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SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES

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**A
WORLD
IN
CRISIS**

There are confronting images in this issue 'A World in Crisis'. Many are distressing depicting the atrocities inflicted on Gaza and Ukraine. As we begin 2024 hoping for better outcomes globally than in 2023, further escalation of the war in Gaza has put the world on edge. I felt it important for the design of the cover to depict a less challenging image than those shown in this issue and chose a photograph taken by Brendan Hoffman, taken in 2023 in Ukraine during the Russian incursion.

Photojournalists Brendan Hoffman and Oksana Parafeniuk have been photographing the war in Ukraine since 2014 and have amassed a plethora of images depicting the lives of the Ukrainian people under Russian bombs and missiles. In their interview Brendan and Oksana remark that people seem unfazed by missile attacks, but at the same time are suffering, although occasionally life in Kyiv can seem normal. The photograph taken by Brendan Hoffman on the front cover captured:

Coloured smoke from signal flares obscures the independence monument in the centre of Maidan Nezalezhnosti, or Independence Square, during a rally and march held by family members and other supporters of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians being held prisoner by Russia or who have gone missing on Saturday, January 14, 2023 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Many of the participants urged Ukraine and Russia to come to an agreement to trade all the prisoners being held on both sides.

Acknowledgements:

Editorial assistant: Michael Buky, mcbuky@gmail.com

Proof reader: Jane Todd, janeedit@gmail.com

Web master: Daniel Vagg

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EDITORIAL CONTACTS

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Enquiries
Debra Livingston
debra@socialalternatives.com

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

Bronwyn Stevens
Bronwyn@socialalternatives.com

CO-ORDINATING EDITOR

Bronwyn Stevens
Bronwyn@socialalternatives.com

SHORT STORY EDITOR

Thu Hoang
hoang_ngoc_thu@yahoo.com.au

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

Loretta Bowshall-Freeman
lbowshall.freeman@gmail.com

POETRY EDITOR

Aidan Coleman
aidan.coleman@adelaide.edu.au

COVER DESIGN, DESKTOP PUBLISHING AND ART DIRECTION

Debra Livingston
debra@socialalternatives.com

WEBSITE

Debra Livingston and Julie Matthews
debra@socialalternatives.com

Social Alternatives

Social Alternatives is an independent, quarterly refereed journal which aims to promote public debate, commentary and dialogue about contemporary social, political, economic and environmental issues.

Social Alternatives analyses, critiques and reviews contemporary social issues and problems. The journal seeks to generate insight, knowledge and understanding of our contemporary circumstances in order to determine local, national and global implications. We are committed to the principles of social justice and to creating spaces of dialogue intended to stimulate social alternatives to current conditions. *Social Alternatives* values the capacity of intellectual and artistic endeavour to prompt imaginative solutions and alternatives and publishes refereed articles, review essays, commentaries and book reviews as well as short stories, poems, images and cartoons.

The journal has grappled with matters of contemporary concern for four decades, publishing articles and themed issues on topics such as peace and conflict, racism, Indigenous rights, social justice, human rights, inequality and the environment. Please show your support by subscribing to the journal. For other enquiries please contact a member of the Editorial Collective.

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Submissions of articles, commentaries, reviews and fictional works are subject to double blind peer review and should be emailed to the general article editor. Authors are encouraged to consider and reference papers previously published in *Social Alternatives* to promote ongoing discussion. Submissions should be double-spaced with page numbers on the bottom right. Academic articles should be approximately 3,000-5,000 words, commentaries and review essays between 800 to 1,500 words, book reviews 800 words, short stories 1,000 words and poetry up to 25 lines. Submissions must include:

- copyright release form
- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

Please use Australian/English spelling and follow Harvard referencing. Submit tables, graphs, pictures and diagrams on separate pages. Remove in-text references identifying authors and replace with [name removed for the review process].

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

A World in Crisis

BRONWYN STEVENS AND DEBRA LIVINGSTON

As 2024 begins the world is beset with a series of crises. A refugee crisis continues to engulf advanced nations from Europe to the USA and to Australia as millions risk death and disaster to flee war and poverty. US competition with China edges closer to confrontation and through the AUKUS agreement Australia has been pulled even closer to a USA whose own stability is looking increasingly fragile. Wars in Gaza and Ukraine pose a particular threat to world peace and stability. Climate change continues to loom over the globe with higher temperatures, more unstable weather patterns and catastrophic rain events.

This issue of *Social Alternatives* addresses some aspects of these crises. Australia has faced a refugee crisis for some years, smaller than Europe and the United States but substantial enough to become a major political issue. Solutions have included draconian policies such as boat turn-backs, offshore detention, temporary visas and indefinite detention. Most recently, political drama was sparked when the High Court ruled indefinite detention illegal and ordered the release of affected refugees – those who were stateless or had been released from prison but could not be returned to their country of origin. As moral panic was whipped up by the opposition the government introduced harsh restrictions initially to be applied to all irrespective of the reason they were in indefinite detention. Despite the ongoing harshness of government responses many in the Australian community have rallied to support refugees by providing basic necessities, educational assistance and supporting creative endeavours. One such initiative is 'the Ballina Region for Refugees Annual Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize.' This issue contains a brief history of the prize, the report of the judge Renee Pettitt-Schipp and the winning entries.

In response to China's expanded military capacity and greater naval reach into the Pacific Australia has drawn even closer to the United States through its participation in the AUKUS alliance. The terms and commitments of this agreement have received scant critical appraisal by both major political parties, the mainstream media and pro US think tanks. In his article 'An Unworkable Pact? The Problems with AUKUS' Binoy Kampmark examines the AUKUS agreement, the implications of its terms and potential impediments to its implementation. These include the difficulties Australia will face in acquiring, constructing and managing a fleet of nuclear submarines with its limited experience in nuclear technology. He then considers the implications of the alliance and some of the commitments Australia has made to the USA as part of the agreement. These include most worryingly

the potential threat to Australian sovereignty. Kampmark concludes with an examination of the problems that will be caused by the handling and storing of the nuclear waste associated with the submarines which will be especially challenging given Australia's failure so far to find a storage site for even the low-level nuclear waste currently produced in Australia.

The war in Gaza is becoming a major flashpoint for international confrontation. The conflagration that erupted on October 7 has sparked reverberations around the world. The Netanyahu Government was already under pressure in Israel over judicial reforms seen by some as an attack on Israeli democracy. Its failure to intercept intelligence and prevent the attack put it under further domestic pressure. The Netanyahu Government responded with a full-scale assault on Gaza. Initial sympathy for Israel began to evaporate as its assault appeared to make little effort to protect civilians who are the majority of the now 27,000 plus Gazans killed. These casualties have been disproportionately women and children. Nor has the mass assault on Gaza attained the release of the hostages. They remain in deadly peril, not only from their HAMAS captors but from Israeli bombs, missiles and bullets.

The death and destruction wrought in Gaza has seen attempts at the international level to restrain what many see as Israel's disproportionate response. Two General Assembly Resolutions and orders from the International Court of Justice have so far failed to stop the assault on Gaza's civilians. The conflict has spread to the West Bank where settler attacks on Palestinians – killings and dispossessions – have increased so dramatically that President Biden has announced sanctions on Israeli settlers attacking Palestinians and peace protesters. Conflict has expanded beyond Israel and Gaza, initially from Houthi attacks on vessels transiting the Red Sea and blocking a major trade route. The US and UK responded with targeted attacks on Houthi bases. The danger of a direct Iran-US clash was increased by an attack on a US base in Jordan that killed and injured several US military personnel. The US responded with eighty-five hits on the bases of Iran's Revolutionary guards and their allies in Syria and Iraq with more attacks threatened.

This issue contains three pieces relating to the current war in Gaza, 'An Overview of the War in Gaza' is followed by a blank verse response to initial reporting of the

Hamas attack that implied that war in Gaza only began on 7 October. Entitled 'To Forget' it reminds us of the tragic history of the Palestinians since 1947. This issue also presents an article about, and a gallery of images from a Palestinian Photojournalist, Mohammed Zaanoun's Snapshot of Life in Gaza.

Even though Gaza-based photo-journalist Mohammed Zaanoun was seriously wounded early in his career he continues to document everyday life in Gaza. His images dramatically illustrate the scope of destruction impacting every aspect of people's lives under the Israeli offensive.

Another war, the war in Ukraine, is causing apprehension around the world with its potential for confrontation between nuclear armed powers. From 2014 when a western oriented government came to power in Ukraine, Putin's Russia has been involved in conflict in Ukraine, first supporting the pro-Russian separatists in border regions and then invading the Crimea. Alarm increased significantly after Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war drags on into its second year with stalemated WW1 style trench warfare on the eastern border. A major assault on Kyiv was repelled but Ukrainian cities and towns continue to suffer attacks from Russian bombs and missiles. Civilians and civilian infrastructure are regularly targeted, millions are displaced. The Ukrainian resistance so discounted by Putin foiled a full-scale invasion and is now launching Ukrainian-made drones that are demolishing Russian military platforms and hitting infrastructure deep into Russia. But Ukraine faces enormous obstacles in repelling an enemy so much larger in population and resources and the suffering and destruction continue. Casualties on both sides are enormous.

For this issue Debra Livingston arranged an interview and a picture gallery by Brendan Hoffman and Oksana Parafeniuk, 'Images of War: Ukraine' which gives some context to the war and the lives of the photojournalists featured. It also contains an impressive photo-gallery of images of the war in Ukraine and the impact it is having on the Ukrainian people. Brendan and Oksana have been photographing the war, and civilian life surrounding it, since its early days in April 2014. Their gallery of photographs 'emphasise the inherent absurdity of armed conflict: the shock of the unimaginable juxtaposed with the utterly mundane' (Hoffman 2022).

The final article in this themed edition on the World in Crisis turns to the impact of climate change and its interaction with policy shortcomings. As 2023 progressed, the validity of the dire prediction made by climate scientists decades ago were on display as floods began to engulf large areas of eastern Australia. Morag Cook examines the devastating 2022 floods in Lismore and critiques policy responses to previous

floods in her article 'Lismore Floods, Policy Failure, and Climate Change: The Need for Political Ecology in Policy Learning'. She argues that the scale of the disaster was exacerbated by both the impact of climate change and policy failures in previous responses to floods in the region. Human factors had been omitted in previous evaluations and policy formulation. She argues that applying the theoretical lens of political ecology thus incorporating human factors would expose policy failures and provide better policy learning to guide future policies.

Reference

Hoffman B. 2022 'The Sky Is Blue but the Sun Isn't Shining' <https://www.brendanhoffman.com/war-in-ukraine-1> (accessed 15/01/2023).

Authors

Bronwyn Stevens has published on Australian politics and public policy and the intersection between Australian and international relations. She is currently Coordinating Editor of *Social Alternatives*.

Dr Debra Livingston is a photo-media artist, and lectured in photography at the Queensland College of Art and the University of the Sunshine Coast. Her work is presented in solo and collaborative exhibitions locally and internationally in private and public collections.

POETRY AUTHORS

Michael Farrell is originally from Bombala, NSW, and has lived in Melbourne since 1990. Michael's books include *Googlecholia* (Giramondo), *Writing Australian Unsettlement: Modes of Poetic Invention 1796-1945* (Palgrave Macmillan), and the edited volume, *Ashbery Mode* (TinFish).

Mitchell Welch is a writer, editor and freelance communications consultant with an interest in music and visual/photographic art. His work has appeared in a range of journals and anthologies including *Antipodes*, *Arena Magazine*, *Arena Quarterly*, *The Australian Poetry Journal*, *The Best of Australian Poems 2022*, *Cordite*, *Meanjin*, *The Medical Journal of Australia*, *Overland*, *Rabbit*, *Southerly* and *TEXT*.

B. R. Dionysius was founding Director of the Queensland Poetry Festival. He has published nine collections of poetry, teaches English, lives in Brisbane and in his spare time watches birds.

Ken Bolton's most recent book, *A Pirate Life*, was published by Cordite this April, just weeks after *A Double Act*, the selected collaborations of his and John Jenkins', appeared from Puncher and Wattmann.

Dennis Haskell is the author of 9 collections of poetry, the most recent *And Yet...* (WA Poets Publishing, 2020).

Cath Kenneally is a writer and enthusiastic swimmer. She lives in Adelaide.

Andrew Leggett is an author and editor of poetry, fiction, interdisciplinary academic papers and songs. His third collection of poetry, *Losing Touch*, was published in 2022 by Ginninderra Press, where his fiction collection *In Dreams and Other Stories* has also recently been accepted for publication.

