impact of immigration on wages and the impact of immigration upon unemployment. In both areas, since we can never know what the levels of wages or unemployment would have been in the absence of mass immigration, a great deal depends upon the assumptions which are made in modelling. For example, some studies compare wages in areas of high immigration with wages in areas of no or little immigrant presence, but this requires an assumption that immigrants do not choose their destinations on the basis of local job availability and/or wages. Other studies focus on the impact of immigration at different
skill levels. Such studies are particularly interesting for Australia, where immigration has moved from the illiterate or primary educated southern Europeans of the 1970s to the graduate and post-graduate qualified Chinese and Indians of the 2010s. What these studies tend to show is that those most disadvantaged by having to compete with the incoming skilled migrants are the less skilled natives and the earlier arrived immigrants (which explains why immigrants themselves are often so hostile to immigration). However, again these findings depend on the assumptions as to the substitutability of the immigrants. How far do employers prefer the natives because of their greater knowledge of English and the local work culture? Or how far do they prefer imported workers because they are cheaper, more experienced and more compliant? (Campbell and Tham 2013).

The fact is that before they can come and ‘take Australian workers’ jobs’, skilled or unskilled immigrants have to have government supplied visas which makes the economics of immigration particularly politically sensitive. Take the case of university employment. Lecturers down to entry level A are on the list of skilled occupations where employers can nominate to import workers if there is no Australian available to do the work. The websites of many Australian universities explain the procedure to potential applicants. Evidently, the availability of qualified Australian lecturers depends entirely on exactly in how much detail the requirements of the position are defined. In 2014-15 Australia imported 620 university lecturers on 457 visas (DIBP 2016).

However, besides wages ‘there are a number of other dimensions by which immigration may affect the host country economy, such as the price of goods, the housing market, the availability of public services and the fiscal system’ (Dustmann, Glitz and Frattini 2008: 15). This is an area where there appears to be a clear difference between Prime Ministers Abbott and Turnbull. As Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull has already demonstrated a willingness to see the Federal Government help to pay for the upgrading of public transport. One of the biggest complaints against immigrants is that they make our already over-crowded cities and transport systems even more clogged up (Krockenburger 2015: 19; Markus 2014).

**The Productivity Commission Inquiry**

On 20 March 2015, then Treasurer Joe Hockey referred the migrant intake into Australia to the Productivity Commission. The scope of the inquiry was to cover both the benefits and costs that the intake of permanent entrants can generate with respect to the budgets and balance sheets of Australian governments and the income, wealth and living standards of Australian citizens.

A novel requirement was to examine the scope to determine intakes solely through significant payments for entry visas and the impact such a scheme might have *inter alia* on ‘opportunities for Australian citizens to be altruistic towards foreigners including refugees’ (Snow 2015). This payment option was originally proposed by economist Gary Becker in 2011. Apparently he was pursuing a hypothetical argument, since he acknowledged that: ‘No country has ever adopted such a policy’ (Becker 2011: 27). The Australian body was tasked to examine this idea as part of the deal under which Senator David Leyonhjelm agreed to vote for the reintroduction of temporary protection visas. The Senator argued:

> Once upon a time we had ‘ten pound poms’, but in future we could have 10,000 pound poms. This is a revolutionary idea that requires a change in the way we see migrants – not as charity cases, but as contributors to Australia (Creighton 2015).

One reason why the government viewed the Senator’s proposal with considerable scepticism was the prospect of wealthy refugees being able to buy their way into Australia. The Productivity Commission’s (2015a) Issues Paper already demonstrates a very limited interest in the proposal, suggesting that one unanticipated consequence of such a policy could be a rush to emigrate to New Zealand as a back door way into Australia. Another option to be examined was a US style lottery for immigration places.

Temporary migration was also under scrutiny due to recognition that ‘temporary migration is an established pathway to permanent migration’. The Commission’s Issues Paper provides an excellent summary of Australia’s current policy setting and regulations and experiences with immigration (Productivity Commission 2015a). The public were expressly asked ‘What should be the objectives of Australia’s immigration policy’ and whether ‘the current immigration policy in Australia (is) broadly aligned with the objective of improving the wellbeing of the Australian community?’

The Commission issued a draft report for comment in November 2015. There were very few submissions from an uninterested public. Overall, the Commissioners’ conclusion is that:

> … although it is possible to assess the impacts of immigration, there is no comprehensive empirical basis for setting a level of immigration or population over time that would improve the wellbeing of the Australian community. It is up to the political process to deliver an informed decision about the change in the size of the population that is
in the best interests of Australians (Productivity Commission 2015b).

So the ball is back with the government of the day.

Prime Minister Turnbull

In early 2016, the ABC’s Lateline (5 February 2016) revealed that it had seen a leaked government document proposing sweeping changes to Australia’s humanitarian resettlement program. Recommended changes allegedly included ‘an enforceable integration framework to assess aspiring migrants’ suitability for life in Australia’, ‘a revamped citizenship test and citizenship pledge’ and more surveillance of applicants from pre-visa to post-citizenship referral. Prime Minister Turnbull denied that either he or Immigration Minister Dutton had seen the draft document. Dutton said that he would not apologise for the debate around screening refugees ‘this is a very serious time for our country, for Western democracies … people will pretend to be refugees when they are not’. Actually, the document was more complex, explaining the concern was not that people fleeing Syria are not refugees, but that it is expected that some refugees from this conflict will bring issues, beliefs or associations that lead them to advocate or engage in politically motivated or communal violence’ (ABC News 5 February 2016).

Overall, the content reflects Dutton’s view, as a former policeman, of citizenship. These views are in common with the Howard citizenship proposals, as well as the recent most controversial legislation stripping dual nationals of their Australian citizenship, which Turnbull had opposed when Abbott was prime minister (Savva 2016: 183, 209). There is still the risk of creating two classes of citizenship; one for those born here and the other for immigrants.

Conclusion

The only consistency in Abbott’s public views on immigration, whether in opposition or government, lay in their inconsistency. Since attracting blue-collar votes at the same time as support from the business community was the objective, it simply did not matter if the messages to different audiences conflicted (Savva 2016: 213). Workers were to be reassured that our sovereign borders remain unviolated by small boat-loads of asylum seekers, whilst businesses could fly in as many jumbo loads of temporary migrants on 457 visas as they pleased (Howe 2015). Concerns over urban congestion and rising house prices were to be waved away by Productivity Commission reassurances that business-induced immigration only serves to grow the national skills base and the national wealth. Finally, Australia’s one off increased quota for Syrian Christian refugees was in stark contrast to the fate of Syrian Muslims being bombed from the air by the Royal Australian Air Force.

In 2016, federal electioneering still demonstrates governmental attacks on refugees, with Minister Dutton saying that refugees ‘won’t be numerate or literate in their own language, let alone English’ yet ‘these people would be taking Australian jobs’ – two statements which appear again to be contradictory and fail to explain why Australian employers would prefer non-English speaking illiterates to locals. Prime Minister Turnbull backed Dutton in a sadly familiar replay of using the small number of refugees as a political football whilst conveniently ignoring the far greater number of 457 and other temporary visa holders (Bongiorno 2016).

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Now is the Turn of the Right: ‘Ditch the base’

ANTHONY LYNCH

Elite neoliberal policy consensus requires traditional parties of the left and right to progressively sever their connection with their traditional party bases. The task fell first on parties of the left, but now it falls too on parties of the right. Tony Abbott’s Liberal National Party government provides a case study in how this challenge impacts on parties of the right, and how this impact is likely to play out.

Introduction

What are we to make of Tony Abbott’s rise to leadership of the Liberal Party, his almost two years as Prime Minister1, and his eventual deposition by Malcolm Turnbull, the man he had deposed as Leader of the Opposition in 2009, and had, a mere seven months before his loss of the leadership, convincingly defeated in an earlier spill?

There are numerous ways of approaching this question, some deeper than others and all interconnected. On one level there is the question of Abbott himself – his political skills and lack thereof, his qualities as opposition leader and prime minister, his ‘core values’ and ‘captain’s picks’. On a deeper level there are questions of the competency and unity of the Federal Liberal Party and, deeper still, to its connections to those business and media interests (often one and the same) from which it draws its publicity and policy ideas while ensuring their public visibility and support. But on the deepest level of all we have an instance or example of a more general and international story; a story concerning a challenge all neoliberal committed political parties face in our representative democracies and, in the end, a challenge for representative democracy itself. It is the challenge of ditching the party base so as to free party elites from any commitments or loyalties that might hinder their determined pursuit of neoliberal policy ends. The interest in Abbott’s prime ministership is that his rise and fall makes it clear that this challenge is not, as many have tended to think, merely for parties of the left – who have pretty much already ditched their base – but something that now confronts the parties of the right, and in ways that press even harder on the democratic credentials and political security of neoliberalism triumphant.2

Neoliberalism and the Parties of the Left: Convergence Right

There was a time in representative democracies when competition for office was, at its heart, a competition between the parties of labour and capital: a battle, in colloquial terms, between left and right, business and workers. That contest, and the use of these terms as fundamental to understanding the politics of representative democracies has, since the 1970s, meant increasingly less with the rise of neoliberalism as the bipartisan framework for public policy (a process in Australia to be dated from Hawke and Keating, though with green shoots already springing up under Whitlam3). This is because neoliberalism is unashamedly about foregrounding the interests of capital. Our business elites took the stagflation of the 1970s as an opportunity to undermine the Keynesian social democratic state that had delivered what still remains the highest levels of economic growth in human history, and had done so in a context of lessening inequality, which meant a rising share of profits being returned to that productive labour from which it arose.

In this context the established parties of the left did not, as one might have expected, unashamedly side with their labour base and look for innovative ways of mastering shocks that, in comparative terms, were far less than those neoliberalism produced with its rolling financial crises, culminating in the yet (if ever) to be emerged from the global financial crisis of 2008.4 Instead we saw a convergence of left and right on the need for business friendly, entrepreneurial, policies that meant a determined effort to outsource and privatise public services, infrastructure and assets; reduce ‘red tape’ on business interests and projects; reduce the tax levied on business and the rich generally; and to undermine the bargaining power of organised labour both directly, through restrictive legislation and penalties, and indirectly through a general assault on the provision of public goods and services as a morale destroying ‘culture of entitlement’, suitable only for ‘leaners, not lifters’.5

This convergence of left and right on the primary importance of the interests of capital – on the need for a business friendly, smaller, more efficient, ‘fiscally
A member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) over the last three decades or so will have missed this fact.

All this radical centring, this third waying, of the left as it moved to the right and embraced neoliberalism as political orthodoxy has almost destroyed the traditional social foundations of such parties. They no longer rest on effectively representing the interests of labour as on two feet. The first is that of ‘caring’ neoliberalism or ‘lesser evilism’; while the second is a concern for ‘liberation’, ‘freedom’ and ‘rights’ pitched at the level of an identity politics that, however worthy it might be, systematically obliterates the basic labour/capital divide to celebrate a depoliticised capacity for identity choice.5 ‘Lesser evilism’, as well as an economically detached, class ignoring, identity politics, replaces on the left what used to be a politics of working class interests and achievements. This process does not mean (at least not yet) that there might not be – as there is in the United Kingdom with the rise to the party leadership of Jeremy Corbyn as, perhaps, there is in the campaign of Bernie Sanders in the US – some occasional populist inspired counter-assaults on the capital friendly neoliberalism of the party elites; however, it does mean that such counter-assaults must come from outside those elites. As a consequence such revanchist efforts are (as Corbyn in particular is finding) perennially vulnerable to well-organised counter-revolutions, must fight against the accumulated weight of decades of neoliberal rhetoric and social atomisation and do so in a media environment shaped by those whose interests are precisely, even paradigmatically, corporate and neoliberal.

Under such conditions it is not hard to see why such efforts have thus far amounted to little or nothing and why I doubt they will amount to anything more. If they were to matter and if they were to change things in any serious way, then they would have to be able to appeal to, motivate and, to a great degree, recreate just that social base or consistency that has been intentionally marginalised. But as we have seen, that social base was jettisoned in the convergence-right logic that underpinned third way ‘caring’ centrism and in such a way – with its aspirational individualism and appeals to private greed – that forming or appealing to any social base at all now seems, to party elites, either treasonous or impossible.6 Such elites do not appeal to a social base that bears collective interests, but, as Tony Blair says (and as ‘a result of the way the world works these days’) to aspirational individuals driven by the anxious and envy inducing attractions of wealth, motivated by the altruism destroying avarice of perpetual entrepreneurship (Sparrow 2016). In other words, they appeal to pretty much the same people as the right, the parties of capital, have always appealed to. What marks out the third way as in any way distinctive is nothing elemental or structural, but an ungrounded, insecure and shallowly sentimental, lesser evilism. It is ‘bleeding heart’ neoliberalism for the squeamish that leaves its logic entirely untouched.
Neoliberalism and the Parties of the Right: The (Early) Pleasures of Stasis

It is for this reason – the social base ditching move of parties of the left as they move right in a one-sided process of convergence now pretty much completed – that I suggest that understanding the contemporary politics of neoliberalism, isn’t much served by depressing if accurate accounts of the travails of the Vichy-style neoliberalism of traditional parties of labour. The real politics of neoliberalism today – and so the place to look for any tensions or contradictions that might inhere in its otherwise triumphant logic – is the politics of the right and the politics of capital, for this is the convergent centre to which all tends. And this is true even though it is not true that parties of the right have always been in power, even mostly in power, across the world of neoliberal governance. Given the left’s move to the right in the context of professionalised political elites dedicated to neoliberalism, such permanent ascendancy isn’t needed or expected. But it does mean that the parties of the right contain the purest expression of neoliberal governance, for they have no weight of labour tradition or its late occasional efflorescence to confuse its expression, or to deceive its proponents.

So let us look at how neoliberal governance plays out in its natural home, the party of the right, and let’s look at this in the light of Tony Abbott’s story as leader of the Opposition, then prime minister, and then not. And let us begin with Abbott the success.

Abbott’s Story

Success

The Abbott leadership was not, as some mistakenly think, a series of unmitigated disasters. In at least two ways it was a success. It was, in terms of the neoliberal policy project and despite its apparent failure, a success in so far as it pushed that project forward. Also, it was a success in electioneering terms in that it showed what political opposition means for parties of the right in a world of converged-to-the-right politics. Let us begin with the first point.

The thing to notice is this: as parties of the left move right on issues of economic policy, and in ways that favour (and are favoured by) corporate elites, parties of the right have the space and incentive to themselves move further to the right. As the general policy direction is the same, what matters now is the speed and radicalism of policy implementation. Thus parties of the right – most obviously and pretty much first with Margaret Thatcher – are our foremost proponents of radical change, of ‘shock-treatment’, of (today) ‘austerity’. This burgeoning space for pro-capital radicalism not only tends to capture the money and support of those whose interests are furthered by neoliberalism’s innate tendency to upwards redistribution, it defines the residual political difference between left and right. And so the radicalism of the Abbott Government’s first budget with its GP ‘co-payment’, cuts to unemployment benefits, family benefits and pensions, its swingeing cuts in education and health, its ‘tighten your belts’, become ‘lifters not leaners’ rhetoric of ‘personal responsibility’ in which the task is to get a good job and a mortgage (and if not, then not to drive a car); and its major legislative moves, eliminating the mining tax and the carbon trading scheme, and rebranding and reinvigorating the anti-asylum seeking regime as ‘Sovereign Borders’.

As we saw with Abbott, this increased capacity for policy radicalism may have an adverse impact on contemporaneous opinion polling – which places pressure on the leader as it did with Abbott – but in terms of the neoliberal governance regime it functions rather to break open new areas for policy making. Given that the supposed party of the left is itself committed to neoliberalism (so deeply indeed, that its one moment of brilliantly successful anti-neoliberal policy making – the Rudd Stimulus – was something the party refused to articulate and defend as the Keynesian remedy it was, and which saw the then Treasurer Wayne Swan talk endlessly and uselessly about the need to ‘balance the budget’), then all it can object to is the ‘insensitivity’ and ‘unfortunate timing’ of the policy presentation rather than its essential content. The Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen’s reply to the 2014 budget at the National Press Club did not see him attack a budget more than 60% of the public found ‘unfair’ (News.com.au 2014), but saw him promise to do it all a bit more slowly: ‘The commitment to more saving than spending over the decade is an important one for Labor. It will be an important one for us in office, as well as opposition’ (Bourke 2015).

On this level – that of the neoliberal governance regime itself rather than Abbott’s personal aspirations – Abbott did not fail. All that he, through his Treasurer, the jovially plutocratic Joe Hockey, pressed for will come about, either through the hands of his successor, Malcolm Turnbull, or (all wishful thinking aside) through the hands of Bill Shorten and Chris Bowen if the ALP had won the coming election. Indeed, it will very likely go further, now the gates have been opened. This is why, it appears, Abbott still seems to think he would have won the next election and will be fondly remembered by ‘history’. He feels, quite rightly, that he was doing what will be – in neoliberal language, what has to be done, and that this is what the electorate will itself have to face up to and accept.

In truth, the change of leadership from Abbott to Turnbull has no real policy, as opposed to presentational, dimension at all. On this level it is, in the colloquial sense, pure Kabuki Theatre. It had, however, a clear electoral logic, though for reasons I shall come to shortly, that logic has not played out in quite the way the Liberal National Party (LNP) hoped. The logic itself is clear. For Turnbull’s leadership was clearly meant to see him playing the role the ALP wants to play: that is to say, the lesser of two evils when it comes to a set of capital
friendly policy imperatives. The beauty of Turnbull as Abbott’s replacement was precisely this status, for if it worked it made the ALP utterly irrelevant. As the ‘lesser evil’ to the Abbott Government, Turnbull was to be seen as doing no more or less than the ALP claimed as the basis for its vote-worthiness.

The second Abbott success was unambiguously a personal, as well as a policy, success. It was his successful campaign against the Gillard/Rudd Government, and it was a campaign that exploited the vulnerability of the lesser evilism government of the convergent left.

Because, on the level of policy commitments, all major parties today are neoliberal – the right unashamedly so, without even the sentimentalist reservations of ‘caring’ and ‘inclusive’ neoliberalism the left may offer up – the right does not even have to pretend that it is presenting a new or different or novel policy package or direction. After all, rather like the standard metre in Paris, and as the convergent destination of the left, it defines the policy environment as such. What the right has to do, and what Abbott did, was to expose the empty sentimentalism of a bleeding heart lesser evilism through a project of incessant and unrelenting assaults on pretty much all that a left neoliberal government does. Unable to defend itself in any meaningful way on substantive policy grounds, and having already turned class interests into economically and socially ungrounded, thus politically indefensible, sentiment, all the ALP could do was object to the ‘negativity’ of it all. Add to this the real (and growing) hostility many have come to feel at the results of neoliberal policies, one may well ask what the angry or upset voter is to do? The answer is either a weightless vote for the Greens or an independent, or a determined effort to have an effect by ‘throwing out the bums we now have’ – even if, as in Australia and with Abbott, this means more of the same bums, doing even more of what the poor voter would like to effectively repudiate, but cannot.

Failure
If on these two levels – acquiring office and furthering neoliberalism – Abbott was far from a failure, he was still tossed aside by his party as leader and prime minister. Here is where the story becomes interesting and revealing. The crudest level of analysis rightly points to Abbott and the LNP’s falling poll figures, though in truth a fall – from the high of the election – was not unexpected (it is the norm), and the fall itself (from 53% at election to around 46%) was not out of the range for a government at that period in office, and not something with a further budget invariably unsurmountable. Any decent politician with a high opinion of themselves (as Abbott’s recent comments make clear) would back themselves to get re-elected from such a position, especially as a first term government in a nation that traditionally tends to favour allowing governments a second term. After all, we are talking of a situation in which, out of 13 million voters, around 480 000 have changed their voting intentions since the election.

So why not Tony? What was the problem? It was, I suggest, a problem that only a party of the right could have, at least, could still have, in our bipartisan and neoliberal policy world. The problem was that Tony Abbott was in a party that still had its own defining, distinctive, social base; something not true of the convergence-right left, and for quite some time; and that he clearly felt some basic or absolute commitment to that base to such a degree that it threatened to make the poll changes unsurmountable. I do not mean here the business base, which is equally there for the ‘caring’ neoliberalism of the ALP and as such is not a base for this or that party at all, but the shared policy ideology of both party elites. I mean a base that is particular to a party and committed to that party as such. Further, this base for parties of the right in Australia, as in the United States and the UK and elsewhere, is a socially conservative base.

While the parties of labour and the left had to move right, and so had to cut themselves free from their traditional social base in order to pursue the neoliberal goals of capital rather than the interests of labour, initially things were different for parties of the right. Indeed, rather than abandon their social conservative base for an untrammelled commitment to neoliberalism, they found it useful to encourage that base, both for rhetorical and for electoral purposes. On the rhetorical level, pandering to the prejudices of the socially conservative served a number of purposes. It undermined the welfare state by turning structural and institutional forces into matters of personalised virtue and vice, which itself functioned to deny the legitimacy (even reality) of claims of generalised class interests for an individualised world of ‘personal responsibility’ and moral probity. It was also a brilliantly effective weapon to deploy against the converging parties of the left as they tried to transmute their moral opposition to untrammelled capitalism into a concern for the rights of minority identities defined not in terms of class or economic location, but sexuality, gender, or a general (unanalysed) ‘social’ oppression. Here is the place of the notorious ‘culture wars’ that produced mighty levels of rhetorical heat and steam, but placed no pressure at all on neoliberal policy development.

Electorally, the social conservative base ensured – as the left was in the process of losing its base – an absolutely secure voting bloc that, so long as the rhetorical charge was high and constant enough, could be relied on to vote with the party as its policy program became even more turbo-charged in pursuit of the interests of business and capital. Clearly this advantage was greater in places with non-compulsory voting, but it had its place in Australia, if mainly in terms of efficient electorate targeting and expenditures.

Next – and this is the point on which, it seems, the
political logic of Turnbull’s election to the leadership may be foundering – by holding onto its base the LNP managed to retain a strongly motivated party machine. What seems to have happened is that the pure neoliberal elements of the LNP, secure in the bipartisan neoliberal consensus and dedicated to furthering their personal business interests and wealth, left much party activism to those with stronger ties to and roots in the traditional social conservative base. This was not an option for the neoliberal left, but on the right it had its obvious advantages even though that advantage, as we will see, may now have become a liability.

Having a secure party base, and so a strongly motivated party cadre of the kind the left now generally lacked, allowed the LNP to maintain a sense of solidarity between the social conservative base and the neoliberal business base which, in reality, could equally well identify with and pursue its ends through the socially gutted ALP.