The Ballina Region for Refugees Annual Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize

Social Alternatives is pleased to be associated with the Ballina Region for Refugees (BR4R) annual poetry prize for another year. The BR4R is a community run volunteer organisation that supports refugees in regional Australia. As Coleman explains in Social Alternatives Issue 40: 3 'Poetry to the Rescue' 2021,

BR4R organises street rallies, vigils, public talks and letter-writing campaigns to raise awareness of the plight of refugees. The group hosts a homestay program and provides financial and material assistance for refugees and those seeking asylum both in on-shore and off-shore detention and in the community. One of the group's key aims is to support refugees to settle in regional Australia, including the provision of housing, education, employment, access to social services, and social integration (Coleman 2021: 4).

Their annual Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize celebrates the positive contributions that refugees make to our communities. Every day millions of people globally embark on dangerous journeys to find safety and freedom. The poetry competition acknowledges the circumstances that forced asylum seekers to flee their homelands and request refuge in Australia. It highlights poems that consider the experiences, aspirations and hopes of refugees and asylum seekers looking for a home in which they can build new, meaningful, and safe lives (BR4R 2023).

The competition accepts poetry from anyone in the community but poems from refugees and asylum seekers themselves are especially welcome. The 2023 BR4R Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize focuses on the theme of *Finding Freedom*. Cash prizes were enabled by donations from Christine Ahearn and a bequest from Louise Griffith. Prizes are awarded to the first, second, and third placed entries. There are also categories for a poem from a refugee or asylum seeker and from someone under 18 years old. The winning entries for 2023 are published in this issue of *Social Alternatives* along with the Judge's report.

Judge's Report – BR4R Seeking Asylum Poetry Prize (2023)

RENEÉ PETTITT-SCHIPP

I would like to thank Bill Boyd and everyone at Ballina Region for Refugees for the excellent, ongoing work they do, raising public awareness of refugee people's experiences. As a poet, I especially appreciate the use of creative engagement as a way to encourage Australians to expand their empathic imaginations. Poetry has a striking way of cutting through to the 'heart' of the matter, overriding dualistic ways of thinking about each other; the everyday 'us' and 'them' habits of our thought patterns. To everybody who entered the award, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks for taking the time to imagine the world from another person's perspective, and to the refugee entrants, thank you for your courage and willingness to share your experiences publicly. My hope is that this competition (in both the writing and reading of the works) has created many small bridges between ourselves and the world, connecting us more intimately to one another.

It was wonderful to see the number of entries received; there were around one hundred poems submitted to the award. When approaching the poems, I could not help but bring my own lens of working within

Australia's detention system. Those poems that spoke of both the suffering and resilience of refugee people really resonated with me. I was also looking for works that avoided a predictable rhyming scheme. The most striking poems were those that really captured the shining humanity of many refugee people, poems that saw being a 'refugee' as an expression of only one aspect of a fuller personhood. It was this shimmering humanity that I witnessed in the winning poem, 'Meteor Shower' – even the title suggests to us that this work may resist what we expect from a poem about people fleeing violence and war. 'Meteor Shower' weaves together rain, the cosmos and the domestic in a beautiful rhythm of leaving and returning; the speaker leaves things of beauty that spoke of home, only to find them once again reinvented, from bright pyramids of fruit to luminous bedroom rugs. Some lines were so striking (*mum traces the golden moon with a careful finger, so as not to displace it*) I had to check and double-check that the entrant was also in the under eighteen section!

I once read that poetry 'breaks the habits of words', and it was this kind of fresh imagery that I was searching for as I read through the many entries. In 'Small fragments of Seeking Deliverance', the work is ordered into stanzas that begin with the repeated pattern of a question, inviting us to a new reckoning with ideas of 'home' (that skillfully avoids cliché). Each section invites us to a different part of the globe, culminating in the striking final stanza set in Darwin: *Bare feet, plastic bag,/ Long grasser looking for shelter, /In another Country.* 'Jar and Light', by contrast, is organised into six stanzas that capture a former life squeezed into the suffocating space of a detention centre (*the room's a jar/ where we breathe/ lidded months*) where one's own future is written by another *behind reinforced glass... in Times New Roman* and hope is carried like *a clot in the gut*. In the last stanza the first steps toward freedom are finally taken, but hesitantly, as the speaker finds a new voice in a strange land, in the wonderfully understated last lines: *Intimate speech/ broaches new accents.*

In the under eighteen category, I was deeply moved by the work, 'It's going to be okay'; it broke my heart each time I read it. The poet does not tell me as the reader how to think, but lets me witness the painful tension between the speaker's memory of their mother's words (*That is what she had said./ That all would be fine*) and the reader's overwhelming experience that everything is not fine (*the unerasable memory/ of my past... to forget/ to live on*). The unresolved tension in this poem appears to mirror the unresolved conflict between what the speaker's mother wishes for her daughter or son, and the reality of the speaker's experience. This poem stayed with me for some time.

The winning award in the refugee category went to the poem 'Trap'. This poem stood out in the way the speaker acutely identifies with the natural world as a result of their own suffering. This poem also 'breaks the habits of words' in the wonderful couplet, '*Sitting, I have been waiting for this moment for years,/ to dress up in my ironed clothes*'. Here again we read the tension between the speaker's will to enter their new life while they are haunted by memories of the past, even when witnessing scenes normally associated with beauty (*Oh God! What does the butterfly experience in this moment?*) We are not reassured that everything will resolve at the end of the poem, yet the reader feels that the speaker's identification with the natural world carves out a fullness in him or her, an openness to all that is good and difficult in the world.

Thank you once again to everyone who entered the award and congratulations to all of the finalists. May you long continue to bring your craft and compassion to the world!

Overall First Prize: Meteor Shower

i.

When it rains the / rain people come out. Beautiful / calliope, boats singing on the /
shore when it rains / it pours, maelstrom on the sky a star / comes crashing down. /
Then another and the stars keep / raining down like a / red meteor shower / smashing
this life / losing my glow. Smashes / this poem with / nowhere to go.

ii.

When it rains we / leave home, fire and deadly / smoke of persecution on our heels /
months of old and / fresh blood in our mouths / salt builds like quicksand on our / skin
we wear the wind / for warmth / my mother's name worn out like persian rugs from
stepping / over. Dank, noxious scent / makes a new roof smell old and safe / for a
while, getting used to sleeping and eating in shoebox portions / then dancing, singing
in sixes. Learning / to build myself up like earth / bursting from the shadows / and into
orbit. Guy on corner / peddling baubles of fruit I had never seen / so bright, like stars.
Pears / turn to pyramids at home / home long battled and sought.

iii.

At home I see rain / sluice down ghostly terraces and waterfall over / this palm sized
window over my bed. Next to me mum traces the golden moon with a careful finger,
so as to not displace it. / I watch and the younger ones not yet asleep squirm over
with half lids, keeping their elbows tucked in the tight room. / It smokes and quivers,
lighting our faces with warm glow, gentle / starlight, provides the quiet harmonics for
slow eyes to slumber. Fruit / glitters on the corner like jewels, and after months we
have this beautiful new rug that flares under the bed like a kaleidoscope / even in the
dark.

SELINA DECARLO

Overall Second Prize: Jar and Light

1.

The room's a jar
where we breathe
lidded months,
fractious, gasping.

2.

In squeezing memory
streets and buildings
we used to inhabit
are hallucinations—
flowers vining
our prickling play,
and chants at festivals
washing on skin
as clammy humidity.

3.

We can't live within
insistent probings
of 'name' and 'identity'
as our bodies discard
their closest places,
and though language would stand
apart from paperwork
the airless words
won't translate,
curling and shrinking.
Behind reinforced glass
our futures are written
in Times New Roman.

4.

We're haunted by shreds
of implosive memory,
soldiers running
through sleeping villages—
shouts, arrests,
strafing bullets.
Trekking for days
on a valley floor
below a grey snowline,
we carried hope
like a clot in the gut.

5.

We've counted days
by scoring brickwork—
and still we're counting.

Time hangs like a shirt
on razor wire.

6.

At last, a meander
of roads and dry wind
where our children's names
catch at branches.
Our language crowds
doubtful mouths
as some of us scuff
the turning dust
with hesitant steps.
Intimate speech
broaches new accents.

PAUL HETHERINGTON

Overall Third Prize: Small Fragments of Seeking Deliverance

What emancipation is there in a dusty apartment block
in Durban,
From a village, from violence to the north,
With no hands, no home,
You found you were an artist,
Creating an escape.

What do you sing for your supper on a cobblestone
street in Dublin,
Carrying the past, in the voice of a gypsy child,
Dirty face, strong eyes,
His sister said it's from Romania,
And that they were hungry.

What joy can be felt perched in the high Himalayan air
of Darjeeling,
Far from the familiar peaks that filled your horizon,
Overpass, not under,
The Dalai Lama on the wall,
While threads come together.

What direction are you headed under storm clouds in
Darwin,
Not back to community, back to crumbling walls,
Bare feet, plastic bag,
Long grasser looking for shelter,
In another Country.

TROY WALSH

Under 18 years Old First Prize: It's going to be okay

My mother's
Voice rings through my head,
The image of her back so vividly
Did it remind me
Of the past I used to know.

I don't think I remember
Anymore
The place I used to call home.
Or the home I used to know.

What is a home?

Hiding below the dark,
Pungent smell of fear,
The haunting shadow of life.
Was that my home?

I have been held
Hostage by my own country,
Traitor by my own blood.

But that is all behind me.

The unerasable memory of my
Past, I am free now

That is what she had said.
That all would be fine.
To forget.
To live on.

YUNA CHO

Refugee and Asylum Seeker Prize: Trap

I sit beside a wooden window, feeling old,
listening to the rusty squeak of a door hinge
and watching a beautiful butterfly fly by
bringing a message of freedom.

Sitting, I have been waiting for this moment for years,
to dress up in my ironed clothes.

Suddenly, the butterfly disappears in front of my eye
and searching the sky, I spy
a black and ugly spider dancing,
dancing towards its web.

The good-message butterfly is trapped,
fluttering for its freedom.

Oh God! What does the butterfly experience in this
moment?

Its death is in the hands of that blackface spider.

My heart trembles in my chest with horror
and tears fly from my eyes.

I well understand the pain of that butterfly—
I too have been trapped in my cage for years.

Oh God! I do not want this message of freedom.
Let it go! Release the butterfly from the web ...

MOHAMMAD ALI MALEKI

An Unworkable Pact? The Problems with AUKUS

BINOY KAMPMARK

The following article considers the implications of the AUKUS security pact for Australia, noting obstacles to implementing the tripartite security alliance involving the deployment of nuclear technology and the expansion of the current US military presence in Australia. The paper argues that the efforts to implement AUKUS in various ways face three fundamental obstacles, thereby challenging Australia's militarisation. The first involves challenges in acquiring a nuclear-propulsion submarine fleet both in terms of constructing a new design and purchasing existing models from the US. The second considers the growing unpopularity of AUKUS and efforts to militarise and garrison Australia as a US satellite. The third considers the complexities and challenges of storing nuclear waste arising from the vessels. To that end, the paper concludes that the objectives of the alliance may prove unworkable on several levels.

KEY WORDS: AUKUS, nuclear submarines, sovereignty, waste storage, activism

Introduction

In his pugnacious 15 March 2023 address to the National Press Club in Canberra, former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating expressed sharp displeasure at the conduct of two ministers of the Albanese government. Both Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles had, he charged, embraced the US military industrial complex without qualification, seeing it as indispensable for Canberra's security in the face of an ascendant China. 'The Albanese Government's complicity in joining with Britain and the United States in a tripartite build of a nuclear submarine for Australia under the AUKUS arrangements represents the worst international decision by an Australian Labor government since the former Labor leader, Billy Hughes, sought to introduce conscription to augment Australian forces in World War One' (Keating 2023).

While Keating expressed dismay at the decision, he could take heart from the political and operational challenges facing the implementation of the agreement. While AUKUS has assumed a degree of mythic status, acquiring the label of being 'too big to fail', the contention may well prove to be false (Childs 2023). To that end, the following discussion examines the AUKUS agreement and the various challenges it faces in being implemented. After considering the available details about the AUKUS agreement and what it entails for Australia, the paper considers three distinct areas that have been, and will continue to be, challenging for its effective implementation. The first lies in the difficulties of submarine acquisition and problems with how such a fleet will operate. The second considers domestic opposition to the measure in Australia, from

the perspective of surrendering sovereignty to an increasingly militarised forward defence posture steered by the United States. Finally, Australia faces a problem to which the Commonwealth has yet to find an answer: identifying a permanent site for nuclear waste storage in the face of a historically successful, robust community campaign.

Commentary at the time pointed to the power pretensions and challenges posed by the People's Republic of China, with its territorial aspirations in the South China Sea and an extensive conventional arms buildup warningly described as the most aggressive since the Second World War. Since then, questions loomed about acquisition, construction and delivery of the nuclear-propelled submarines.