The Problem

The problem, the one that ultimately sank Abbott’s prime ministership, is that these advantages are not necessarily permanent or enduring advantages. Indeed, they may become absolute disadvantages in the context of an established and bipartisan commitment to neoliberalism. If neoliberalism saw the parties of the left excise their social base early on, now it seems the parties of the right see the same need.

The need for excision arises because what was once an advantage rhetorically, electorally, and motivationally, fades away, even inverts, the more neoliberalism becomes the bipartisan norm, the more it has its inevitable adverse economic and social consequences for the social conservative base, and the longer the rhetoric that solidifies and animates that base remains merely that – rhetoric. The difficulty with ditching the base for the right is that they have retained their base, they have used and exploited it, and they have bound the two together in a cadre of motivated politicians who cannot see that this commitment runs against the interests of their patrons in the business sector.

Here was Tony Abbott’s problem, for he was the prime minister and he had identified himself as – indeed, perhaps had always simply been – a member of the socially conservative party base, indeed a manifestation of that base in the party and for a long time. It was just this identification that made him increasingly problematic for two crucial constituencies. Ironically – though out of success – it constituted a problem for the bipartisan business base. Abbott may have furthered neoliberal policy possibilities, but he also exhibited a commitment to a set of socially conservative values that were useful rhetorically, but were never meant to be truly, let alone fully, implemented, if only because if that were the case, then these values might swamp or trump the ends of neoliberal policy in unexpected ways. A commitment to ‘family values’ is fine, but not if it means a Paid Parental Leave policy that allows women six months leave at their replacement wage and superannuation. Equally, hostility to ‘radical greenies’ is one thing, but an active climate change denialism that closes off new areas for commodification is quite another. Perhaps even worse from the point of view of those 54 colleagues who voted him out of the leadership, it might mean standing firm against the socially powerful – and certainly mainstream media dominant – sweep of LGBT rights advancement and the extension of marriage beyond its traditional social boundaries, pushing away swinging voters. Finally – and most fundamentally – having any core or basic values of whatever kind, makes one unpredictable and unreliable when it comes to the smooth deployment of neoliberal policies.

This latter problem – that of ‘core’ or ‘basic’ values – is a special problem for neoliberal parties of the right. Parties of the left, having ditched their base long ago and embraced an identity politics empty of political and economic content, don't have absolute values – or rather, have them only outside their fundamental neoliberalism in the politically weightless space of identity politics – but parties of the right have retained theirs and used their base in articulating and furthering their neoliberal ends, so encouraging in that base, and in the cadre committed to that base, the thought that their values are central to politics and power. It is just this thought that we see playing out today with the Republican Party in the United States. There the base insist, and increasingly insist, that the party turn the rhetoric of social exclusion and revenge into reality and – the most terrifying thought of all for our bipartisan neoliberal policy elites – that they do this whatever the cost.

Ditching Abbott as leader was the LNP finally trying to do what the ALP had long been doing, and ditching the party base. That this was the case saw the extraordinary infighting between Rupert Murdoch’s papers of the right, the socially conservative Telegraph and the big end of town Australian (Tsvirko 2015).

In some places such a battle might assume the epic proportions of a real civil war (or ‘fight for the party’s soul’). With the LNP, in the context of compulsory voting and after more than 40 years of neoliberal embedding and triumph, this may seem far less likely. But as we have seen since Turnbull’s accession, the tie on the neoliberal right between party cadres and the still committed social conservative base is not something that can be as easily or quickly severed. The Turnbull Government seems, to the surprise of many, to be unable to free its neoliberal policy direction from the electorally damaging socially conservative values that the Abbott Government epitomised.
Ruling the Void

If this analysis is correct and if the LNP has done as the ALP has long done, then we have, or pretty soon will have, a representative democracy based on political parties which have no real, no defining, social base at all. In such circumstances, as Rudy Andeweg puts it, ‘the party … becomes the government’s representative in the society rather than the society’s bridgehead in the state’ (Farrell 2015). Of course, in a world of bipartisan neoliberalism, whichever party is in government, the policy agenda remains the same. So finally we will, with a little tweaking, have made Marx’s understanding of the modern state true:

The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the kleptocratic rich.

In an appalling irony of history this outcome for Australia may have been furthered by the destruction of Abbott’s prime ministership: the final nail in the coffin of party democracy.

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End Notes
1. At 1 year 362 days, Abbott’s term as Prime Minister was the third shortest of Australian prime ministers elected as leader of their party. Harold Holt disappeared off Portsea Beach in 1967 after 1 year 327 days in office, and in 1914 Sir Joseph Cook lost office in a double dissolution after 1 year and 85 days.
2. This essay owes much to Peter Mair, Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy, 2013. What it adds is a focus on the distinctive way parties of the right have related to their base and so the distinctive issues associated with their – eventual – attempts to ditch the base.
3. Many forget that when stagflation hit Australia in 1975 the Treasurer, Jim Cairns (Cairns, 1975a), reacted this way: ‘We live in a society where the determinants, the things that happen in society as a whole are taking place in the private sector … If we’re to keep people in work or get them back to work, we have to work on the private sector.’ Thus the government’s first challenge is to ensure ‘a reasonable rate of return on investment.’ And this means ‘planning to get the domestic deficit down to the lowest possible level’ (Cairns, 1975a).
4. For the story of the Left’s opportunities and failures in meeting the challenges of rising inflation and unemployment see Harvey 2007.
5. That such a depoliticised identity politics will certainly have its own politics is undeniable, but it will not be a politics that challenges the neoliberal trajectory. A nice example of this is Madeleine Albright’s defence of the neoliberal candidature of Hillary Clinton against the social democratic candidature of Bernie Sanders’s: ‘There’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help each other!’ (Albright 2016).
6. Consider Tony Blair on the Corbyn challenge (Blair 2015). The headline: ‘Even if you hate me, please don’t take Labour over the cliff edge’. The message: ‘The party is walking eyes shut, arms outstretched, over the cliff’s edge to the jagged rocks below. This is not a moment to refrain from disturbing the serenity of the walk on the basis it causes “disunity”. It is a moment for a rugby tackle if that were not a moment to refrain from disturbing the serenity of the walk on the basis it causes “disunity”.’ To which he later added, the icing on the cake: ‘If your heart is with Jeremy Corbyn, get a transplant.’
7. For a detailed account of the full neoliberal dimensions of the Abbott Government’s first budget, see Matt Ryan’s essay ‘Austerity for some: Tony Abbott’s economic legacy’ in this issue of Social Alternatives.
8. Things here can become ridiculously confused (and self-delusional). Consider this (Fyfe and Bachelard 2011): ‘As one Labor backbencher told The Sunday Age, the Opposition Leader’s [Abbott’s] approach was fraught with danger because “you can use negativity to frame your opponents, but at the end of the day it frames you”.’
Abbott's War on Democracy

Graham Maddox

Tony Abbott was not the first leader to undermine Australian democracy. A process of erosion has been going on for some time, sharply accelerated by the conspiracy surrounding the government’s dismissal in 1975, and propelled by John Howard’s protracted contempt for the people, especially over the war in Iraq and in his determination to silence dissent, humiliating critics with ad hominem abuse. Abbott acknowledged Howard as a significant mentor, and strove to outdo his exemplar in arousing fear in the community, treating the population as gullible and manipulable, such as with the condescending rhetoric over the 2014 budget, reducing policy to three-word slogans and stifling public discussion. His asylum-seeker aggression, shrouded in official secrecy, flouted international law and showed contempt for the Australian people. If democracy means anything, at its centre is respect for the people.

Mr Abbott’s displacement from the prime ministership on 14 September 2015 does not of itself indicate that he was at war with democracy. Nevertheless, Mr Turnbull’s announcement that he would challenge for the leadership of the Liberal Party did suggest that Abbott had failed to communicate adequately with the people, and a number of voxes populi on the day had interviewees saying that Abbott was ‘out of touch with the people’.

Before we accuse anyone of debellation, it is as well to be clear about what is being fought against. Democracy is often said to be a promiscuous concept, one ‘essentially contested’. But it bears historical experience and arose in ancient society as rule by the citizens of an entire community – that is, ‘rule by the people’. Hiding behind modern confusions in the understanding of democracy, the Abbott Government relegated ‘the people’ from a central place in the polity and pandered to the rich and powerful, operating to enhance their power. Its first budget was in effect a frontal assault on the ordinary people of the land, particularly the poorest. The contrast between its actions and the historical theme of democracy could scarcely be starker.

The model is ancient Athens, where all authority was vested in the assembly of the entire citizen body. There is much debate about the democratic purity of this system, but there is no avoiding that the Greeks invented the idea of democracy, and bequeathed to the world the possibility of popular rule, and the ideals of freedom, equality and community (koinonia). When these ideals are assailed, democracy is under threat (Vlastos 1983).

The historical ‘model’ is relevant to modern conceptions of democracy because a clear focus on the ideals of the original democracy, and on the benefits its institutions were designed to produce, cuts through the surge of obfuscations that redefine democracy to suit factional tastes and to invite the criticism that the term is promiscuous and ‘contested’. The institutions of Athens can scarcely be reproduced in a modern, territorial state, but its procedures and ideals can interrogate all modern applications of the term ‘democracy’ (Ober 1993).

In order to address the problems of promiscuity and essential contestation it is useful to turn to the famous characterisation of democracy by Abraham Lincoln: democracy is rule ‘of the people by the people for the people’ (Lincoln 1863). Nowadays some may regard this formula as simplistic, but it has the virtue of restoring the people to the heart of any conception of democracy. We may usefully address each part of Lincoln’s definition in turn.

Of the people

Obviously this includes rule over the people. A government is elected to protect the people and create law and order throughout society. It is also expected to provide a safety net of subsistence to all. On public safety, the Abbott Government vigorously paraded its credentials to contrast with the alleged weakness on the other side of politics.

Government of the people has a yet more significant claim on our attention. It means that the government belongs to the people, and democracy is a system of government based on popular sovereignty. At the base of the whole system the people are in authority. Democracy originally means ‘the power of the people’.

By the people

The power of the people implies rule by the people. Here the promiscuous spectre of democracy heaves
Things have never become so bad in Australia. Our two-party system is more connected to the breadth of the Australian population than the shadowy American parties that are nearly identical to each other (Moore et al. 1998). The Australian parties are set up to represent different points of view and to oppose each other in promoting them. This ‘dialectical’ democracy is intended to preside over a conversation in the community about political ideals and policies. Various analogies have been invoked to explain this, such as the ‘transmission belt’ between the people and the government. An eminent observer, L. F. Crisp, once contrasted the Labour (sic) Party as a progressive force to the opposing political forces in the parties ‘town and country capital’, referring to the Coalition between the Country (now National) Party and the Liberal Party, on the conservative side (Crisp 1971). There were critics aplenty to say that this was oversimplified and required nuancing, since examples of progress and stability could be demonstrated on either side. Nevertheless, the characterisation of ‘parties of initiative and resistance’ is broadly true for the big picture of the Australian political landscape (Moyes 1931: 8-9). Of course there have at times been significant third parties with strong influence on the system: the Democratic Labor Party, the Australian Democrats, and now the Greens, not to mention a plethora of small groups having disproportionate influence in the Senate. While they broaden the range of choice for electors, they do not obliterate the main rival forces of contention: Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition.

While no one can dictate to the electorate which government it chooses, for democracy to be healthy a reasonable expectation of alternation between the rival parties allows for a diversity of voices to be heard and eventually given heed. This ‘dialectical’ democracy authorises a public dialogue among all citizens. Moreover, many commentators have observed that it is good for the government itself to face a strong opposition that probes its motives and actions and keeps a government on its mettle. Political opposition within a democracy should be ‘constitutional’ – that is to say, accepting the norms of the constitution, of democratic procedure and general civility. A token of this is the rule that members of parliament should observe ‘parliamentary language’. A British statesman, Lord Simon, once declared that ‘our parliamentary system will work as long as the responsible people in different parties accept the view that it is better that the other side should win than that the constitution should be broken’ (Amery 1947: 31-2).

A war on democracy radically attacks this party-based version of democracy. Journalist David Marr began his Quarterly Essay on Abbott with the declaration: ‘Tony Abbott is the most successful Opposition leader of the last forty years…’ (Marr 2012). In Realpolitik this judgment may be correct, but in constitutional terms it is suspect. In any case, some may judge Abbott’s opposition as the worst we have had, because he failed utterly to prepare his team for responsible government (Barratt 2015).

Abbott wanted to insist that public discussion be supportive of his government’s stance. He conducted an ongoing vendetta against the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), along with the Fairfax media, for alleged bias against the government. That all News Corporation (Murdoch) papers across the country were fiercely supportive of the government, and harshly critical of Labor, did not seem to strike a balance with him. There was little he could do about Fairfax commentary, but the ABC remains a statutory commission dependent on public funding. It was in the government’s power to decrease its funding, and so it did, as for the SBS also. Yet the ABC merely had to record the facts of the Government’s actions to be accused of bias. Furthermore, various attitudes among the press were not conducive to democratic debate. On leaving prime-ministerial office, a bitter Tony Abbott attacked the media for their character assassination of politicians, yet it is clear that he had benefited more than most from his association with a supportive Murdoch press. As Brian McNair wrote in The Conversation:

Most observers of the political media would accept some of these criticisms, even as they might raise an eyebrow at the audacity of their author who, after all, played a bigger role than most in perpetuating the thuggish and fickle politics-media culture which has now brought him down … And yes, there is lots of ‘sour, character assassination’ in the political media. Julia Gillard experienced it, at the same time as her haters in the media were cheerleading for Tony. I don’t recall any complaints from the Liberals about character assassination back then. Abbott famously echoed in a parliamentary speech Alan Jones’ offensive remarks about Gillard’s father dying of shame (McNair 2015).

An overtly misogynist contempt for the then Prime Minister Gillard was in part also a lack of respect for the constitutional system. Abbott’s mantra of tarnishing the prime minister with lying and deceit, which turned out to be no match for his own mendacity in office, was calculated to undermine Gillard’s legitimacy. Yet Abbott’s aggression went beyond the bounds of taste and civility. His rhetoric was abusive, while his verbal assaults on Julia Gillard betrayed his chagrin that Labor should have chosen a...
Prime Minister Abbott was by no means the first to delegitimise the opposition party. The widespread conservative conspiracy that led to the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government in 1975 was an extraordinary, unconstitutional, event (Hocking 2012: 303; Hocking 2015; Archer and Maddox 1976). The rhetoric justifying the outcome strongly implied that Labor had no right to rule, while the Liberals were a natural ruling party. John Howard’s Liberal government did the utmost to stifle the public conversation that is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy, deliberately targeting and attempting to humiliate into silence any critic of its actions (Hamilton and Maddison 2007; Marr 2007). This Abbott also did, most notably with Professor Gillian Triggs, president of the Human Rights Commission, after she issued a report on the maltreatment of children in Australian asylum-seeker detention camps. She was accused of bias, partisanship with the opposition, and was apparently offered a new position by Attorney-General George Brandis to try to remove her from her statutory presidency (Lowry 2015).

In February 2014, then Prime Minister Abbott announced a Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption. He promised that this ‘would not be an inquiry into trade unionism or the day-to-day activities by honest union officials’. Yet he generalised his intent by saying ‘We don’t want honest workers to be ripped off by dishonest union officials’ (Abbott 2014). The Opposition feared that the commission was to be set up precisely to expose the numerous links between trade union officialdom and Labor members of parliament. The unfortunate juxtaposition of the union ‘governance’ and ‘corruption’ was an implicit accusation that the very nature of union management invited corruption. This was not to imply that all unions were free from corruption, but to suggest that corruption in Australia lurks in many quarters (Larmour 2011). For all Abbott’s disclaimers in the official announcement, his rhetoric was designed to raise in the public mind the miasma of an inherently corrupt institution infecting Australian public life. Once that suspicion had been entrenched, there would be flow-on suspicion that the Labor leadership might be corrupt. The issue was heightened when the two most recent Labor prime ministers, Rudd and Gillard, and the present leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, were summoned to testify. Shorten was publicly humiliated by the commissioner, Dyson Hayden, who had been personally appointed by the prime minister. Hayden’s credibility was later called into question when possible sympathies to the Liberal Party were exposed. In any case, it was unseemly for the royal commissioner to call Shorten an ‘unreliable witness’, and impossible to see how this would not be construed as a political incursion (Hayden 2015). Regardless of the outcome of the inquiry and whether Shorten had a serious case to answer, it was difficult to believe that such humiliation was not Abbott’s hope from the outset, whether or not he anticipated this development. Part of Abbott’s justification for establishing the commission was allegedly ‘systemic issues involving secret funds, commissions and kickbacks’, often from employers, who should also have been investigated. A royal commission into business practices would not have pleased Abbott’s powerful supporters, yet his failure to establish one showed up his lopsided approach.

The connection between the trade union movement and Labor political leadership should have been no surprise to anyone. The Australian Labor Party, the oldest party in Australia, was established by trade union organisations in the 1890s. It was set up to advance the cause of labour through political means. More particularly, it was organised to defend workers against the concerted power of employers who used the law to enforce discriminatory work contracts and who employed the coercive institutions of government to enforce their position. Historically there was a clear imbalance between the political position of working people and the multiplied power of the rich. That this imbalance could endure was demonstrated by John Howard’s punitive Work Choices (2005) policy, which placed unions at a considerable disadvantage, while Howard outright dismembered some bodies distasteful to the Liberal Government such as university student unions. There was an unmistakable air of condescension in Howard and Abbott’s rhetoric about unions that resonates also with the ‘born-to-rule’ syndrome.

From the beginning in Britain, honest manual work was respected – ‘they who tread the path of labour...’ Respected as long as the work was conducted in obedience to the master who was to be approached cap in hand. Yet combinations of workers were not to be tolerated, and those who presumed to form unions were transported to the colonies. Groups like the Tolpuddle Martyrs began their careers under the stigma of criminality. As far as the Conservatives are concerned, the stigma has never quite faded, and its traces are politically useful. In the Australian colonies labour took on a different hue. Jack, as good as his master, was not to be suppressed. Shearers, confronted with unfavourable individual contracts, banded together to withdraw labour from non-union properties. Shearers, miners, seamen all organised themselves into tightly disciplined unions, claiming the moral high ground: ‘If altruism is the ideal of human brotherhood and high civilisation, the trade union is the first step towards it’ (Spence 1909: 333). Russel Ward claimed a peculiar Australian mateship among bush workers (Ward 1966: 214). Yet in the face of strikes employers enlisted the power of the state and troops were called out to restore ‘order’. The stigma was etched more deeply again. It was in this conservative tradition of hostility that Abbott set up a royal commission on trade union ‘corruption’.

To return to the Australian colonial story, however, the political savvy of the workers was unique in the world.
The unions themselves produced political organisations that became the Australian Labor Party, announcing that while employers had the right to control their own businesses, working people were prepared to take control of the conditions of their own lives, and moreover were competent to do so – that is, were competent to run the state. And Australia produced the first labour governments in the world, a generation before a Labour party took office in Britain. Yet still the conservatives seek to revive the stigma, linking political labour with the ‘corruption’ of workers in combination. The appearance of Labor leaders Rudd, Gillard and Shorten before the royal commission willy-nilly sharpened the image. In short, ‘The government’s royal commissions into home insulation and trade unions looked like an attempt to reboot the 2013 election campaign’ (Robinson 2015). As many thought, Abbott in office was exactly like Abbott in opposition – combative and destructive.

For a prime minister to demonstrate support for the democratic ideal he or she needs to show respect to the whole Australian people; it was too easy to forget that the parliamentarians Abbott wished to traduce were duly elected representatives of the people, and had recently been voted in by nearly half the electorate. More important, to delegitimise the Opposition would be to undermine the very idea of democracy and the way it is conceived of in this country.

For the people

Abbott’s war on democracy included war on his own people, particularly cultural groups within a multicultural Australia. He offended the Jewish community by accusing Labor of committing a ‘Holocaust of jobs’ (Keane 2015). He offended Muslims by saying that they did not sufficiently practise their ‘religion of peace’, rousing the president of the Arab Council, Ms Randa Kattan, to accuse Abbott of inflaming ‘sentiments that are bordering on hatred and racism’ (Decent 2015). He insulted ‘housewives’ by telling them that they would benefit from the repeal of the carbon tax as they figured out the family budget while doing the ironing. He also told women that their virginity was their greatest gift (News.com.au 2010). His first Cabinet contained one woman.

Abbott set out to evoke fear in the whole community. He found a convenient outlet for his innate aggression by focusing on the dreaded ISIS (also called ISIL, Daesh), the ruthless caliphate set up by Muslim heretics. Abbott could not mention them without saying that they were a ‘death cult’. He was aided in this by the willingness of ISIS to taunt the West by publicly beheading innocent Westerners who had fallen into their hands, and beyond this, summarily executing many of their own who refused to come under their sway. In the calculus of death their efforts were paltry compared with the chaos of the Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria wars. Yet ISIS disturbed peaceful nations like Australia by publicly calling for random murders in the community, and the federal and state police forces uncovered several alleged assassination plots. Abbott exacerbated the fear caused by these threats by saying they were ‘coming for us’, while the real action of ISIS was in the Middle East. He entered America’s war against them with alacrity on the justification that to do so would be protecting Australia. His decision to conduct bombing against ISIS troops in Syria was of highly questionable legality. He was correct in forever saying that the first responsibility of any government is protection of its people, but that does not include trying to make them live in fear. Yet he was dedicated to proving that his side of politics was tougher on security than the Opposition, a further rivet in his platform of delegitimising Labor. The point here, however, is that governing for the people does not mean frightening them, even if it is cautioning alertness without alarm!

The effect, and very possibly the purpose, of Abbott’s fiery rhetoric against the ‘death cult’ was twofold: the words are designed to invoke fear, and to gather support for the government’s warlike presence both at home and abroad. And it serves to tarnish the image of all practicing Islam. Muslim leaders were concerned about Abbott’s lack of consultation with them, about a rhetoric seemingly designed to disturb their community, his unguarded implications that the ‘religion of peace’ was actually associated with terrorism, his lack of proper funding for the deradicalisation of Muslim youth, the exaggerated and fearsome armed police raids into Muslim communities, and draconian legislation that seemed to be directed specially against Muslim communities. Much of this official activity could well have provoked radicalisation rather than containing it. ‘Abbott rarely mentioned Muslims outside of references to terrorism’ (Lentini 2015: 237).