What AUKUS entails

On 15 September 2021, the trilateral security arrangement between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom was announced (White House 2021). What was unusual about it was the promise by two nuclear powers to share nuclear-propulsion technology with a non-nuclear power. Costing in the order of A\$368 billion over three decades, the Royal Australian Navy would receive up to eight nuclear-powered submarines. This constituted a radical departure from Canberra's 2016 Defence Strategy, which envisaged A\$80 million for 12 conventional attack submarines built with the cooperation of the French manufacturer Naval Group (Australian Government 2016). The plan envisages the initial acquisition by the Royal Australian Navy of between

three to five US-manufactured nuclear submarines of the Virginia class, the proviso being that Australian funding will be made to US shipyards to cover any shortfall of submarine construction for the US Navy.

During this time, it is also proposed that the designing and construction of a new submarine dubbed the SSN-AUKUS, building on existing work undertaken by the UK on replacing the Astute-class submarines, will take place. It will be, according to the White House (2023), 'based upon the United Kingdom's next generation SSN design while incorporating cutting edge US submarine technologies, and will be built and deployed by both Australia and the United Kingdom.'

The provision of nuclear technology, dubbed the first pillar, is only one aspect of the AUKUS agreement. The second pillar focuses on the sharing of technology in such fields as artificial intelligence, technological development, and space technology (Jackett 2022).

The agreement comes with another significant proviso: the de facto garrisoning of Australia by US and, to a lesser degree, UK personnel. The Biden administration promises visits by US nuclear submarines to Australia in 2023; Australian personnel joining US crews for reasons of 'training and development', with the UK conducting similar rounds in 2026. The following year, a UK-US 'Submarine Rotational Force-West' (SRF-West) will be established at HMAS Stirling near Perth in Western Australia.

A number of benefits for Australia were touted. The US-funded security thinktank, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, described AUKUS as 'the golden chalice' in furnishing Australia not only with 'a capability exercised by few countries worldwide' – nuclear powered submarines – but 'a seat at the top table in exploring the potential of a range of cutting-edge technologies' (Lyon 2023). Much the same view was expressed by the US-funded United States Studies Centre based at the University of Sydney, with one report stressing the 'transformative potential of AUKUS' in strengthening 'defence innovation and the industrial base of all three countries' (Jackett 2022: 2).

The Prime Minister Anthony Albanese praised the prospect of a burgeoning workforce numbering 20,000 over three decades (Albanese 2023), including 4,000 workers responsible for construction of necessary infrastructure in South Australia's Osborne site; 5,500 workers to build the submarines in the South Australian yard; and 3,000 workers tasked with making improvements to the HMAS Stirling base in Western Australia (Australian Submarine Agency 2023).

The AUKUS announcement received a chorus of approval from a number of industry advocates keen to be part of a newly announced military industrial complex. The Chief Executive of the national employer association Ai Group, Innes Wilcox, praised 'the profound flow-on impacts the AUKUS trilateral security partnership can deliver for Australian industry and supply chains' (Ai Group 2023). It would 'contribute to skills development on a massive scale. Tens of thousands of jobs will eventually be created requiring upskilling as skill sharing among our AUKUS partners' (Ai Group 2023).

Submarine acquisition: a plagued history

The procurement and acquisition of submarines is often costly, cumbersome, and even strategically questionable (Kampmark 2022). That the RAN envisages not only acquiring Virginia-class vessels from the United States, but also a specifically designed and built SSN-AUKUS as part of the agreement utilising a British design with US technology, suggests a remarkable degree of optimism in an industry plagued with cost, construction and delivery problems. Australia's history with submarines, typified by the innumerable problems of the Collins Class program and the tangle of the now terminated SEA 1000 Future Submarine Program with the French Naval Group, leaves little room for optimism. But such problems tend to evaporate before, as Dobell puts it, 'the bipartisan consensus on defence'. It does not take long for that love to quickly transmute to 'agony and angst when we turn to building them' (Dobell 2020).

The Collins Class project, commenced in 1987, was a venture marred by poor planning and organisational dysfunction within the defence establishment, leaving Australia with a more diminished capacity than that provided by the previous Oberon fleet (Georgiou 1999). Even at its finest operational stage, two-thirds of the Australian fleet of six submarines was unable to operate at full capacity. Nor were crews available in sufficient numbers to run the vessels. Yet it still boasts a sentimental following (Yule and Woolner 2008).

The SEA 1000 Future submarine program, envisaging the construction of 12 Shortfin Barracuda Block 1A submarines, was intended to 'deliver a quantum leap in the capability delivered to the Royal Australian Navy and its submarine service by leveraging technology and capabilities developed for nuclear submarines, implemented on a conventional submarine' (Kuper 2020). But the program came to be questioned by an eclectic array of critics, from the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) to Gary Johnson of Submarines for Australia, who noted that the Australian–French contract was based on 'dumbing down a nuclear submarine by removing the whole basis of its superior capability, and

then charging at least twice as much for a far less capable submarine' (Johnson 2020). The ANAO's January 2020 report noted how the Department of Defence was unable 'to demonstrate that its expenditure of \$396 million on design of the Future Submarine has been fully effective in achieving the program's two major design milestones to date' (ANAO 2020).

The problems of cost, timeliness and workforce challenges also remain chronic in submarine construction, even for countries versed in the highly sophisticated technology that accompanies nuclear propulsion. Construction delays were frequent with the US and UK navies regarding the building of their respective Virginia and Astute fleets, notwithstanding their knowledge of nuclear technology and shipbuilding (Dean et al. 2023). Both countries have faced similar impairments in their workforce capabilities, given a lack of constancy in policy. 'As the enthusiasm for nuclear power has waxed and waned, gaps have arisen in both countries' workforces around key competencies' (Dean et al. 2023).

The acquisition of submarines under AUKUS is further complicated by US domestic politics, a feature left largely underexamined in Australian press and political analysis. In December 2022, members of Congress were already keen to impress the Biden administration about concerns that the agreement to furnish the RAN with US nuclear powered vessels posed risk to Washington's own capabilities. A co-authored December 21 letter to President Joe Biden from Democratic Senator Jack Reed and outgoing Republican Senator James Inhofe raised concerns 'about the state of the US submarine industrial base as well as its ability to support the desired AUKUS SSN [nuclear sub] end state.' Current circumstances required 'a sober assessment of the facts to avoid stressing the US submarine industrial base to the breaking point' (Katz 2023).

On 22 May 2023 a Congressional Research Service report outlined with clarity the issues facing US politicians regarding the transfer of the Virginia boats. Should, for instance, Congress 'approve, reject, or modify DOD's AUKUS-related legislative package for the FY2024 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] sent to Congress on May 2, 2023'? (Congressional Research Service 2023: 18). Would the transfer of three to five such boats 'while pursuing the construction of three to five replacement SSNs for the US Navy' have a 'net impact on collective allied deterrence' (Congressional Research Service 2023: 19)? Then came that nagging question: Would Australia unequivocally commit to deploying US-supplied vessels in a conflict with China?

In July 2023, Mississippi Senator Roger Wicker, a ranking member of the Senate Armed Services

Committee, emphasised the requirement for the accelerated production of Virginia-class submarines. 'As it stands, the AUKUS plan would transfer US Virginia-class submarines to a partner nation even before we have met our own Navy's requirements' (Wicker 2023). That same month, twenty-three Republican lawmakers, including Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell, penned a missive to Biden warning that the transfer of the Virginia-class boats would, under the current plan, 'unacceptably weaken the US fleet even as China seeks to expand its military power and influence'. The signatories, in recapitulating Wicker's points, also noted that the production rate would have to lift to 2.5 submarines per year from the current rate of 1.2 per annum. 'The administration and Congress need to be willing to make the necessary investments into the US submarine industrial base that will advance the security of the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom' (Lagrone 2023).

The subsequent passage by Congress of the 2024 NDAA in December 2023 authorised the transfer of three Virginia class submarines to the RAN but also grants considerable benefits to the US military, including the maintenance of US submarines by Australian personnel, and the provision of Australian funds to the US submarine industrial base (Australian Government 2023b).

The legislation, reciprocated by Australian statutes, also subordinates the transfer of 'controlled goods and technology', which can now take place without a license, to the dictates of the US State Department control regime. This notable feature ostensibly freeing Australia from licensing requirements led Bill Greenwalt, a notable figure behind the drafting of US defence procurement rules, to issue a stark warning: 'Whenever it cooperates with the US [Australia] will surrender any sovereign capability it develops to the United States control and bureaucracy.' Australia would get 'nothing except the hope that the US will remove process barriers that will allow the US to essentially steal and control Australian technology faster' (Greene 2023).

Opposing AUKUS in Australia

The broad cathedral of US and Australian strategic opinion extolling the merits of AUKUS is at odds with a growing opposition to the sagacity and value of the agreement to Canberra (Larison 2023). The AUKUS agreement has galvanised an increasingly vocal civil protest movement in Australia and a growing number of voices in parliament questioning the cost and security implications of the project for Australian security and sovereignty. The political spectrum of dissent is considerable: veterans within the governing Australian Labor Party; branches within the ALP itself, and universal

opposition from the Greens, all are expressing concern about the extent Australian territory is being coopted into US strategic calculations in the Indo-Pacific.

The response from the ALP has been telling. While Keating's salvos against AUKUS were largely dismissed by the Albanese government as the angry ruminations of a retired politician entitled to anachronistic opinions, the former prime minister was far from the only Labor stalwart concerned about the pact. Kim Carr, a previous occupant of ministerial positions in industry and defence material, found it 'particularly strange' that Australia was now adopting 'a revamped forward defence strategy'. 'Given the historic patterns that have seen Australia participate in so many regional conflicts since the 1950s, the questions remain as to how our national interest is served by locking Australia into the strategic priorities of the United States for the next 50 years, regardless of regime changes in the United States, the United Kingdom or our national interests' (Carr 2023).

Carr also expressed concerns about the reliability of the security rationale being advanced by Australia's own security and intelligence community for a deeper alliance with the United States. The Iraq War, one based on the acceptance of 'spurious intelligence briefings on weapons of mass destruction', continued to cast a long, oppressive shadow. 'In light of that experience, we know that it pays to reflect critically on what we are being told by security agencies' (Carr 2023).

Former Labour Foreign Minister Gareth Evans was also troubled by a set of questions posed by the security pact. Three sprung to mind: whether the submarines are actually fit for purpose under the program's remit; whether Australia retained genuine sovereignty over the boats in their possession; and, were that not the case, 'whether that loss of agency is a price worth paying for the US security insurance we think we might be buying' (Evans 2023). While accepting the valuable role of nuclear submarines in general defence planning, Evans wondered whether 'the 20 or more sons-of-Collins we could buy for the same price' might be a better investment if the 'primary purpose' of the AUKUS fleet was to guard continental Australia and its Indo-Pacific sea-lanes from possible attack (Evans 2023). Keating went even further, suggesting anywhere between 40 to 50 Collins Class submarines to police the Australian coastline rather than having nuclear powered submarines lying in wait off the Chinese shoreline.

Universal opposition to AUKUS from the Greens has been characterised by regular statements by their defence party spokesman, Senator David Shoebridge. The pact constituted a '\$368 nuclear-powered raid on

public education, health, housing, First nations justice that will starve core services for decades to come' (Shoebridge 2023). As a testament to such concerns, prominent members of the ALP, the Greens and two former Defence personnel – former Chief of the Air Force, Air Marshal Ray Funnell, and former Dep. Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Operation in East Timor, Major General Michael Smith – called for a parliamentary inquiry into AUKUS calling the assumptions behind the pact 'ill-defined', with others 'unsupported by argument or evidence' (Australia Institute 2023).

While the thinktank ecosystem in Australia did sport hearty encouragement for the agreement, most notably the US-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the left-leaning Australia Institute demurred from the unabashedly pro-Washington stance, sceptical about the broader utility of such vessels, suggesting that AUKUS agreement had a large element of 'political theatre' that lacked 'both legal enforceability and a wealth of practical detail'. For Allan Behm, the institute's director of its International & Security Affairs Program, 'The question should be whether strategic policy requires nuclear submarines, not how policy should accommodate them because of their availability' (Behm 2023: 4).

Civil society groups have also been vocal in advocating against implementing AUKUS, many grouped under the auspices of the Australian Anti-AUKUS Coalition. The umbrella association comprises groups as diverse as the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, doctors from the Medical Association for Prevention of War, legal figures from Lawyers for Peace and Sydney Criminal Lawyers, along with various religious bodies (Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, Pax Christi Victoria). The Coalition, according to its statement of principles, makes its opposition clear on several points, including 'the AUKUS military alliance', 'the acquisition and stationing of nuclear-powered submarines and the establishment of new nuclear reactor technical facilities in Australia or the Pacific' and 'foreign military bases and troops on Australian soil and visits by foreign warships likely carrying nuclear weapons' (Australian Anti-AUKUS Coalition 2022). Concerned academics and scholars have also followed suit (China Daily 2023).