While few would doubt that ISIS was a disgraceful and brutal organisation, Abbott continued a shameful policy with regard to asylum-seekers by tainting them with the suspicion of terrorism (Bolton 2015). Crowding onto leaky, dangerous fishing boats was scarcely the ‘modus operandi’ of the terrorist. Unfortunately, Abbott was again abetted by a pusillanimous and complaisant Opposition that had fallen into line with Howard’s brutal policies, and they actively supported Abbott in his. Research from bodies like the Catholic Edmund Rice Centre and the Refugee Council of Australia, whose motto, tellingly, is ‘spreading knowledge, not fear’, showed that the overwhelming majority of asylum seekers were genuine escapees from persecution. Yet Abbott continually disparaged them as ‘illegals’ (which they were not, since asylum-seeking was permitted by international law), accusing them of ‘queue-jumping’ when there was no discernible queue, humiliating them by every possible means, and, enforcing a ‘border protection’ policy, implying that they were some kind of invasion threat – an absurd proposition in the extreme. All this was calculated to reinforce the fear that references to ISIS were supposed to engender. To further underscore the impression that boat-people were undesirables, he took over and intensified Rudd’s execrable determination to let asylum-seekers never settle in Australia.
Abbott, rather than governing for the Australian people, treated them with contempt when he decreed that the methods for stopping-the-boats be conducted in secrecy. He employed immigration minister Scott Morrison to enforce a ruthlessly silent, and a suspiciously cruel, policy of turning boats around, or forcing asylum seekers onto Australian provided lifeboats and set loose to float into oblivion. The hypocritical justification for ‘turning the boats around’ was to save people from drowning at sea, when the boats, repeatedly described as unsafe, were turned around anyway to fend for themselves. Hypocritical, because if the government were really exercised by the dangers to the boat people, on whom they had spent inordinate amounts of money to repel, they could have rescued them by sending rescue ships at a fraction of the cost. The offshore detention of boat people in concentration camps on Manus Island and Nauru, from the few leaked pieces of information that have filtered through to the public, is cruel and unusual. The brutal murder on Manus of Reza Barati by those who were paid to protect him is the worst example of many instances of abuse (Senate 2014).

Some will argue that the welfare of foreigners is not our concern. That argument is not the democratic one. Of course a democracy must organise itself for the orderly settlement of its peoples, but the very foundation of democracy is on the basis that all people are equal, regardless of race, colour, creed or social status. The denigration of people who take to sea on a precarious voyage is a huge diminution of our democracy. If our leaders, as several do, profess a Christian faith, then they know that they are adjured to welcome the stranger. The real cause of the aversion to asylum-seekers among our politicians is the polls that indicate an unwillingness to accept them by large sections of the electorate. That perception may well be changing, now that the heart-breaking images of the plight of Syrians fleeing war and persecution are widely seen, but in any case, the blind following of opinion polls signifies the failure of moral leadership on both sides of the political divide, with the honourable exception of the Greens, especially Senator Sarah Hanson-Young.

Since the ‘model’ of democratic ideals followed here stems from ancient Athens, it may well be argued that the Greek democrats were not friendly to foreigners. They lived comfortably alongside the ‘metics’, foreigners who contributed to Greek society, but their label ‘barbaros’ for the eastern foreigner who spoke an unintelligible language was contemptuous, and indeed Aristotle (himself a foreigner) was to classify certain barbarians as ‘slaves by nature’ (cf. Springborg 1992: 230). Yet the cosmopolitan ideal that holds all humans to be equal undoubtedly stems from Athenian ideas of equality. The cynic Diogenes was the first to call himself a citizen of the world and inspired his Stoic successors to develop a full theory of human equality (Hill 2015). The ultimate source of this inspiration was undoubtedly Socrates (Vlastos 1983).

Tony Abbott’s public xenophobia descended into petulance with his announcement of a border force. This was an unnecessary and embarrassing militarisation of the customs service. Ten million dollars were spent on changing signs and labels and providing spiffing uniforms for customs officers. What seemed like an elaborate and expensive digital game turned sinister when the Border Force announced that officers would position themselves ‘at various locations’ around Melbourne, ‘speaking with any individual we cross paths with … targeting everything from anti-social behaviour to outstanding warrants’ (Crikey 2015). This foretaste of a police state was met by instant spontaneous demonstrations of dissent – democracy in action – and the Government responded that it had all been a misunderstanding. If only the effectiveness of this popular action had occurred when many thousands of people throughout the country demonstrated against John Howard’s entry into the deceitful Iraq War of 2003, but Howard had had no inclination to be directed by popular opinion, on that score at least.

The Abbott-Hockey budget measures are treated elsewhere in this collection. Suffice it to say that there was wide perception that the government was not governing for all the people in its fiscal positioning. Again they continued the unparliamentary undermining of the credibility of their opponents, in that the Labor Party in government were mere ‘tenants’ who had ‘trashed the joint’. Mr Hockey’s budget rhetoric called the rich the ‘heavy lifters’ of society, regardless of the source of their income. On the other hand, those who were not rich were ‘leaners’, a deep insult to the bulk of the Australian population. The most direct assault on the idea of a public good was Hockey’s announcement that ‘the age of entitlement was over’ – another insult to the Australian people. The main target of the slur was people who did not work, whether they were unemployed or disabled and unfit for work. The punitive budgetary measures made it seem that those unemployed, even with a structural unemployment rate hovering around six per cent, were responsible for their own situation.

In defending the failed 2014 Budget, much of which was delayed in the Senate, ministers lamented the burden on future generations if they were saddled with inherited public debt. This was a curious argument in the face of global warming denial on the part of many on the Coalition side of politics. Gillard’s ‘carbon tax’ (‘socialism masquerading as environmentalism’ – Abbott 2015) was excoriated without any acknowledgment of its place in reducing carbon emissions. Abbott repeatedly announced that coal was the future of Australia, ridiculed the effectiveness of wind-power generators and forewarned the withdrawal of public subsidies for solar power. Clearly, the threat to future generations from climate change is one of the most pressing problems for the planet, so Abbott’s concern for our children’s children rang hollow. As did his government’s claims for education reform, when the announced future abandonment of the Gonski reforms was an unnecessary and embarrassing militarisation of the customs service. Ten million dollars were spent on changing signs and labels and providing spiffing uniforms for customs officers. What seemed like an elaborate and expensive digital game turned sinister when the Border Force announced that officers would position themselves ‘at various locations’ around Melbourne, ‘speaking with any individual we cross paths with … targeting everything from anti-social behaviour to outstanding warrants’ (Crikey 2015). This foretaste of a police state was met by instant spontaneous demonstrations of dissent – democracy in action – and the Government responded that it had all been a misunderstanding. If only the effectiveness of this popular action had occurred when many thousands of people throughout the country demonstrated against John Howard’s entry into the deceitful Iraq War of 2003, but Howard had had no inclination to be directed by popular opinion, on that score at least.
could set. This envisaged a shrinking of overall quality in order to single out a few elite universities that would only be available to the rich. The rest would become like American colleges, yet Pyne apparently did not consult the literature that showed the American system in crisis. For example Alexander (2013) claimed that ‘Funding crunches in Washington, DC and in every state capital, along with rising college tuition rates, are putting the quality and autonomy of our 6,000 colleges and universities in jeopardy. And that is putting our nation’s future in jeopardy’ (Alexander 2013).

In assessing a government’s democratic credentials, it is necessary to make a distinction between mere populism and the application of democratic ideals. It is an error to equate democracy with snapshot polling of public opinion at any moment. A polled majority in favour of persecuting boat people is not democratic, because democracy comes freighted with historical experience and philosophical idealism. Pursuing democratic ideals requires committed leadership, although not the type of leadership called for by the exclusionary notion of ‘Team Australia’. The conservative classically honours a bond of respect between past, present and future generations. Abbott did not honour the present generation, and cared little for the future. He was almost constantly at war with democracy.

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Legal Efficiency as Dogma: Neoliberalism, justice and the Australian civil law system

BINOY KAMPMARK

The coupling of justice, efficiency and cost in case management suggests a clear assumption: justice, economy and the smooth running of a process are all elements of the same program within a legal system. The suggestion, expressed in Aon Risk Services Australia Ltd v Australian National University (2009), is typically oriented towards assumptions of systemic behaviour in the name of efficiency. This paper argues that Australian law has moved towards a distinct neoliberal model, reflected by a chronic suspicion of lengthier proceedings. This, it argues, misunderstands the basis of just resolution of proceedings, and neglects the sensible rationale provided in State of Queensland v JL Holdings Pty Ltd (1997) 186 CLR 146. Justice delayed is not always justice denied.

‘Speed and efficiency, in the sense of minimum delay and expense, are seen as essential to a just resolution of proceedings’ (Legg 2011).

The neoliberal view of efficiency has been well and truly extended to cover legal systems. Some studies have ranked legal systems according to efficiency principles, implicitly suggesting that efficiency and justice are linked (Ménard and du Marais 2008). Reports such as Doing Business, authored by staff at the World Bank, see the function of law through the prism of standardised practices – ‘one size [can] fit all’ (2004: XVI). The 2004 report made a rather bold attempt in dealing with legal traditions in terms of their efficiency, a point expanded upon in subsequent studies (World Bank/International Finance Corporation 2005, 2006).

Authors such as Wolfgang Streeck (2011, 2014) see such approaches as fundamental, a case of markets versus citizens, where the tensions between democratic legitimacy and capitalist-market relations are revealed. Such tensions, argues Streeck, were obscured in the affluence of a post-Second World War world, notably in the economies of the United States and Europe. Sagging fortunes from the 1970s, perceived inefficiencies, and the call for institutional reform, saw neoliberal forces spring into action. That action took the form of active restructuring of ‘law and social life along market lines, from labour relations to universities to the professions’ (Grewal and Purdy 2015: 4).

While the doctrine of utility – that judges and law-makers would pass laws in accordance with maximising pragmatic outcomes – was an empirically difficult thing to prove. Legal theorists such as Richard Posner suggested economic efficiency as the guiding consideration behind judge-made law. ‘The common law method,’ he famously asserted, ‘is to allocate responsibilities between people...
engaged in interacting activities in such a way as to maximise the joint value, or, what amounts to the same thing, minimise the joint cost of the activities’ (Posner 1977: 178, 1979, 1980). The assumption was itself problematic, because it combines two often disparate concepts: economic efficiency with utilitarian effect. Jammed in between this is the fairness essential to according justice to the parties in dispute.

The problem in such studies is that they do not actually assess the actual practice of the legal system in each context, privileging the emphasis on the system as an aim in itself, rather than how it resolves a dispute. Ménard and du Marais provide a classic example of this, insisting on the need to move beyond the idea of institutions as ‘exogenously given’ and embrace methods of economic analysis (2008: 79). To that end, the authors insist on links between legal frameworks and the financial system itself, an approach that stresses on how profitable, or efficient in terms of returns, a system is.

This utilitarian principle can be challenged more broadly, taking note of the critique put forth by John Rawls. Utilitarianism is driven by goals, and in that, ‘the good is defined independently from the right, and then the right is defined as that which maximises the good’ (Rawls 1971: 24). This leads to his observation that utilitarianism rejects ‘the distinction between persons’ (Rawls 1971: 27). It is precisely this rejection of distinctions between persons that must be repudiated, favouring, as the adversarial system does, the singularity of the case between the disputants. The endeavour to impose efficiency goals through various spheres of human interaction, most notably the law, suggests a failure, to use Rawls’s terms, to consider the distinction between such persons, be it their disagreement, the time needed to resolve it, and the resources required to do justice.

Neoliberalism and Legal Reform

Efficiency as a guiding principle was already the governing cause of the neoliberal revolution in market and welfare reforms, central to the modernising drives of the economic changes initiated under Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the United States (Harvey 2007). It is the argument that public’s wellbeing is attained by the functions of the free market (McCluskey 2003). It has also been seen in the embrace by governments of austerity and belt-tightening, while focusing on the idea of ‘indebted man’ – a concept that has severe ramifications for accountability in the withered political state that has been termed ‘post-democracy’ (Stavvakakis 2013). Privileging efficiency while condemning debtors says much of what Maurizio Lazzarato (2012) has called ‘the Neoliberal Condition’.

This embrace, even by traditional Labour parties, that is best reflected in Tony Blair’s Third Way in Britain, entrenched the market place as a distributive system of public goods, even as it emphasised the role of duties. In the words of Blair’s New Labour ministerial colleague, Jack Straw, the old Left ... failed to argue against ... an extension of individual freedom [as] a license to do almost anything, and that the State existed as some sort of universal state provider, which made no moral judgments regardless of the merits of those who were dependent on it (Somers 2008: 245).

In Australia, the neoliberal philosophy was incorporated by means of ‘economic rationalism’, a common feature of Australian economic debates from the 1990s onwards (Jones and Norton 1993; King and Lloyd 1993). The market – and market choices – thus took centre stage as proponents of delivery, be it services or goods. Hence, the market is privileged as the appointed maker of choices over regulation, a modern reincarnation of laissez-faire liberalism (Yergin and Stanislaw 1998: 15-16).

To that end, it is suggested here that a broader analysis of legal efficiency, as linked to justice is required, one that sheds light about the legislative and judicial thrust that has been embraced by Australian jurisdictions in the context of civil procedure reform. David Singh Grewal and Jedediah Purdy’s (2105) work suggests the value of considering neoliberalism in a legal context. ‘We contend that to give up the term would be a serious intellectual loss.’ The authors argue for a definition of the neoliberal project as applicable to legal values, which is centred on ‘a set of recurring claims made by policy-makers, advocates, and scholars in the ongoing contest between the imperatives of market economics and non-market values grounded in the imperatives of democratic legitimacy’ (Grewal and Purdy 2015: 1-2).

Both jurisprudence and legislation in Australia has stressed the importance of efficiency in resolving disputes, citing case management as an appropriate vehicle. Case management has become code for efficiency, the watchword for legal reformers. It suggests a greater involvement by judges in terms of restraining the freedom of parties to resolve their own dispute. It suggests that notions of justice cannot be divorced from expeditiousness. Legal resources, and facilities, are finite; as is a judge’s patience. In 2000, Australia’s eleventh High Court Chief Justice, Murray Gleeson, sympathetic to the migration of neoliberal philosophies to the Australian civil system, would argue that the ‘economic significance of an effective system of administration of justice is generally undervalued’, and in his view, ‘Economic rationalism should be comprehensively rational’ (Gleeson 2000: 62-66).
In this regard, it is suggested that the Australian High Court case of *Aon Risk Services Australia Ltd v Australian National University* (2009) shows a move that potentially overvalues efficiency at the expense of justice, despite inaccurate assertions that ‘cost and delay’ factors ‘do not displace justice, but rather are to be weighed together’ (Legg and Higgins 2016: 174). Potentially, it goes even further, annexing justice principles to those of market reason. It does follow, at least presumptively, Posner’s notion that judges will examine choices in maximising efficiency.

This replaces the spirit evident in *State of Queensland v JL Holdings Pty Ltd*, where the same court claimed that ‘the ultimate aim of a court is the attainment of justice and no principle of case management can be allowed to supplant that aim’ (1997: 154). The case is a vital counterpoint and consideration in the neoliberal revolution of Australian law. The judges there hedge and express discomfort at punishing the parties for delaying matters to be heard before the bench – the matter, importantly, is one to be considered between the parties, not one beyond the specifics of the case. Case management, the right hand extension of efficiency, could not apply ‘except perhaps in extreme circumstances’ (*State of Queensland v JL Holdings* 1997: 154).

The *Aon Risk* case makes a point of targeting this reasoning. It capitalised on such criticisms that a mere cost order was insufficient to do justice between the parties, or that the *JL Holdings* decision encouraged lawyers to treat it as ‘carte blanche’ to amend their pleas, thereby introducing clogging delays (*Black and Decker (Australasia) Pty Ltd v GMCA Pty Ltd* 2007: 551; Lyons 2010: 539). Criticism of the decision included a direct reference to a stifling ‘culture’ that had arisen, one indifferent to case management and the consequences of overly liberal tendencies making amendments to pleadings. Judges, in other words, were not doing enough to rein in those appearing before them, sticking all too closely to the adversarial principle. Judge Robin QC expressed hope that ‘in the future greater regard will be paid to case management’ (*Parmac Investments Pty Ltd v Logan City Council* 2009: [8]). Subsequent lower court decisions also stressed that *JL Holdings* had to be viewed through the modifying prism of efficiency as reflected in statute (*Dennis v Australian Broadcasting Corporation* 2008: [29]). Lawmakers were insisting that the market had the answers; such quaint notions, however, were still bogging down judges, as justice for justice’s sake, whatever the cost.

According to French CJ, the adversarial presumption – that parties in dispute battle out before a neutral umpire – must give way to a more interventionist court keen to emphasise the integrity of the judicial system first. The parties to the dispute, in short, should not be entirely left alone to determine the parameters of their own dispute, a cardinal point of the adversarial system. While finding justice between the litigants was not to be dismissed, it is now read as part of the composite court structure, with its array of marshalled resources that need to be well spent on appropriate cases. Indeed, case management principles are intended to ‘do justice to all litigants’– ‘considerations such as delay and costs can never be as important as the raising of an arguable case and it denies the wider effects of delay upon others’ (*Aon Risk* 2009).

*Aon Risk*, as a summary by the Australian Government Solicitor noted, showed that ‘the courts will pay more than lip service to case management principles’ (Berger 2009). There is little doubt that the matters are also substantive and beyond mere form – pleadings cannot be amended on the basis of raising ‘an arguable claim’ which can be corrected by a payment of costs by way of compensation (*Aon Risk Services Australia Ltd v Australian National University* 2009: 111-3). Admittedly, the conduct by the Australian National University was significantly dire; its amendments would have required *Aon* to, in effect, defend the case from the start while facing no reasons for the lateness of the proposed amendments. Conduct, in other words, is fundamental.

The *Aon Risk* bench tried to distinguish the reasoning in *JL Holdings* on an ‘entirely different factual setting’. The case, according to French CJ (*Aon Risk Services Australia Ltd v Australian National University* 2009: 6) and Heydon J (*Aon Risk Services Australia Ltd v Australian National University* 2009: 133), should not be regarded as ‘authoritative’ on the issue of the exercise of discretion in amending pleadings, or on general principles of case management. In doing so, Heydon J took special note of a remark made by Bryson J in *Maronis Holdings Ltd v Nippon Credit Australia Pty Ltd* (2000), who considered one of the supposedly ‘damaging’ influences arising out of *JL Holdings*: ‘When forbearance and liberality are extended to a delinquent the burden of inconvenience and lost opportunities for preparation tends to fall heavily and without adequate repair on parties who have not been delinquent’ (*Maronis Holdings Ltd v Nippon Credit Australia Pty Ltd* 2000: [15]). While the judges are entirely correct in wishing to weed out instances of delinquency in the legal system, the decision in *Aon Risk* may well have stretched matters too far.

The emphasis in *Aon Risk* is less on an individual citizen’s desire to seek legal redress than the integrity of a system (that system having to function in order to serve the citizen), meaning that an individual court case has to be viewed within the broader social framework of resources and set outcomes. As Nicholas Rescher might put it, this is justice that gives regard to the interests, property and safety of other persons (1982: 5).

The language of the various Civil Procedure Acts replicate the spirit of *Aon Risk*, as do similar provisions that emphasise the just resolution of the ‘real issues’ of the case with minimum delay and expense. Central to this is the adoption of ‘overarching obligations’, a feature of the Victorian legislation (*Civil Procedure Act 2010* (Vic), Part 2.3). At its core is the principle of efficiency and a more collective appraisal of the court system as a functioning entity with limited resources. Market liberal models tend to privilege system, effects and process – the market model and choices – over the priorities of individual justice. In this case, there is some truth in the statement that *Aon*
Risk embraces a form of neoliberal caution: the system cannot be drained, exhausted and limited by the delaying tactics of litigants. They do not operate as islands, but within a system of scarcity. But the language of the court is sterile in its functionalism – justice is not as important as access and expeditious resolution. If litigants get it wrong, the reasons for disturbing the timetable better be formidable. Near enough is, in fact, good enough.

The case of Yara Australia Pty Ltd v Oswal (2013) confronted the issue of overarching obligations and their effect on the legal profession in Victoria. The obligation at issue there involved a party taking reasonable endeavours to ensure that costs associated with proceedings are reasonable and proportionate to the issues and the amount in dispute (Civil Procedure Act 2010 (Vic), s. 24). The Court observed that the overarching obligation regarding costs overrides the duty practitioners owe their client to the extent of any inconsistency. The obligation extends to solicitors and barristers at the pleadings stage, preparing affidavits and gathering material for the case (Yara Australia Pty Ltd v Oswal 2013: [14]-[15]). The reasoning in Yara Australia, it can be argued, is neoliberal for that purpose. Costs are essential; the duty owed to a client is subordinate to principles of efficiency.

This approach, it is argued, follows a more problematic evaluation of citizenship and court participation. It suggests that the language of costs, expenditure and the assumed detriment of delays has triumphed over individual circumstance. Those writing in the European legal and political traditions of governance see this as a post-democratic and debt-obsessed mentality, the hollowing nature of the neoliberal project which redistributes sovereignty from the citizen, shifting it to manager-banking sectors of the economy obsessed with resource limitations (Crouch 2004, 2011, 2013).

While safeguards against the abuse of proceedings are to be encouraged, it is questionable whether the judges in Aon Risk were correct to assert that cost orders in themselves were inadequate against parties indifferent to delays. Such orders suggest a calculation of risk – delays may occur due to circumstances beyond the control of the parties. While it is true that the parties in dispute direct their submissions and case to the heart of the dispute, this may not always seem clear at the start of proceedings. Justice, in short, is a complex creature requiring consideration, which may not pair with the idea that ‘near enough is good enough’.

Conclusion

Attaining justice within any legal system, balancing procedural matters with the broader dictates of supply and demand, remains a perennial issue. Pandering to a particular ideology that distributes risk in accordance with the market and resources suggests the limits of the project. Just resolution, in other words, is not always a matter of remuneration and appropriate scheduling.

Some measure of restraint is required over sharp practice and unjustified pleadings that seemingly smell of opportunism. But the law has always had some regard for that, holding practitioners to their court undertakings with warnings and cost orders. But the troubling equation of procedure to justice, seeing process as a means of justice, the privileging of case management as object and end rather than suitable means to attain an end, has become a trumping feature of the law. There is merit in making sure that more citizens have access to the courts, but the quality of such access also matters. Using the entire spectrum of society as the yardstick by which to resolve adversarial disputes, which are specific to the dispute of the contesting parties, is a troubling, not to mention confusing measure.

It is suggested that the cautionary wisdom expressed in such cases as JL Holdings be revisited, not merely from its practical understanding of how issues in dispute between parties are resolved – put from its sound theoretical evaluation about the difference between procedural management on the one hand – and attaining justice on the other. Procedure itself should not be confused with the dictates of justice. Nothing in stating this should assume that parties can, or should run amok. Areas of the law such as discovery of documents have seen extended delays, in one instance amounting to $200 million for gratuitous exercise of court time. Such a cost for discovery, made more grim by a damage estimate between $195-212 million, prompted Justice Ronald Sackville to comment that it bordered ‘on the scandalous’ (Seven Network Limited v News Limited 2007: [10]). The striving for a proportionate accounting of respective positions, is, as ever, an ongoing one.