Nuclear waste storage: problems of site

Storing nuclear waste arising from functioning reactors has presented insuperable logistical problems for all states with nuclear powered facilities and assets. The World Nuclear Association makes the remarkable point that the nuclear industry has yet to identify a solution to the 'waste problem' (World Nuclear Association 2022). Under the AUKUS security pact, the Commonwealth offered, with little hesitation, to host the resulting high-

level waste that would issue from the future nuclear-propelled submarine fleet. This is no small affair, given the need to dispose of the 'small hatch-back' of spent fuel and 'four-wheel drive' reactor components. As former submariner and Australian senator Rex Patrick writes, 'This needs to be stored in a special facility set up to take waste and store it ... forever. Used fuel requires isolation and containment from the environment for at least 100,000 years' (Patrick 2023a). W.L. Lenneman, who ran the Waste Management Section within the Division of Nuclear Safety and Environmental Protection within the IAEA, noted the 'most distinctive feature' of high-level waste is its need for 'special handling and considerations, such as thick biological shielding and engineered cooling systems' given the 'radioactivity heat load' (Lennemann 1979: 2).

Australia's experience in the field of storing high-level nuclear waste is non-existent. To date, it is confined to the temporary storage of smaller quantities of low-level waste and intermediate-level waste, largely arising from the country's small nuclear medicine industry, the use of radioactive materials in scientific research along with laboratory items (gloves, plastic, paper and filters), and any relevant industrial and agricultural uses. Even with low-level waste, Australian governments have been singularly unable to 'resolve its waste issues despite the tiny amount of material actually involved, and the large and sparsely populated nature of the country' (James et al. 2011: 2).

Despite these limitations, the Australian Defence Department was cavalier in promising 'sophisticated security and safety architecture' around the nuclear-powered submarine program, building 'on our 70-year unblemished track record of operating nuclear facilities and conducting nuclear science activities' (Australian Government 2023a). The department admits that the storage and disposal of such waste and spent fuel will require dedicated facilities and trained personnel, appropriate transport, interim and permanent storage facilities and 'social license earned and sustained with local and regional communities'. To achieve this, the United States and the UK would 'assist Australia in developing this capability, leveraging Australia's decades of safely and securely managing radioactive waste domestically'.

The Australian Defence Department has, to date, been coy about a possible site. To date, Defence Minister Richard Marles has appointed a former Deputy Secretary of Defence Estates, Steve Grzeskowiak, to identify an appropriate site. Costing \$396,000, the measure was an incongruous one, given that the same individual had previously conducted an analysis of over 200

Defence sites in terms of suitability for low-level waste management, finding none to be appropriate (Patrick 2023a).

Domestically, the identification of a nuclear waste repository also promises to remain a contentious issue between the Commonwealth and the various state governments unenthused to host it. State Premiers, wary of community opposition, have readily expressed their reservations about that aspect of the AUKUS undertaking. Queensland promptly declared that 'under no circumstances' would it permit nuclear waste to be stored within its borders. Any nuclear material arising from the agreement, argued the former Victorian Premier Dan Andrews, should 'go where all the jobs are going', namely, South Australia (ABC News 2023).

Western Australia's former Premier Mark McGowan took the view that such a location would have to be 'somewhere remote, somewhere with very good long-term geological structure that doesn't change or move and somewhere that is defence lands'. It followed that the small South Australian site of Woomera would be ideal (Hastie 2023). This view received nodding approval from a former industry and science minister in the Howard government, Nick Minchin. Minchin recalled formidable opposition, largely from the Defence Department, against the Woomera suggestion, given the 'stigma associated with nuclear waste' (Coorey and Tillett 2023). The best way of sidestepping the problem of State disagreement, he argued, would be to locate the facility on Commonwealth land to 'avoid the states playing politics' (Coorey and Tillett 2023). Woomera had, in his words, been 'previously assessed', satisfying such requirements as 'remoteness, stability and space.' It also made good sense given South Australia's status as the country's chief producer of uranium, and the state which will host the assembly site for the proposed SSN-AUKUS submarine.

Nuclear waste storage: community opposition

Ignoring the relevant stigma about storing nuclear waste as Minchin is keen on doing, can come at a considerable cost. Governments at all levels risk legal suits from members of the community unenthusiastic about hosting the National Radioactive Management Waste Facility. Opposition has been successful in a number of instances against site proposals for low-level nuclear waste, notably Woomera itself and Muckaty in the Northern Territory (Power 2016). Much of this, it has been argued in the literature, stems from the Commonwealth's refusal or inability to engage public opposition to such projects in any meaningful and consultative way, thereby investing in 'social license' (Holland 2002; Morsley 2017; Rublee 2023).

Subsequent deliberations for a proposed site recently turned to Napandee near Kimba in South Australia. In 2021, the Coalition Resources Minister Keith Pitt promoted the site as a developmental opportunity, promising 45 permanent local jobs (Lim 2023). An economic assessment impact report by the Commonwealth also concluded that such a project would result in returns of \$95 million to Kimba and the Flinders Ranges in the first three decades (Lim 2023). The means of securing public approval for the venture involved efforts to secure consent via a voluntary nomination process, a process that has been seen as an effort to manufacture consent (Morsley 2017: 81). A local postal ballot was duly held, involving 734 respondents and a favourable return of 62 per cent for the project (Briggs 2019). The vote, however, only extended to local ratepayers, and had the effect of excluding the traditional owners by virtue of them possessing native title.

Opposition to the project was forthcoming from agricultural and indigenous groups. Local farmer Peter Woolford emphasised the broader agricultural and environmental risks of such a storage facility. 'We just can't understand why you would expose this great agricultural industry we have here in grain production to any potential risk at all by having a nuclear waste dump here' (Ward 2023). A legal Federal Court challenge against the Commonwealth's decision was also initiated by the Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC). Barngarla Traditional Owner Harry Dare focused on the ancestral heritage at risk from such a storage site: 'We're actually fighting for a seven sisters and women's dreaming site and we're fighting for a vote in our local governance' (Richards 2023).

The legal argument pivoted less on a matter of cultural significance than the claim of predisposed bias on the part of the resources minister. In the arguments of the plaintiffs, Pitt had already made up his mind that the Napandee site would be used. According to Justice Natalie Charlesworth, Pitt had evinced an 'apprehended bias' and shown a tendency towards 'pre-judgment' in making his decision (Charlesworth 2023). The judge took special note of relevant statements made by the minister and his predecessor Senator Matt Canavan. While Pitt declared Napandee to be the selected site in November 2021, it had already interested Canavan the previous year. '[Pitt's] statements demonstrated unswerving dedication to achieving a factual outcome for the benefit of those persons in Kimba who favoured the facility being located at Napandee, whilst at the same time displaying a dismissive attitude to its key opponent, the Barngarla people' (Charlesworth 2023).

The justice rejected the contention by the Commonwealth that 'a finding of apprehended bias would have the

consequence that ministers responsible for the administration of statutes could never participate in robust political discourse with respect to the subject matter of their statutory powers or with respect to the repeal or amendment of the law'. The court ruling has the effect of making any ministerial decision on selecting an appropriate site for nuclear waste storage, whatever its concentration, vulnerable to successful public interest litigation.

Where this sits in the context of other decisions to store nuclear waste arising from nuclear-powered submarines, notably those from the Submarine Rotational Force-West (SFR-West) based at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia, remains an open question. As the Australian Submarine Agency notes, 'The rotational presence of United Kingdom and United States SSNs in Western Australia as part of the Submarine Rotational Force – West (SRF-West) will provide an opportunity to learn how these vessels operate, including the management of low-level radioactive waste from routine sustainment' (Patrick 2023a). The agency goes on to claim that, 'All low and intermediate radioactive waste will be safely stored at Defence sites in Australia' with the storage facility 'being planned as part of the infrastructure works proposed for HMAS Stirling to support SRF-West' (Patrick 2023a). Doing so effectively circumvents community consultation.

Concluding remarks

This paper has chosen to focus on specific areas of concern that will impair the success of AUKUS. Despite being roundly endorsed by the Anglosphere mandarins centred on Washington, London and Canberra, the neglect by the three powers regarding the formidable obstacles of submarine acquisition and shipbuilding in Australia, ignorance of the limitations imposed by the US Congress, a failure to appreciate the obstacles to storing nuclear waste, and political opposition in Australia, risk making the agreement weak, if not ineffectual. What remains to be seen is how a new US administration will approach the agreement, and whether the increasingly comprehensive seizure of Australian sovereignty by the US military-industrial complex will continue despite the agreement's other failings.

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Author

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge, Senior Lecturer at RMIT University, contributing editor to *CounterPunch* and columnist for the *Mandarin*.

An Overview of the War in Gaza

BRONWYN STEVENS

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a horrific attack on military targets and civilians in Southern Israel. Over 1200 residents of Israel were killed and 248 people taken hostage, 129 of whom still remain missing. This appalling war crime came as a shock to many but the tensions in the region are long-standing. In the wake of revelations that the Nazi holocaust had killed six million Jews a western-dominated United Nations in 1947 acceded to the demands of Jewish Zionists for a homeland in Israel despite the lands having been largely occupied by a majority Palestinian population for centuries. This set the scene for endless conflict between two peoples with conflicting claims to the lands of Palestine. Initial attacks by Arab nations and resistance by Palestinians were defeated and the envisaged Palestinian state did not eventuate. After several wars Israel has become an occupying power in the West Bank and has blockaded the Gaza Strip keeping it under tight control, almost as an 'open air prison'.

Substantial resentment has grown against this occupation but the killing and taking of civilian hostages by Hamas was undoubtedly a war crime. The hostages continue to suffer from the military assault on Gaza as well as the threats from Hamas. The Secretary General of the United Nations has argued that nothing can justify deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians and demanded the immediate release of the hostages (Guterres 2024).

The Israeli response was initially seen as within the bounds of the right to self-defence by many countries. Dealing with an enemy embedded in the civilian population provided a huge challenge but international law requires the protection of civilian populations in war. A massive Israeli military response ensued, destroying civilian houses, apartment buildings, schools, hospitals and farmland as well as people. More than 50% of buildings in Gaza have been severely damaged or destroyed by Israeli bombs and missiles. (Palumbo et al. 2024) Gazans were driven by bombing from the north to purported safe havens in the south, but the bombing followed the fleeing population. There were no safe havens in Gaza nor was there any exit. The borders have been closed. Very few entries or exits have been permitted.

Journalists have not been able to get in and rarely are they able to get out of Gaza. Despite this, reporting on the war has continued from the journalists and photojournalists already in Gaza who file stories when they can. Being a journalist in Gaza is an extremely hazardous occupation. At least 79 journalists have been killed since the Hamas attack 'the biggest single death toll for journalists in a conflict zone for years' (Tharoor 2024).

The death toll in Gaza has reached more than 27,000 and is escalating daily. These casualties are disproportionately women, children and babies. Children are suffering from lack of food and water, lack of shelter, lack of education and lack of safety (UNICEF 2024). Many adults and children are suffering catastrophic injuries. Some die because there are no hospitals or medicines to treat them (Burke 2024). Operations and amputations have to be performed with little or no anaesthetics or antibiotics. Power shortages and lack of food and water are turning Gaza into 'hell on earth' and despite the massive Israeli assault no more hostages have been released. Hamas has not yet been eliminated and the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned that the war would continue for 'many more months' (ABC 2024) and has rejected any peace deal that did not provide complete Israeli victory over Hamas.

Severe criticism has been levelled at the Netanyahu Government for its conduct of the war. Inside Israel the desperate families of the hostages have become increasingly assertive. The Jewish diaspora is also divided over both the failure to secure the release of the hostages, the strategy adopted by the Government and the behavior of some conservative Jewish Organisations. (See Schwartz and Kaiser 2024 for an Australian response).

Efforts by the international community to call for a mandatory cease fire failed in the Security Council when the US vetoed the motion. The General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a cease fire in late

October with 120 countries in support. A motion was again put to the General Assembly on 12 December calling for an 'immediate humanitarian ceasefire', demanding 'all parties comply with their obligations under international law ... with regard to protection of civilians' and demanding 'the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages' (UN 2023). This time 153 nations supported the motion, including Australia who had abstained on the previous motion. However, General Assembly resolutions do not have the force of international law that Security Council Resolutions do.

Another attempt to gain international intervention was undertaken by South Africa who sought rulings from the International Court of Justice on provisional measures 'to take all reasonable measures to prevent genocide', 'to protect against further severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people' to prevent forced displacement, allow adequate food and water, ensure evidence of genocide was preserved and the immediate suspension of Israeli Military operations in the Gaza strip (ICJ 2024: 3). The Israeli response asserted their right to self-defence against an enemy embedded in the civilian population, questioned the jurisdiction of the ICJ and the standing of South Africa to bring the case.

In its judgement the Court considered its jurisdiction under the Genocide Convention, canvassed UN agency reports of the catastrophic situation for civilians in Gaza (ICJ 2024: 17) and examined statements of members of the Israeli Government including those of the Minister for Defence who had 'ordered a complete siege of Gaza and there would be no electricity no food no fuel'... 'I have released all restraints' ... 'We are fighting human animals' 'we will eliminate everything' (ICJ 2024: 17).

The Court concluded that it did have jurisdiction under the Convention and that South Africa did have standing as a party to the convention (ICJ 2024: 12). Fifteen of the seventeen judges, including Court President Donohue from the United States supported the provisional orders. Even Israeli's ad hoc judge supported some of the provisional measures (Reuters 2024). The Court made six orders that Israel must 'take all measures within its power to prevent acts' of genocide; take measures 'to prevent and punish' 'incitement to commit genocide'; 'take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance'; 'take effective measures to prevent the destruction' of evidence of genocide. Lastly, Israel must submit a report to the court on all measures taken to give effect to its Order (ICJ 2024: 23).

In a final example of the inadequacy of international law and the power of the state of Israel over its western allies fifteen well-respected judges of the ICJ who found sufficient evidence to accept jurisdiction in a case alleging genocide against Israel made six orders to Israel. However, these orders while legal are non-enforceable. In contrast, an allegation from Israel that twelve of the many thousands of aid workers employed by the Palestinian relief organisation the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) had participated in the attacks of 7 October has led several countries, including the US and Australia, to suspend aid. These are serious allegations and need to be thoroughly investigated but UNRWA, is the major provider of aid in Gaza so depriving the agency of funds could make famine 'inevitable' (McKernan and Michaelson 2024). UNRWA's head and the Secretary General announced an immediate independent inquiry and dismissed the accused workers. They and other aid agencies' spokespersons have appealed to countries that suspended funding to reinstate it 'to ensure continuity of its vital humanitarian operations' (UN 2024).

The situation in Gaza has continued to deteriorate. On 23 January, the Secretary-General reported on the catastrophic situation continuing in Gaza which included the deaths of 153 UN Aid workers struggling to deliver assistance to Gazans. He continued:

The entire population of Gaza is enduring destruction on a scale and at a speed without parallel in recent history.

Nothing can justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people.

With winter bearing down 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza [struggle] to simply make it through another day without proper shelter, heating, sanitary facilities, food and drinking water (Guterres 2024).

Much of the initial coverage of the 7 October attacks focused on events on that day. Both Israelis and Palestinians have suffered from the endless conflict. A violent reaction from Palestinians was not unpredictable. As the next item 'To Forget' reminds us, the attack, horrific and surely counter-productive as it was, is the culmination of a long history of grievances.

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Author

Bronwyn Stevens has published on Australian politics and public policy and the intersection between Australia and the International arena. Her Masters' thesis covered aspects of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.

Immersion Therapy

Elaine Morgan's *The Descent of Woman*
her counterblast to Desmond Morris
hit me amidst in my malleable twenties

propounding the theory of The Aquatic Ape
us as seagoing primates

proposing a lakeside, estuarine, littoral evolutionary phase

we smart hominids, just down from trees
twigged to the advantages of part-immersion
over the unequal race with those zippy tigers
at a time when our gait was shambling at best

confuse-a-cat, instead, from a short distance offshore
thumb your nose from the safety of chest-deep
life-preserving, enclosing waters

who needs Man the Hunter when women can
gather shorefoods as well or better
who needs hair when you want to swim

we got much better at upright posture, standing
as deep as we could safely get

babies were easy to carry on fatter hips
our breasts ballooned for them

for me this fable never lost its magic

it explains the way we flock to beaches
to stand in the shallows staring out to the horizon
gazing back to the sand

from above, Earth's shorelines
are clotted with two-legged statues
responding to the primordial pull
waterwards

other monkeys aren't swimmers
a zoo orangutan nearly drowned, lately
lugged senseless ashore from its moat
after trying for floating food

Elaine's is a pacific proposal,
washing its hands of
the case for aggression

imagines an interval of calm
a few thousand seaside millennia
an era at the beach
a hiatus before our warlike times

I believe it calls us back
with a still-audible whisper

we answer it when we trudge
a mesmerised horde
to the nearest waterway
kick off our shoes and wade in

CATH KENNEALLY

Enemy Mine

It is quite one thing to wish your enemy dead,
& quite something else again, when those words,
a first draft of a curse; random slip-of-the-tongue
gallops its fateful way back home. He wasn't even
my antagonist for that long. Two years my junior,
I patted the back of his head & wet his hair as he
drank from the water tap; a baptism gone wrong.
My own skull rammed into the toilet wall's cracked
paintjob. It was hot, lunchtime, bitumen blistered
our bare feet. There was nothing much in it, a bit
of bluster; anger evaporated as soon as it touched
the ground like a midday sun-shower, but I got in
a final word. Two weeks later he was over-turned
in a semi-trailer riding shotgun; boy who never got
to fire. 'I hope you die,' was all I'd said in parting.

B. R. DIONYSIUS

CANE TOAD MOAN

The season jumps the starting gun,
springing from the blocks too soon,
from the winter that never was
in this tropical town. The yellow birds
battle sparrows for territory as they build
their nest in the garden bed beyond
my study window. They labour, then lay
their eggs too close to where last year's
snake slid past the sill, the place my
green frog decorates in guano. My lawn
reverberates with cries of 'Barry White!'
from each toad suitor to its mate.
My blue bones rejoice at the tone
of that low down cane toad moan.

ANDREW LEGGETT

The author's paternal grandmother died in a railway goods wagon during the journey to Auschwitz. One son escaped from Buchenwald ending up in the US, another fled with his wife via Shanghai to South America and the author's father became a refugee in the UK. At ten years old the author visited Dachau concentration camp near Munich and vividly remembers the detritus of its inmates' possessions. In 1967 he worked as a volunteer in a kibbutz after the Six Day War.

To Forget

I sit beside a wooden window, feeling old,

To understand Israel it is necessary to forget.

To forget that the land of Israel was previously occupied by Palestinians.

To forget that Jews and Palestinians lived together harmoniously under the Ottomans.

To forget the Balfour Declaration and the fact that, had the Allies not won WWI, Israel in its current location would never have been created.

To forget Israeli terrorism under the British mandate.

To forget the bombing by the Irgun of the King David hotel that left 91 dead.

To forget the hanging by the Irgun of two British army sergeants and the booby trapping of their bodies.

To forget the ethnic cleansing of the 1948 al-Nakba - 'the Catastrophe'.

To forget the massacre at Deir Yassin that left 107 dead men, women and children.

To forget the Lydda Death March when over 400 Palestinians died of whom 170 were massacred in a mosque. The expulsions were ordered and implemented by future Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin.

To forget that the terrorist leader of the Irgun, Menachem Begin, became Israeli PM.

To forget UN Partition Resolution 181 regarding the borders of the Israeli state.

To forget UN Resolution 194 allowing the return of refugees.

To forget UN Resolution 242 from 1967 requiring Israel to pull back to its pre-Six Day War borders.

To forget the ongoing expropriation of Palestinian land outside those borders.

To forget the Israeli-sanctioned massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps with up to 3,500 deaths.

To forget the Geneva Conventions.

To forget that attacking health facilities is ever remotely acceptable, whatever the reason.

To forget that Hamas, in the 1970s, was set up as a religion-based rival to Fatah, encouraged and even funded by Israel and the USA in the belief that it would undermine the authority of the secular Fatah organisation in the West Bank that had emerged from the PLO.

To forget that Netanyahu promoted Hamas.

To forget the ongoing 'administrative detention' without trial of thousands of Palestinians.

To forget that Gaza is the world's largest open-air prison.

To forget that without US support, Israel would have had to strike durable agreements with neighbours and its dispossessed populations.

To forget that an Israeli life is valued more than a Palestinian life.

To forget that in every conflict Palestinian deaths vastly outnumber Israeli deaths.

To forget that Palestinians also have a right to self-defence.

To forget that Israel does not want or to recognise a Palestinian state.

To forget that Israelis are vilifying Palestinians in a similar manner to the way Nazis vilified Jews during the Holocaust.

To forget that a senior member of Likud and recent minister Galit Distal Atbaryan said Israel must invest all its energy 'in one thing: erasing all of Gaza from the face of the Earth'.

To forget that Moshe Feiglin, a former deputy speaker of the Israeli Knesset, called for a 'non-nuclear' Hiroshima.

To forget that Israeli government minister Amichai Eliyahu endorsed using a nuclear bomb against Gaza – and told the Times of Israel that the whole Gaza Strip should be conquered and resettled.

To forget that Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called the people of Gaza (over one million of whom are children) 'human animals', and who ordered a 'complete siege' of Gaza, cutting off water, food, fuel and electricity.

To forget how our collective and selective amnesia encourages the continuation of the status quo and the continuation of conflict.

To forget that both ordinary Palestinians and Israelis want peace, however, land theft and judicial inequity prevent it.

Lest we forget.

MIKE

With acknowledgement to Pearls and Irritations <https://johnmenadue.com/>

Deprecation In Favour Of Weather

'I live in the ghetto', certain guys I know sing, and I hear the word 'ghetto' as an unstable metaphor. How else? Tag me if you have any feedback. Critique is always care, ideally. Care for the song, care for those of Wonder, in this case. But also about the resolute trope of not

Being shut down. My name is Geppetto, I live in a nineteenth-century novel, but my name may be heard in the echo of Pixar's screams. I once carved a box of matches big enough to make a house from, but they set fire to themselves, and burned down the peaches.

The meaning of America, businessmen tell me, is father figure and son figure getting on together. Maybe it is, maybe so. But big brother gets on with no one. Do you have a big brother, one that watches you on TV? That wants to stop oppression forever, just as soon as

They assume total power? A plastic bag slips down a mountainside. I'm not English: they see plastic in the sea. I don't know much about ghetto language, but appreciate it, the novels that go into it, just to make a matchstick. Every time I want to make a comment, though, or touch

Your shoulder, my pencil turns into a finger that, wherever it goes bleeds ink. Perhaps pastoral's a sibling of the ghetto, turning every conversation back to the weather. Weather as an unstable centre that keeps us above the ground that we pretend to settle on, and value.

MICHAEL FARRELL

Palestinian Photojournalist Mohammed Zaanoun's Snapshot of Life in Gaza

DEBRA LIVINGSTON

Introduction

The conflict in Israel and Palestine is beyond comprehension, and for this issue I publish the story of Mohammed Zaanoun, a photojournalist recording the destruction occurring daily in Gaza and showcase a selection of his images from 2023 and 2024. Some of these images have been captured from video on The New Humanitarian website. Others are from his personal website. His images provide a window for the world onto the devastation being wreaked on Gaza. They give people across the globe a view of the life of Palestinians in Gaza and the way they are surviving with the continued bombardment of their homes and towns by the Israeli military. They are heartbreaking images and I am deeply devastated about what is happening in the many countries currently suffering from invasion and war.

Witnessing Israeli Defence Force incursions into Gaza in 2006, the then 20-year-old Palestinian photojournalist Mohammed Zaanoun was shot and seriously injured by shrapnel. It provided the impetus for his future career. He graduated from the Gaza University, majoring in Graphic Design and then became a new recruit at Ma'an news, an independent wire news service in Palestine. After an extended stay in hospital in 2006 Mohammed, became a freelance photojournalist and has dedicated his life to being a witness through the lens of a camera. He is currently documenting the devastation caused to peoples' lives by Israeli bombing.

The Anera website publishes a blog 'The Olive Press' 'Voices from Gaza' that gives regular reports from those living in Gaza about their daily lives (anera nd). An article featuring an interview with Zaanoun, reflecting on 'Gaza's scars and Beauty,' documents the contrast between life in Gaza in 2017, and the situation in 2023-2024. When Elhelo asked him which was his favourite photograph he replied:



A girl jumps rope and behind her is a building destroyed by war. Photograph Mohammed Zaanoun (uploaded on anera 2017).

My favourite photo is one I took of a girl jumping rope, and behind her is a building destroyed by war. It expresses strength and power. After death, there is life. It shows the real Gaza—where people find life amid destruction (Zaanoun cited in Elhelo 2017).