D. K. Brown’s points, to this end, are salient. Measurements based on efficiency, reflected by output measures such as GDP take into account ‘accessible data of market values’ while excluding various ‘non-market variables’ (2010: 218). Human capital measures such as education, health, relative income inequality and environmental damage are factors that are avoided (Brown 2010: 218). Some economists have even argued for other measures that add greater understanding to value (Daly and Poster 2012: 2-3, 10). The aims of justice, specific to disputing parties, should not be clouded by the ‘market value’ emphasised by recent judicial reasoning. To do so may allow for greater access to the courts and fewer delays, while tolerating a classic confusion between what justice is, as opposed to how it is attained. On the contrary, lengthier proceedings may sometimes be needed, despite cutting against the halved grain of efficiency.

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**Breaking up**

I try shutting my mind out
to the constant pressure
the hissing panic
of nightmares
in the light of day
where we wake
shaken, until a moment
follows fast on the heels
of shadows
deliver me the distance
between the lies and indifference

I'm scared
where is the next
in what happens
in the narrative we started
unsure, almost startled
staring into unknowns

_ZALEHAH TURNER_,
_SYDNEY, NSW_
Abstinence makes the heart grow fonder

*Paul Williams*

Picture a sixteen year old boy, very ugly, crew cut, rotten teeth (calcium deficiencies), overbite, gawky, zit faced, sitting in an upright hard wooden pew in church in suit and tie.

Me.

Picture a church built on swampland, in between brown rushes and yellow festering water that breeds billions of mosquitoes, harbouring a thousand croaking frogs.

Green River Baptist Church.

And now picture the congregation: men in dark suits and ties with wide lapels, women in long crinkly large dresses with high collars and puffy sleeves, and skirts down to the ground so their ankles are hidden.

Them.

Picture a community where no one has sex, mentions sex, and every new born is a virgin birth. Sex is evil. Sex is the original sin that cast Adam and Eve out of paradise.

Now picture the Pastor of this church, a young preacher straight out of Riverside Bible School, with intense eyes, blonde hair, goofy teeth, and an iron grip on his congregation.

Pastor Steve.

Finally picture his Sunday sermons at around eleven am on a hot Sunday, with flies buzzing around, us with rumbling stomachs (we've been in church and Sunday School and choir practice since 8am).

He was the only one allowed to talk about sex, but only in euphemism, always in the negative. Flee fornication! Resist the devil! Trim your virgin lamps in preparation for the arrival of your bridegroom Christ.

Procreation occurs only within the sanctity of marriage. Dating is frowned upon, dancing is forbidden and rock music a damnable sin. Boys and girls do not mingle at social events, and married couples do not display any affection for each other in public. There must be a Bible between you if you want to sit next to a person of the opposite sex in our church.

Seriously.

It was easy for me to be a virgin at that church: not only was I separated from the opposite sex and given no means, opportunity, or motive, I was, as previously mentioned, also very, very ugly. I hated the moustache beginning to grow, the hair on my legs, the breaking voice, the way puberty had stretched me into a gangly alien being who did not recognise himself in the mirror. And worst of all, my genitals had mutated slowly into monstrous alien beings with a life of their own, insisting on shaming me and diverting my attention from the straight and narrow at every social event. Hormones and pheromones and testosterones pumped through me, torturing me, possessing me, compelling me to stare down girl's tops, up their skirts, to rehearse vile imaginary acts my Id wanted to perform with them.

However when it came to actual sex, I was safe from Satan's clutches. I was the last person who ever would get laid, the least attractive to the opposite sex in that church. I would, it seemed, remain pure with lamps trimmed until the second coming of Jesus my Saviour.

But then there was Terri.

Terri was fourteen. For some reason unbeknown to me, she sat next to me in church every Sunday. A large Schofield King James hard cover, red letter, gold edged Bible sat between us of course, but she always wore these huge long skirts with great big folds in them, like a king size doona, and we managed to touch each other without anyone noticing. At first it was just an accident, my hand pressing against hers on the bench, my foot against her shin under the skirt. And then, slowly, over weeks, it was fingers and wrists. And then it became a habit: every Sunday we squeezed hands, palpitated fingers, felt the texture of sweaty palms throughout the whole service.

Every service.

I never got above the elbows, and she never did more than squeeze my fingers tight as if she were milking them.

So far so good. Nothing wrong with a little hanky-panky. But things got worse. The pastor warned us about slippery slopes, about the little lie that becomes the big
lie, about small habits that become lifestyles, about roads that are easy to run down that become, well, slippery slopes that shoot you straight down to hell.

So by the fifth service of Lent, my fingers were spidering over her thighs, and by Easter, her hand had guided me all over her legs, her armpits, the outside of her bra, her belly button, the long fence of her panty elastic, and finally, at the Eucharist, into a marshland where birds exploded out of the reeds as I walked past, the water oily and still and yellow and stinking like the primeval soup that spawned the first life on earth, where I waded in the water barefoot, squeezed through the brown reeds and plants that looked as if they would eat me, my feet getting stuck in the mud, and the terrifying pressure as I tried to pull them out. Water creatures swam towards me. Water spiders skated on the surface of the viscous water. Bubbles erupted from the bottom, and my stomach was in a queasy knot of repulsive disgust and excitement at the adventure of it all. I felt the shame of returning home all muddy and stinking to mother.

Her face when I dared look was bright purple. Her breath caught.

‘You all right, dear,’ whispered her mother, turning her head from the pew ahead. ‘Do you need your asthma spray?’

Terri shook her head. ‘I’m fine, Mum.’

The Pastor frowned. He was always watching. Like God. He knew the number of hairs on our head. He was Omniscient and Omnipresent. Wore huge yellow rimmed glasses when he read from the huge Bible on the huge pulpit. And peered over them at anyone fidgeting or coughing or not paying attention.

But in a private universe flocks of birds beat hot wings at me, dive bombed me from dizzying heights, cawed loudly in my ears. The ground beneath my feet crumbled away and I found myself in quicksand that sucked and squeezed me down into a dark abyss.

This could not go on.

But next Sunday, it did go on. This time I had entered another dimension, a shimmering world of high crystal clear lakes and tall mountains, snow-capped, with clear blue skies. The blue lakes were transparent and through the still skin of viscous water I could see mermaids, alien creatures, bright coloured tropical fish.

Next Sunday, I who had never taken any drug or mind altering substance in my life was high, my brain blowing out into beyond language into wordless ecstasy, seeing colours that were beyond the spectrum, hearing choirs singing outside of the human auditory range, feeling my body expand and pulse as large as the universe. And the portal was a viscous stickiness between my fingers that felt like snot but tasted like sour grapefruit.

Next Sunday, a month of Sundays later, the same. A sticky dimension of pure spirit, a transubstantiation of the flesh.

Every Sunday. Every. Every. Every.

All under the watchful eye of the Pastor, who stared omnisciently, but, I prayed fervently, saw nothing.

I tried to stop, and one Sunday gripped the hymnbook tight to my chest. But she wriggled and sighed and pushed against my thigh until I let my hand loll on the pew bench, and she groped for it and guided my fingers into her parallel universe.

Every week.

Sometimes we toured her belly button, traversing vast territories of desert, jungle, mountains, across rivers, slowly, finding the source of the Nile. All the while our faces were deadpan during the long sermon about sodomy (furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done), we would be under the ramparts and into lands of cloud kingdoms made of candy floss, or discovering King Solomon’s Mines full of glittering treasure, or running fast down a mountain pass during a thunderstorm, while lightning crackled all around us.

I say us, but can only speak for myself. Her mouth remained prim and tight; her eyes never met mine; her posture was upright and her demeanour pious. The only give away was the facial rosacea, the sunburn spreading down her neck and on occasions the goose pimples on her arm.

And every session would end in the closing plangencies of the sermon, after which the congregation would leap to its feet, grab its hymnbooks and sing gustily.

Every Sunday night I would rebuke myself for these carnal ventures into sin, and vow never to give in to lust again, but the following week, Terri and I made our ways into caves, through waterfalls, across purple fields of little flowers into new worlds where three suns rose, and seven moons orbited, citizens wore bright and shiny auras around their middles.

It had to stop.

We climbed hot dunes, above a crashing glitter blue sea; we dived the Great Barrier Reef and marvelled at a million species of coral; we danced on a wild tropical Hawaiian beach in hula skirts, drinking Kava from half coconut shells; we orbited the earth in silver UFOs with friendly green aliens with a thousand tube fingers like mini elephant trunks that sucked at our skin instead of speaking through their mouths.
And the sermons continued, like thunder rolling across the sky. A storm was coming, that was for sure. Fist on pulpit, eagle eyes, tremulous voice: Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Birds exploded out of the reeds, cawing loudly in fright. Cicadas screeched. A billion frogs croaked, and mosquitoes zinged around my flesh, biting me where I dared not scratch.

‘That tickles.’ Terri wriggled in her seat. And giggled. The sermon came to a screeching halt. Terri hid her face in her hair. I frowned into my Bible.

‘If people find the Word of the Lord amusing,’ Pastor Steve said to the rafters above us, ‘then they should crawl out of this sacred place on their bellies, like serpents.’

The silence was a high snowy mountain in a rushing wind. My fingers were frost bitten. My lips chapped with cold. The high pitched whine rose in my left ear, and my feet were icy.

His blue, blue eyes watching, watching, through his yellow rimmed spectacles. ‘OK at the back there? Let’s continue.’

But thank the Lord: the organ finally struck up the rousing post-sermon hymn and the congregation rose to its feet. Terri smoothed her dress. I held the hymn book open at the wrong place, the thin pages sticking to my fingers as I turned them.

After the service, Terri was hustled out by her parents, but before I could escape, Pastor Steve blocked my way. ‘Jimmy, I’d like to see you at the manse this afternoon. Are you free?’

‘Fright trains screeched in my ears.
It was nothing. It was a routine visit, I told myself. We all took turns at visiting the Pastor for spiritual checkups. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

The manse was a large double storey house on the ridge behind the church.

‘Come in, come in.’ The Pastor’s office was full of natural light, and he sat behind an oak desk, surrounded by bookshelves with bright, modern books with titles like The Corinthian Catastrophe, Fox’s Book of Martyrs etc. He gave me a bone-breaking handshake and a warm smile. ‘Tell me about Terri,’ he said.

‘Who?’

He closed his eyes and then opened them, as if he had sent a quick Instagram prayer to God and received an answer. ‘This has got to stop.’

I reddened.

‘Satan,’ he said, ‘is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And he is a good counterfeiter. He deceives young people into thinking that lust is love, that mere feelings are the real thing. And many a young person has perished in this way.’

Slid a gold edged bible onto the table towards me. ‘I Corinthians chapter 6, verse 18. Read the passage I chose for you today. Aloud, please.’

I cleared my throat. ‘Flee fornication.’

‘Go on.’

‘Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.’

The Pastor had x-ray vision. His eyes could also melt anything in their path. I was a puddle of red shame on the floor.

‘I’m not trying to condemn you, Jimmy. My job is to protect my lost sheep from prowling wolves.’

I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

‘Fornication is a sin against your own body. You understand that? Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.’

I pictured a temple, somewhere in India—dark, winding passages, of high spiralling towers into the tropical sky. Hundreds of birds wheeling around its turrets. Cawing loudly like crows.

‘Sorry.’