Before the violence erupted in early July 2023 Zaanoun turned his camera towards documenting a Palestinian artist who paints Arabic calligraphy over the rubble of destroyed houses. Artist Ayman al-Hosari paints these in an attempt to turn the murals into works of art to express love and peace. This type of Arabic calligraphy is an expressive artform that is used after conflict.

The images below are taken from videos published in 'Snapshots: A Palestinian photographer captures life under bombardment in Gaza', on the *The New Humanitarian* website.



A family house bombed in 2003; all is left is rubble. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



Children are playing on a mural painted by Palestinian artist Ayman al-Hosari who paints on the rubble of destroyed houses in Gaza. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.

The photographs taken in 2017 and early 2023 show a creative and crafted take on living in the Gaza, but as Zaanoun comments this situation did not last:

Everything changed overnight on 7 October, after a raid into Israel by Hamas gunmen left 1,200 people dead, most of them civilians who were killed deliberately, according to the Israeli authorities. Hamas, the political and militant group that governs the Gaza Strip, also took around 240 hostages back into the coastal enclave (Zaanoun *The New Humanitarian* 2023).

Mohammed Zaanoun's work documenting the Israeli siege on Gaza provides a moving and memorable photographic record that brings the experiences of Palestinians to the world. His photographs are provided to many international news outlets such as *La Monde*, *The Electronic Intifada*, *Ma'an*, *Zaatar*, *Anerna* and *The New Humanitarian*. For the *New Humanitarian* Zaanoun documents life in Gaza with "Snapshots' shining a spotlight on Gaza with weekly photos that matter to people on the ground" (Zaanoun 2023). Now in his late thirties he is increasingly at risk of death or further injury whenever he is covering these events. It is a dangerous occupation; many journalists and photographers have lost their lives in this and other conflicts. Tharoor (2024) from the *Washington Post* reported on the deaths of journalists in Gaza:

According to a tally maintained by the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 79 journalists and media workers have been killed since the start of the war on Oct. 7. Local Palestinian authorities put that number above 100. In either case, it's the single biggest death toll for journalists in a conflict zone for years — surpassing the toll exacted on the press operating in Ukraine over the past two years in just a matter of months. By one estimate, 1 out of every 10 journalists in the Gaza Strip has already been killed (Tharoor, 2024).

Commenting on the current situation in Gaza Zaanoun says, 'life is so desperate here in Gaza'. 'Everywhere on the road, I witness the bombings, constantly hearing explosions. I see the missiles strike. Wherever you look, you see destroyed buildings. In the streets, you can smell the remains of mortars, gunpowder, fire and death' (cited by Mraffko 2023).

In *The New Humanitarian* Zaanoun writes 'People in the Gaza face the 'risk of starvation' and disease as food and health systems collapse' (Zaanoun 2023). The pause in the conflict in November 2023 brought some respite, particularly to allow emergency aid through but 'four days [was] a very short window to meet the vast humanitarian needs, given the damage to the region after more than seven weeks of bombardment and siege'.

Zaanoun's house was destroyed, his son injured and along with the majority of the population of Gaza he was forced to leave his city as the Israeli military issued instructions to the population to move south to escape the bombing. But the bombing followed Gazans south. He concludes that the situation has become "catastrophic" and he must now focus on the safety of his wife and their four children. 'No safe place is left for them' (Zaanoun 2023 in *The New Humanitarian*).

Some of Zaanoun's photos show Gazans during the four-day pause including the Abu al-Ruk family taking advantage of the lull to gather around a fire near the ruins of their home in eastern Khan Younis.

The following images are from 'Snapshots: A Palestinian photographer captures life under bombardment in Gaza' with permission from the *The New Humanitarian* website.



People waiting for aid during the four-day ceasefire. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



Families gather during the humanitarian pause. The Abu al-Ruk family gathered round a fire next to their destroyed home in eastern Khan Younis, as the temporary pause in the Israeli bombardment began. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



UN aid trucks are finally able to enter Gaza after weeks of bombardment. The UN's agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said it was prepared to receive at least 150 trucks of aid each day (still well short of what was allowed in before 7 October). Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



This photo shows the destruction caused by Israel's assault on the Gaza Strip, the humanitarian pause [was] vital to allow emergency aid into the Palestinian enclave. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun



This photo shows the many buildings targeted by the Israelis. Video screen shot: photo: Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



17th October, first responders and residents in Gaza scrambled to dig people out from under flattened buildings, often only using their hands. Video screen shot: photo Zaanoun 2023.



Many people were killed in a blast in the densely populated al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, including the family of Zaanoun's friend and fellow photojournalist. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



Evacuating the elderly. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



Photo taken at the al-Aqsa Hospital. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun 2023.



Many people were killed in a blast in the densely populated al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. Video screen shot: photo Mohammed Zaanoun Zaanoun 2023.

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Luck

Casually, I was looking at my phone,
giving directions, when a rash of speed,
thwack, a white cloud
exploded on my left, gunpowder
smells filled the seats, and the car
was jaggging right left right
then juddering to a halt, and
we were both lashed
against seatbelts, at risk of
becoming statistics. Anna
got out, trembling,
I managed to unbuckle and somehow
cricked my bum onto her driver's seat
but no further; movement equalled agony.
The car was steaming, Anna worried
it would gush into flames, I was
ashen-faced but knew
none of this till later.
Then a voice at my ear
was asking my name, calling
an ambulance, giving details.

Even strangers are kind in a crisis.
Shock numbs pain; somehow the ambos
got me out. The rest of the day
was hospital, pain, tests, x-rays,
the same questions over and over again
to ensure you are alert, know your name
and where you are. Anna, caged
in a head brace, at one point
heard my voice
on an opposite hospital bed
as we were wheeled through the system.

*

Now, where her chest hit
the steering wheel, and my fractured ribs,
front and back, are slowly healing.
There's nothing like the rigmarole
of insurance claims and police reports,
along with pain, to demonstrate
what you did survive, and to show
over how many things we have no control
and to see, to sense, to speak, to breathe
is one-quarter choice, three-quarters chance.

DENNIS HASKELL

PHOTOJOURNALISM – INTERVIEW

Images of War : Ukraine

DEBRA LIVINGSTON, BRENDAN HOFFMAN AND OKSANA PARAFENIUK

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Relations between Ukraine and Russia had become increasingly hostile after a pro-western government replaced the pro-Russian President in February 2014. In March 2014 Russia annexed Crimea and provided increasing amounts of military aid to two pro-Russian break away regions in the east of Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk. In a series of speeches in February 2022 Putin denounced the expansion of NATO towards Russia and claimed that Ukraine was an integral part of Russia'. (Beauchamp 2022; Fisher 2022). He began massing Russian troops on the border. And despite initial denials Putin then announced a 'special military operation' to 'demilitarise and denazify' Ukraine. (Berger 2022). This was particularly ironic as President Zelensky was Jewish and after law school became a comedic actor. Russia then launched a full-scale invasion. Tanks headed for Kyiv, missiles and bombs targeted the infrastructure and the civilian population. Attacks in the south were mounted from the sea. Casualties mounted but after initial successes in the south and east the invasion descended into stalemate, the attempted occupation of Kyiv failed but Russian missiles and bombs continued to cause havoc and mounting casualties. Millions were displaced and despite some Ukrainian gains almost one fifth of Ukraine's territory is occupied by Russian troops. However, Putin did not achieve the rapid conquest he was expecting as Ukrainians rallied to repel the invaders.

Amid carnage and catastrophe Ukraine photojournalists have continued to project images of the war and its effects on the Ukrainian people to the world. The work and lives of two of these, Brendan Hoffman and Oksana Parafeniuk are featured in this issue.



This selfie was taken of Brendan and Oksana in Avdiivka in December of 2021, when they both had assignments on the frontline. Oksana was already pregnant. 'We took it to one day show it to our son, Luka'.

Brendan Hoffman and Oksana Parafeniuk

Brendan Hoffman is a documentary photographer based in Kyiv. His work reflects his interest in themes of identity, history, politics, conflict, and the environment. Since 2013 he has primarily covered revolution and war in Ukraine. His work has been published widely, shown at festivals including Visa Pour l'Image, the Zoom Photo Festival in Canada, and the Singapore International Photography Festival, and exhibited across Ukraine, in a major solo show at the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago, Illinois, and in various galleries and educational institutions across Europe and the United States (Hoffman 2023)

Oksana Parafeniuk is an independent photographer based in Kyiv, Ukraine, where she explores manifestations of human resilience and dignity among people facing hardships. Her focus is on exploring creative approaches in documentary photography. In addition to her personal projects, Oksana has worked with and published her work in The Washington Post, The New York Times, Time, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, NBC News, BuzzFeed News, The Wall Street Journal, Al Jazeera English, Rest of World, U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek, MSF Doctors Without Borders, UN Women, UNHCR, L'Oeil de la Photographie, and others.

Brendan and Oksana met when working together in eastern Ukraine in spring 2014 during the earliest days of Russia's intervention in Ukraine (Ferguson 2022). They married in January 2022, six weeks before the Russian invasion.



Brendan and Oksana's son Luka, 14 months old in this photo. Oksana takes cover in the subway with Luka at 3:30 am at night during the massive missile attack by Russia in Kyiv, Ukraine on May 25, 2023. We spent 4 hours in the subway from 1am till 5am. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Yelena Pravda, who runs the Pravda fashion label, poses with ukraine-themed wings in a photo shoot for a fundraising campaign to support women who were displaced from the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut on Tuesday October 17, 2023 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman.



Stanislav Sotnik, 27 left, and Olha Koliadiuk, 26, donate blood at the city hospital after local government announced a request for additional donors on Monday June 5 2023 in Odesa, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman for the New York Times.



Students of the Odesa Professional Lyceum of Maritime Transport hold Ukrainian flags before the march dedicated to the newly-created Day of Unity, announced by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Odesa region, Ukraine on February 16, 2022. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Tymofii Shapoval, 10, a Ukrainian patient who has a brain tumour, waits in the ambulance while medics plan his evacuation from the Medyka border crossing via helicopter in Medyka, Poland on March 30, 2022. Russia invaded Ukraine in late February creating a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, and shortly after St. Jude teamed up with foundations in Poland to evacuate children with cancer from the war zone. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



A displaced Ukrainian girl sleeps in a room reserved for women with small children near the main train station on Tuesday, April 12, 2022 in Lviv, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman.



Maryna Ponomariova, 6, holds a lollipop after a physical therapy session with her mother Nataliia Ponomariova, 41, left, physical therapist Nazar Borozniuk, and aunt Liuba Kostina, 36, right, at Ohmadyt Children's Hospital on Thursday, October 20, 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Maryna, who is from the Kherson region of Ukraine, lost her left leg due to Russian shelling. Photo: Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times.



Serhiy Kopsychyk, 25, holds his one month old son Marko in Pokashchiv village, Volyn region, Ukraine on October 3, 2023. Svitlana and Serhiy got married in January this year and their son Marko was born in August. He joined the army the day after the invasion and he suffered severe injuries on July 27, 2022 in Kherson region, which resulted in him losing both legs, one above the knee, and eyesight in one eye. They live with Svitlana's parents and dream to buy their own house. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Participants of the civil-defence training, organised by a far-right political organisation National Corps was held on the grounds of an abandoned heavy machinery factory on Kyiv's western outskirts. They train with wooden makeshift weapons in Kyiv, Ukraine on February 6, 2022. In the months leading up to the full-scale invasion by Russia, civil-defence training became more widespread in Kyiv and in other major Ukrainian cities, some of which are organised by formal institutions like the Territorial Defense Forces, that is a reservist force of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



NYTUKRAINE For a story by Marc Santora KYIV, Ukraine – People look at destroyed Russian military equipment put on display on Mikhailivska Square outside St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery on Wednesday, August 31, 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times



Mourners attend the funeral of Yegor Bartosh, a member of Ukraine's Azov Regiment who was killed in action, on Tuesday, April 25, 2023 in Kornivka, Ukraine.



Svitlana Zdor, 44, and Iurii Zdor, 42, a married couple from Chernihiv, pose for a portrait in Iurii's hospital room at the Oberih medical center in Kyiv, Ukraine on July 31, 2023. Iurii is a war veteran and he had his leg amputated due to a battlefield injury. He also had severe injury to his other leg and his abdomen and lungs. In Oberih medical centre he is undergoing rehabilitation and some planned surgery. Svitlana and Iurii, who have been married for six years, participated in the promotional video for the Veteran Hub project Resex, a platform about sex life for wounded warriors. As part of the project Veteran hub developed two manuals for men and women veterans that are freely available, which help to establish a relationship with the body and turn trauma into a new sexual experience. Each guide is based on the Veteran Hub team's research on post-injury sexuality. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



For a story by Marc Santora Damian plays the accordion for passersby on Andriivskiy Descent after dark on Saturday, October 29, 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times.