He stood behind me. ‘Don’t apologise to me. Apologise to Him whose temple you have defiled.’ He guided me with a hand to the rough floorboards in front of his desk where we kneeled, and he pressed fingers into my skull until it hurt. ‘Begone Satan! Lord, give Jimmy armour to combat the weakness of the flesh, weapons to fight the son of darkness.’

‘Amen.’

I blinked up at him.

‘Imagine a big black marker. A huge black marker, the size of a person, dripping black ink. Paint her from head to toe with it. Blot her out. The images you have saved in your heart of her—black them out. Scribble over her. Cover her with ink.’

I imagined. The marker squeaked as I pressed hard.
'Jimmy, if your eye causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. Do you understand that?'

I nodded.

He stood. Mussed my hair. ‘God bless you, Jimmy. Black her out of your life. Zip her in a shroud. Delete her from your hard drive. Sacrifice her to God. Then He will give you the desires of your heart.’

‘Thank you Pastor Steve.’

Next Sunday I sat as far away from Terri as I could. I could not look her in the eye. Not that I had ever looked her in the eye. Not once.

She glared past me, in bewilderment, in hurt, in scorn. And as she left the service afterwards, her body brushed against me. ‘Coward!’

That night I dreamed of dead bodies floating on the Ganges River, floating past temples made of mud, spattered with bird excrement. Of Easter Island statues, abandoned, toppled in the grass, while the glitter blue sea crashed on the shores of this lonely island. Forlorn birds cawed in alarm, wheeling overhead in large circles.

The following Sunday I sat as far away from Terri as I could. She was hurt, but I could not do this anymore. I scribbled her with the marker, blotted her image from my retina.

At school we learned that the Mississippi delta was an anticlimax of a river that silted up at the end, went underground, flooded all marshy and sticky with reeds growing in the estuary, with lots of creatures swimming in its yellow slime.

And so it went. I had resisted the devil and he had fled from me. I felt pretty sanctimonious, holy even, and Pastor Steve smiled at me from the pulpit.

But on the third Sunday after Lent, she passed me a note during the meet-and-greet-your-brethren part of the service.

Kitchen. After service. Parents have to talk to Pastor S. We have ten minutes max.

Ignore it. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. I tore the note into shreds throughout the service, each word, until it was a million little pieces of dandruff.

But after the service, there was no escape. Terri was waiting for me. She pushed me to the back of the church kitchen, amongst the boxes and the cupboard and closets.

‘Hi, Terri.’

‘Hi.’

‘Sorry,’ I said.

‘Sure you are.’

‘We’re leaving the country tomorrow,’ she said.

‘Leaving?’

‘You’ll never see me again from tomorrow. Are you happy about that?’ She pressed herself against me, and guided my hand under her skirt.

We fumbled in the pantry amidst stale chocolate chip cookies and cakes under doilies and large urns of water heating up for tea. We didn’t take off any clothes, just…

A black night sky enveloped me and pin prick coloured stars fizzed at my brain. I smelled burnt rice and gas.

There was not much to see, and for me not much to feel except terror, pain and dizzy weightlessness that made my whole body spin into the far reaches of space. Terri winced, clawed, and breathed much too loud, as if she were suffering a stroke, but we both got through it.

‘Jesus,’ she said. ‘Christ.’

And then we smoothed down clothes, pulled up pants, straightened hair. We didn’t even talk to each other. We walked out the back door onto the lawn where trestle tables piled with cakes were waiting for us. Terri’s parents whisked her away by car, and I was left with a thumping heart. I looked up and saw, through a pane of glass into the office, the eyes of Pastor Steve, watching, watching, watching.

It seems that tales of corrupt politicians, travel reviews, and celebrity selfies are not just fodder for Sunday newspapers. Instead, they provide astute insight into how the media portrays consumption in the context of the global south. Through a number of case studies spanning social media to slum tourists, Mehita Iqani’s *Consumption, Media and the Global South* (2016) calls for a refocusing of consumption research to include the majority of the world’s population.

Based at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, Iqani has written extensively on consumer culture and the media in the past, and now broadens her focus to include a number of different countries and media texts. The crux of her analysis is that, for better or worse, globalisation and the media are inextricably linked—as are consumption and the media. As a result, western values of consumption have never been more visible, regardless of where you are in the world; but what does that mean for the millions of people who are excluded from these narratives? Deprivation and excess exist side-by-side; those trapped in poverty are overtly exposed to materialism, consumer culture and individualistic principles through an increasingly globalised media. Iqani explores the consequences of this through a number of case studies based in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The cases include an analysis of slum tour reviews on Tripadvisor, exploring the portrayal of Chinese and South African so-called ‘yuppies’ in documentary films, examining media attitudes towards the spending habits of corrupt politicians, and deconstructing the Instagram selfies of black celebrities in Africa and Brazil.

The standout is the first case, which deals with the consumption of poverty by outsiders through the analysis of Tripadvisor reviews of slum tours in Mumbai, Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro. The chapter is a must-read for those who have wondered about the ethics of such practices. While it is evident that the author has some reservations about slum tourism, the topic is discussed in a nuanced, even-handed manner. The author invokes Paulo Freire’s (2000) notion of ‘conscientisation’ when discussing the ‘eye-opening’ experiences of the tourists. The reviews wax lyrical about the ‘happy, carefree inhabitants’, how ‘humbling’ the experience was and, problematically, the ‘value for money’. The TripAdvisor reviewers are treated with empathy and respect, despite the chapter’s scathing conclusion. Iqani refers to the tours as a ‘neoliberal commoditisation of poverty’ that ignores the fact that ‘people are not “stricken” with poverty; that poverty was produced’ by the same system that allows these tourists the privilege of global travel (2016: 83). This case represents the ideal introduction to how consumption can be used to explore issues of poverty and inequality because, as Iqani summarises: ‘No question of equality is ever only a matter of principle, philosophy, ideology or rights. It is always a matter of who has what and who does not’ (2016: 16).

While the initial contextualising chapters may hold more interest for those with specialised knowledge, the cases themselves are colourful and thought-provoking. Each case flows seamlessly through the more procedural aspects and paints a descriptive portrait of the subjects and the chosen form of media. This is particularly impressive in the case about celebrity selfies: the images themselves are not featured in the book due to copyright restrictions so the chapter relies on a written description. Fortunately, Iqani’s writing style is accessible and engaging, a must when tackling a topic like consumption.

The only shortcoming of this book is the limited scope of each of the cases. Unfortunately, this is a drawback that seems to be reinforced in the mind of the reader with each new chapter. The author is quick to acknowledge this shortcoming, explaining that the case studies were in no way representative or aimed at generalisation, but rather should be considered a catalyst for further discussion. While this has the potential to somewhat limit the book’s appeal for specialised scholars, it does make for a more palatable read which is more accessible to a broader audience.

*Consumption, Media and the Global South* will appeal to those with a general interest in consumption and economics, and would also serve as an interesting counterpoint for those just starting their studies in the area. As demonstrated throughout the various case studies, consumption should not just be of relevance to economists, but to media scholars and anthropologists as well. It is a field with far-reaching implications: Consumption, Media and the Global South serves as a solid starting point for further research, and also provides a compelling argument for the realignment of consumption studies to focus on the whole world, not just the one we most often see in the media.

**References**


Author: Bridget Backhaus, RMIT

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This is a fascinating collection of essays examining the political and financial roles, and thence, the international impact of diasporas (emigrants who have settled far from their original homelands, forming new localised ethnic communities). It is highly recommended for those who continue to focus on war as the exclusive concern of sovereign states.

The research project on which the book is based was jointly sponsored by the United Nations University and the United States Institute of Peace. Each of the contributors,
already known as experts in their field, was asked to answer the question “Was the particular diaspora you studied a peace-wrecker or a peace-maker?” Clearly, the sponsors hoped to find the balance tipping towards peace rather than conflict, but the detailed findings belie their hopes. It repeatedly emerges that it is easier to mobilise emigrants to support the armed fight for the cause, especially where independence and the creation of a new state is the goal, than to work towards a more nebulous plan for peace within existing borders.

The book is arranged as a collection of thirteen chapters by different authors: three dealing with general issues relating to diasporas and conflict and ten detailing the conflict-related roles of the diasporas of Israel, Palestine, Armenia, Colombia, Cuba, Sri Lanka, Kurdish Iraq, Croatia, Eritrea and Cambodia. They have in common a tapestry of intriguing stories of how real life politics are played out on a cross-continental stage. In almost all cases it emerges that the role of the diasporas has been to verge more strongly towards war than peace.

The Croatian chapter, by Zlatko Skrbis of the University of Queensland, tries to present a nuanced case to the effect that overseas Croatians are all for peace—provided that this peace was with an independent state of Croatia. However, the neutral reader would probably score the exiled Croats as 9 out of 10 on a bellicosity scale (including the Australian Croats) on the basis of the well-researched evidence presented by Skrbis himself. Indeed, one issue that emerges is the understandable difficulty of finding a member of a given diaspora who can be balanced and neutral in writing about the actions of their fellow diaspora members. Conversely, outsiders are frequently regarded with suspicion by the diaspora members. Such outsiders tend to lack the passion to follow up in obscure ethnic newspapers and media on the endless minutiae which makes up ‘the bigger picture’. Often there is also a paucity of clear evidence about the roles which less high profile diasporas play. In many cases, such as the Kurds and the Eritreans, it is not known how many members of the diaspora there are. Even less has been documented of how much they have contributed in financial support to their fellow countrymen at home, or what proportion of such support has been devoted to the purchase of armaments.

The authors of these case studies have generally excelled in assembling whatever evidence is available, and spiced them with vignettes of particular personalities and incidents. They have also furnished each chapter with detailed notes, and combined forces to deliver an invaluable twenty-page combined bibliography at the book’s conclusion. Inevitably, some chapters are more satisfying than others. The changing commitments of the Jewish diaspora are too complex to be covered in some twenty pages, and the study of the Armenian diaspora and the Karabagh conflict since 1988—although very revealing—raises the question as to whether there is still such a thing as an Armenian diaspora.

The editors are certainly correct in arguing that each diaspora contains members with differing levels of interest and commitment to what happens at home. Not everyone regards the homeland as more important than their new land of opportunity, although, those who regard themselves as exiles or alternative governments-in-waiting clearly get more publicity than those who wish to forget the miseries of the past. Indeed, one important distinguishing factor is the extent to which diasporas have a vision for the future: many Palestinians want to go back to 1945 or earlier; the Cuban exiles are still fighting to return to 1958. The doubly unfortunate Kurds face a strange world in which the West sees Kurdish nationalism as a good thing in Iraq, but a bad one in Turkey. The Colombian diaspora are often disengaged from their homeland, partly because they are trying to avoid the evil repute of their fellow nationals, and partly because those fighting at home have more reliable, if illegal, sources of finance.

Overall, the book is more persuasive in arguing that not all members of all waves of diasporas around the world are deeply concerned with events at home than it is putting forward a strong claim for the effective engagement in peace making of diasporic movements. In part, this is simply because of an evidentiary problem: it is easier to find evidence of gun purchases than it is of successful support to peace-making. But it is also because of the inherent nature of the lives of diasporas, who have the luxury of being able to nurse grievances without needing to put their lives on the line to defend their often misplaced ideals.

This is certainly recommended as a good, informative and lively read even if, in the nature of things, it will rapidly become more of a historical document than a series of current investigations. Indeed, many of the case studies represent unfinished stories which leave the reader eager to find out what happens next.

Author: Helen Ware Professor, International Agency Leadership, University of New England
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