People gather on escalators in an underground metro station after air raid sirens sounded in Kyiv and there were reports of explosions, either from Russian missiles or from Ukraine's air defense system taking them down, on Tuesday, November 15, 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman.



Fellow soldiers carry in the coffin containing the body of Taras Diduh killed on February 26 during the funeral ceremony held at the Church of the Most Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Lviv, Ukraine on March 11, 2022. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Local residents came for the Sunday service to the Saint Paraskeva church in Kalynivka, Vinnytsia region, Ukraine on February 27, 2022. Russia launched a full scale war on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Mariia Myskiv, 26, gives birth to her daughter Sofiia at the Kyiv Perinatal Centre in Kyiv, Ukraine on October 9, 2023. Mariia's husband is in the military. They got married 1 month after the full-scale invasion and have known each other only for two months. Her husband has an amputated leg due to a previous injury, but he keeps serving on the frontline as a brigade commander. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Teachers at School Number 5 make dumplings with meat to feed soldiers, volunteers, and displaced people in Vinnytsia, Ukraine on March 1, 2022. Around 35 people, many of them teachers and their families are currently living at the school because it has a basement bomb shelter. Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.



Men hold a blanket to catch a frightened cat that fell from the fifth floor balcony of a residential building that was struck by a Russian missile the previous day on Thursday, November 24, 2022 in Vyshhorod, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times.



Local residents wait in line to receive free loaves of bread next to high rise residential buildings that were heavily damaged during airstrikes in March on Wednesday, October 19, 2022 in Chernihiv, Ukraine. Photo: Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times.



A couple Sofia Chygyryn, 19, and Vadym Beilakh, 19, pose for a portrait during the territorial defense training in Kyiv, Ukraine on February 5, 2022. Sofia, student in business psychology, and Vadym, student in management, both also work on the side, came to the training for the first time in order to prepare while the situation is still peaceful. They said "Prepare for the worse, believe in the best". They said they are lucky that they didn't see people in the military uniforms eight years ago. They packed an emergency bag a few days ago and they worry most to lose someone. They added that "every citizen is responsible for the situation and for his family". Photo: Oksana Parafeniuk.

Adam Ferguson published an interview on his website with photojournalist Brendan Hoffman in 2022 about his experiences over eight years living in Ukraine. He published 'Hoffman stayed committed to the story of Ukraine' (Ferguson 2022). Adam put me in contact with Brendan and Oksana so that *Social Alternatives* could archive the photojournalists life in Ukraine during the invasion of Russia.

INTERVIEW

Debra: When we left you in the original interview, you were in Lviv and it was noted you then went to Poland. What happened?

Brendan: As mentioned, we were expecting the birth of our son in June 2022 and we needed to be in a safe and stable place for that. Poland made it exceptionally easy, essentially automatic, for us to register as refugees and have access to the public health system, which is what we did. Luka was born healthy and on time in Krakow.

Debra: When did you return to Ukraine? Why?

Brendan: Russia withdrew from areas near Kyiv at the end of March 2022, so by the time Luka was born Kyiv was relatively safe. We came back at the end of July, because at the time there was essentially no reason not to. We have a comfortable apartment here, family and friends nearby, and we wanted to get ourselves settled and think about going back to work, which I did in late August.

Debra: You say "at the time" there was no reason not to go back. What changed?

Brendan: In October 2022, Russia began targeting Kyiv again, specifically the power grid, so we had months of blackouts.

Oksana: Since we returned from Poland, I had been pumping breast milk, slowly building up a supply in the freezer so I could at some point begin taking assignments again. I did a few assignments but then, of course, the power outages spoiled all of it. Luka and I ended up spending most of the fall in my family's rustic country house outside Kyiv because it wasn't near any military targets and had a more stable power supply. Then we left Ukraine entirely in case the blackouts worsened or we lost heat or water for an extended period.

Debra: Oksana, are you working now?

Oksana: Yes. Luka and I spent the winter in the U.S. and Spain. Brendan visited when he wasn't in Kyiv working. We all came back home for the second time in April 2023, and soon after I started taking assignments again.

Debra: How do you determine that it's safe to be there?

Brendan: There are no guarantees of course, but when we returned last spring, the power situation had stabilised and the air defence, particularly in Kyiv, had gotten better with the arrival of the Patriot system. Telegram channels offer surprisingly detailed and accurate information about threats, so when the air raid siren sounds, we check to see whether it's missiles or drones coming or maybe just a plane taking off in Russia. Then we respond accordingly, which means if there is something flying toward Kyiv we go to the underground metro station across the street, even if it's in the middle of the night. It sucks, but it's much less stressful than staying home and listening to explosions.

Debra: What has your work consisted of these past 18 months?

Brendan: I've mainly been in Kyiv, mostly working for The New York Times covering the war from here rather than the front lines. It sometimes feels like I'm missing the action, but also it lets me do the kind of work I find most interesting, exploring the strange contradictions of regular life carrying on in wartime. And obviously it means I see my family almost every day and can be present and involved.

Debra: What contradictions do you mean?

Brendan: There's of course the stoicism of people who seem utterly unfazed by missile attacks, but it's more nuanced than that. Many people ARE bothered, but they bring their folding chair and their cat and sit in the metro with a book, or maybe just find a coffee shop in a basement where they're mostly protected and use the moment as a bit of 'me time'. It seems improbable but there are new cafes and restaurants opening all the time. When there's not an ongoing attack (which overall fill only a small percentage of the time), life in Kyiv is completely normal and a visitor could be forgiven for not realising there's a war on.

Oksana: Yeah, it's hard to explain this weird new reality. For example, sometimes I take Luka to the swimming pool, there are other mostly mothers with little children. Often everybody is discussing the recent missile attack and what each of them heard.

Debra: How about you Oksana, what have you been doing?

Oksana: I've also mostly been in Kyiv, doing assignments for The Washington Post and NBC News, among others. Many of my assignments have involved civilians or soldiers undergoing difficult or inspiring recoveries after being injured. This is of course a huge issue that Ukraine will face for decades.

Debra: What does the future hold for the two of you?

Brendan: It's honestly hard to say. For now we have no plan other than to be here and carry on, hoping for a miracle that brings a proper end to the war as soon as possible. We realise, however, that it's tough going for Ukraine, that foreign assistance is more and more difficult to come by, and that the war in Gaza and the presidential election in the United States are sapping attention and could result in the return of Trump as president, which would probably not bode well for Ukraine's effort. Luka is getting older as well, and at some point he'll begin to understand what's happening. The last thing we want is for him to be afraid.

Oksana: I truly just want to live here. Being next to my family and friends in these turbulent times is priceless and important. Today there was an air raid alert in the morning, and Luka immediately went to his stroller showing that he is ready to go down to the subway. For now, he doesn't know what is going on, he loves watching the metro trains going by, and we will do our best to make sure he is shielded from trauma for as long as possible.

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Author

Dr Debra Livingston is a photo-media artist, and lectured in photography at the Queensland College of Art and the University of the Sunshine Coast. Her work is presented in solo and collaborative exhibitions locally and internationally in private and public collections.

On The Beach

"your troubles will be out of reach"

I come out of the water, dumped once—tho not badly—& having caught a few waves—surfacing near some teenagers, all girls in their mid teens, a younger brother amongst them. Brown, all of them, but no more tanned than me. Less confused tho. Steadier on their feet. Make my way up the beach—which is not too tightly packed. A Wednesday, lunchtime.

For a moment I think I've strayed while swimming—from where I was. There is someone lying on a towel very close to mine. Asleep—sunglasses, book on her chest. Why so close? The heavy silver bracelet I recognise, shake my hair so the fine drops can wake her. "Frank," she says, opening her eyes, "How very odd to meet you." "Strikes you that way, does it?" "Frank, yes, I'm sorry."

I pick up my towel, dry my hair, my chest & shoulders. "I feel like I'm Matt Helm or someone—Tony Rome—and you're Jill St John, Eva Marie Saint, & I'm James Coburn." "Frank, I don't know what you're talking about. These people—are actors? you've gone back to the golden years of Hollywood? Americana doesn't interest me." "I have reason to be annoyed with you," I tell her.

"I'm sorry for that, Frank. If you'd been curious enough to travel to Melbourne, you'd have been barely inconvenienced: 'Lost Luggage' for one day only—and I'd be a lot wealthier." "No decent beaches in Melbourne, Veronika. And you advised me: walking in sand, you said, would cure it." "You are walking much better," she says. We head off the beach, back to the cars, the streets.

I hand her my shirt, large, blue, suitable for Sydney suburbs. Her book: *English Biography of the seventeenth century* by Vivian de Sola Pinto. "Why are you reading this?" "I needed something. Picked it up in an 'Op Shop' (I believe that is what they're called.)" "'Lives of the poets' sort of stuff, is it?" "I'll learn something, Frank, even if it's just *what serious minded people*

were reading back in ... 1950." "I don't think any serious person took Poetry seriously back then." "They seem to have, Detective." She waves the book at him. "We quit, in the US, before the fifties." "Is America a serious country, Frank?" "Vonnie, you shouldn't have come here. I'm being watched, at least some of the time—and there are detectives out here

from Hawaii, Christ knows why—very keen to find you." "Okay." A pause. "I need money, Frank, to get out of here. About twelve hundred." "Me?" I say—surprised, but also touched. "Will your wife mind?" "I won't tell her for a while." It seems I've already decided. "Look, move quick. Leave from Brisbane or somewhere—not Sydney or Melbourne. The name they're pursuing, that they think you're using,

is Devereaux. *Don't* use that. They know Stein too." "Okay." "Don't fly into the United States. Go to Mexico or somewhere. Drive across." "This is a big favour, Frank." "Might not see you again," I suggest, firmly. "Keep on with the legs," she told me, when we parted—on Arden Street of all places. No-one shifty about, no Audi. "I will," I called, & turned—

up the hill at Coogee, to Michael & Di's, our Sydney friends. A shower. Something *not* to tell.

KEN BOLTON

Lismore Floods, Policy Failure, and Climate Change: The need for political ecology in policy learning

MORAG COOK

In 2022 Australians watched the people of Lismore battle floods more devastating than those previously experienced. By applying the lens of political ecology, policy failures, not only the impact of climate change, are found to be causal factors in the devastating effects of the floods. This article argues that including political ecology as a tool for analysis during the evaluation stage of the policy cycle would result in more equitable outcomes. The article uses several case studies to support its analysis of the Lismore floods and the policy failures identified. The author calls on policymakers to include political ecology in the evaluation process of the policy cycle, and highlights the importance of the understanding of, and accountability for, policy failures resulting in policy learning necessary to prevent further repetition of problems experienced due to the intensifying effects of the Anthropocene.

KEY WORDS: Lismore floods, political ecology, Policy failure, flood risk, resilience

Introduction

In 2022, the community of Lismore endured floods unlike any floods they had experienced previously. Together, they undertook community rescues in small boats, and the media heralded the rescuers as great 'Aussie Battlers'. Many would go on to attribute the Lismore floods to inaction on climate change, but the author uses the lens of political ecology to examine the crisis and argues that the problems experienced by the people of Lismore were not only the result of climate change but evidence of policy failure.

This article uses political ecology to help understand and critically examine uneven power distributions in environmental problem solving by state-based policy interventions. Political ecology as a theoretical perspective is examined and a case study explored to evaluate its use in examining policy interventions. The concepts of policy failure and policy learning and their role in the policy cycle are explored in relation to the Lismore crisis. Three key policy failures are identified in the Lismore case. These are failures of policymakers to manage risk, to incorporate complex nature/social relationships, and to harness and support resilience in the Lismore community. The importance of utilising political ecology in the policy cycle at various stages is identified as aiding in ensuring rigour in policy learning to help meet the challenges for the people of Lismore and elsewhere in the face of the increasing impacts of climate change.

Political Ecology

Political ecology is a critical theory applied in anthropology, environmental sociology, geography, and other social sciences (West 2016). It helps to analyse uneven distributions of power caused by state-based and market-led policy interventions to environmental problems. Political ecology interrogates how policies that impact on the 'management of nature and the rights of people' (Robbins 2012: 13) are based on socially constructed concepts. Problematically, resources may be:

distributed among actors unequally... [which inevitably] reinforces or reduces existing social and economic inequalities . . . [which holds] political implications in terms of the altered power of actors in relation to other actors (Bryant and Bailey cited in Robbins 2012: 20).

'Eco scarcity' and 'modernisation' are examples of environmental problems that political ecologists explore as in the case study by Fairhead and Leach (1996) which examines the uneven power and impacts caused by environmental management policies.

Eco-scarcity adheres to Thomas Robert Malthus' theory (1766 - 1834) that population growth outstrips resources resulting in species 'die off'. As he stated:

In searching for objects of accusation, [the poor man] never adverts to the quarter from which all his misfortunes originate. The last person he would

think of accusing is himself, on whom, in fact, the whole blame lies (Malthus in Robbins 2012: 17).

Eco-scarcity remains a key concept in policymaking for environmental problems (Robbins 2012: 17), however, policies based on eco-scarcity are problematic as they lack consideration of complex causalities such as the relationship between humans and nature (Linnér 2023). Despite this, policymakers emphasise the scarcity of resources as the reason for problems rather than interrogating the management of those resources (Linnér 2023).

Modernisation emphasises that environmental problems, especially concerning the 'underdeveloped' world, are due to a lack of management, modern technologies, or involvement in global markets (West 2016). This continues to be prioritised in 'western' environmental management and conservation (Robbins 2012: 19). However political ecologist Paul Robbins (2012) demonstrated through empirical analyses and historical inquiry that modernisation resulted in policies that intensified power imbalances in communities and resulted in the uneven distribution of resources (Robbins 2012: 19). Nevertheless, modernisation remains a sticky conceptual driver in policymaking for environmental management (West 2016).

The role political ecology can play can be seen through the exemplary anthropological study undertaken by Fairhead and Leach (1996) into the collapse of ecosystems in Kissidougou, Africa which identified policies in land management as a major cause of the collapse. The policies examined were found to be influenced by 'Malthusian' and 'modernisation' paradigms. The local people had been working with the land for many generations, and new policies disrupted these highly functional human/ecological systems. The local subsistence communities were displaced, and the fragile ecosystem was damaged (Fairhead and Leach 1996). Fairhead and Leach employed political ecology to help understand how policies reified power imbalances in the community due to a narrow focus on the management of resources without a broader anthropological perspective and inclusion of local knowledge from all levels of the community.

The case study of Kissidougou demonstrates the way environmental policies have serious implications for communities on the ground. Nixon (2011) argued environmental issues impact poorer communities when 'official landscapes are enforced on vernacular ones' such as those landscapes...that 'have been devised over many generations' (2011: 17). In the process, 'webs' of cultural meaning and significance of the landscape are

severed (Nixon 2011: 17) to result in a 'slow violence' to the people (Nixon 2011). Political ecology can therefore be used to highlight potential problems caused to communities through policy impacts, on problems aggravated by environmental problems.

The Lismore Floods of 2022

Lismore is a town of 29,000 people. It sits on the Wilson's River and Leycester Creek meeting point which feed into the Richmond River's main tributary. In the 1840s early settlers were attracted to the location due to its alluvial soil (Department of Primary Industries 2020: 6). It provided for livestock and grain production for the rapid growth of cities such as Sydney and Brisbane (Lismore City Council 2022a) and the river system assisted in the transport of produce (Wilbourn 2020). At 12 metres above sea level positioned north of the catchment basin at the junction of three waterways, Lismore has experienced many fluvial floods (George et al. 2022). Since European settlement, Lismore's history of flooding has resulted in the construction of levees and the implementation of various flood strategies (Lismore Flood Plan Risk Management Plan 2014, Richmond River Flood Mapping Study 2010, and Lismore Flood Study and Floodplain Management Study, Stage one, flood study 1993). However, the latest flood of March 2022 far exceeded previous community experience. Preparation and mitigation were inadequate to cope with this flood.

Australians watched the civilian rescue responses on their televisions. Locals who had experienced floods previously found the floods of 2022 to be unmanageable, and emergency services were overstretched, resulting in community-driven rescues. Darren Slattery, a local man, rescued people in his dinghy during the highest point of the flood. His distressing narrative is one of many that portray the events of that day.

After that I headed up Casino Street to my partner's dad's house, yelling out to him and his neighbour. I heard nothing so proceeded to Centre Street to grab my daughter, after getting stuck on a submerged car...Daughter on board with her two neighbours. Five people in boat I headed back the same way...I headed back and going to calls and yelling of people in houses and units. Several trips I made this horrendous day. Pulling people from their roofs, even ripping tin off roofs to pull them out from the roof cavity. People, dogs, cats, chickens, yep got them all. I lost count of how many we pulled out of the water that day (Flood Diaries, 2022).

The 2022 Flood Inquiry (NSW Government 2022) reported that during the ongoing flood crises of 2022

nine lives were lost, 7,731 people needed crisis accommodation, and \$2.7 billion in damage was caused to infrastructure resulting in a four-billion-dollar response to the crises from the New South Wales and federal governments (NSW Government 2022). More than a year later, the people of Lismore continue to experience ongoing problems and the 2022 Flood Inquiry (NSW Government 2022) made a suite of recommendations based on findings such as improved policies for the people of Lismore.

Policy Failure and Policy Learning for Flood Management

The problems experienced by the people of Lismore in 2022 were attributed to floods, but political ecology is utilised in this article to argue these problems were exacerbated by policies that preceded the floods. The author argues that existing policies failed to manage and anticipate human responses to risks from floods in Lismore, failed to integrate complex nature and human relationships into policy making and failed to harness, support, and build community 'resilience'.

Making policies is a complicated process yet opportunities for analysis and assessment are included within the policy cycle (Althaus et al. 2018). Success or failure of policies is difficult to analyse and quantify (McConnell 2015; Dunlop 2017), and Dunlop synthesised current policy evaluation literature to find that policy learning rarely follows from evaluation of failed policies (2017: 4). However, Althaus et al. (2018: 248) state that 'learning of failure is crucial, but harder than it seems'. As the then Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet noted 'Our relatively weak capacity to evaluate potential success or impending failure is a capability gap in itself' (cited in Althaus et al. 2018: 248).

Recognising failure results in the policy learning required for improved policies. McConnell (2015) offers a 'primer' to help analyse policy failure. He states:

A policy fails... if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent (McConnell 2015: 230).

Failure of Policy to Manage Risk

A principle of environmental policymaking is how to understand and manage potential risks caused by natural hazards (Stahl and Alan 2019). Conceptualisations of risk and risk management may appear to be common sense, but risk is claimed by political ecologists to be a social construction (Murphy 2010: 277) as risk estimation is neither factual nor politically neutral (Birkholz et al. 2014).

Political ecology is used in this article to highlight problems experienced by the people of Lismore due to risk management policies that had been adopted. The author highlights the way policies often prioritise maps and data over local knowledge and perspectives. People in Lismore chose to live with risks due to an enduring relationship with their town. Socioeconomic status affects personal risk assessment. Risk during floods can be increased by human-built infrastructure. Finally, as existing data on risk management has been made unreliable due to a changing climate, political ecologists assert the important role of 'safe-to-fail-measures' rather than failsafe ones.

Perceptions of risk are constructed in social systems such as 'culture, institutions, organisations, [through] values, [and] beliefs' (Birkholz et al. 2014: 18). Understanding social relationships with risks from environmental hazards highlights the 'political/economic forces' that affect who will have 'access to resources and [indicates] degrees of vulnerability amongst marginalised groups' (Birkholz et al. 2014: 16). Distribution of resources reinforces the importance of critical analysis of policies designed to manage potential 'risks' of environmental problems.

Assessing and managing risk relies on methods of analysis that are rationalistic and quantitative (Kim et al. 2017). Birkholz et al. (2014) argue that while the rationalistic and quantitative methods are relevant to successful risk management in the financial, insurance and management fields, they do not translate to the management of nature/human risks. For example, while maps and data are a key part of the assessment of a potential risk from floods, social science or diverse forms of knowledge are rarely integrated into this planning phase (Porter and Demeritt 2012; De Vries and Fraser 2017). Political ecologists see maps and data as 'problematic technologies of power' (De Vries and Fraser 2017: 934) or what critical cartographers call 'texts' with 'worldmaking' ability (Porter and Demeritt 2012: 2361). Resource management based only on maps and data without a broader humanities perspective may reify power imbalances (Fairhead and Leach 1996). Lismore's history of flooding has resulted in many hydrological studies, flood maps, plans, and policies designed to protect buildings, infrastructure, and the Lismore community. Levees have been built (Lismore City Council 2022b), and houses have been raised (NSW Government 2020), and yet, these strategies did not successfully mitigate the human issues experienced during these floods.

Failure to integrate complex nature and human relationships

After the 2022 Lismore floods, Australians asked 'why do the people of Lismore continue to live on a flood plain when they understand the risks?' (Gilmore and Naylor 2023). The answer lies in a complex interplay between risk perception, personal management of risks, and economic vulnerability (Birkholz et al. 2014: 16). It is necessary to understand that the dynamic relationships people who live in flood zones have with their homes are fostered over many generations (NSW 2022: 15). Understanding risk is not a purely rational process. Risk assessment is often personal, based on emotions, and different forms of knowledge which are found to impact on the assessment of risk and the decision-making of individuals (Bohm and Tanner 2013).

A study assessing community action during floods by Fuchs et al. (2017) found that people living in flood zones do better if they make their own assessments based on existing knowledge of the risk posed by floods. For example, if they relied on instructions from emergency services on when to leave, it was found that communities were more at risk (Fuchs et al. 2017: 3185). The same study asserted that personal and local knowledge regarding risk management and acting on risk strategies was affected by socio-economic status (Fuchs et al. 2017: 3191). Lower socio-economic communities were found less likely to have confidence in their judgements. Instead, they would wait for emergency services to tell them to leave (Fuchs et al. 2017: 3191). Rolfe et al. (2020) overlaid flood mapping with socioeconomic and health data in Lismore and found that eighty-two per cent of people living in the flood footprint area were the most socioeconomic disadvantaged (2020: 631). This may explain why the people of Lismore were more likely to wait for instructions from the emergency services.

The Flood Inquiry reported that the people of Lismore knew from previous events that the floods of 2022 were 'bad' (NSW 2022: 226), yet they waited for information from the State Emergency Services (SES). When they realised the extent of the floods, they reached out for help from the SES. The large volume of assistance calls to the SES caused the Beacon to crash (NSW 2022: 107). Instead of acting on their own risk assessments earlier, they relied on the SES which resulted in an influx of calls eventually overburdening the system and delaying their evacuation. This correlates with Robbins' (2012) assertion, that hazard and risk strategies often ignore the cultural aspect of living with those risks such as the socio-economic status of those living in the flood zones and the impact that has on personal risk assessment. The Lismore flood of 2022 demonstrates how understanding the socio-economic status of those living in high-risk areas

can predict how communities will assess risk and their resultant reliance on emergency services which should be considered in policymaking.

Political ecologists emphasise that management of potential and known risks only through expensive infrastructure may result in another type of risk to communities that is less obvious. Ulrich Beck argues that even though some risk can be predicted, the 'force of the dynamics of nature may be unexpected' (cited in Murphy 2010: 280).

In 1945 pioneer political ecologist Gilbert White called for a radical overhaul of flood management. He maintained that building expensive engineered structures such as dams and levees had little impact on the underlying flooding problem (Macdonald et al. 2012). He claimed that risk does not come from the natural world but from human-built infrastructure. As Robbins (2012) explains, White saw floods as a 'hybrid-human environment artifact, no more an act of nature than one of planning' (in Robbins 2012: 33), and Burton et al. (1978) argued that human intervention in flood management makes floods more dangerous. The 2020 Commonwealth Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (cited in NSW 2022: 78) stated that 'hazards on their own are not disasters... Disaster occurs when natural hazards intersect with people and things of value, and when the impacts of hazards exceed our ability to prevent, respond or recover from them (in NSW 2022: 78). As a result, engineers, planners, and policymakers need to consider 'safe-to-fail' principles rather than overly engineered 'fail-safe' ones (Kim et al. 2017: 409). Safe-to-fail design 'embraces the unforeseen' problems due to climate change. Infrastructure design 'anticipate[s], contain[s], and minimize[s] unprecedented and unexpected events' (Kim et al. 2017: 400). As a result, safe-to-fail design ensures the adaptive capacity of urban systems (Kim et al. 2017: 400).

How to protect communities from risks related to weather events such as floods is assessed and managed based on current and past data. As the climate is changing, the reliability of that data is diminished, and governments are rethinking responses to floods to encourage learning how to live with them (Deser et al. 2020; NSW 2022: 276). Rather than overly engineered solutions such as levees and dams, nature-based mitigation measures that incorporate safe-to-fail principles are an important policy direction. Political ecologists argue that responses to the unknown risks of floods need to 'couple technological constraints with social and ecological well-being' (Kim et al. 2017: 409). For example, Kim et al. (2017) cites the significant inroads made in flood management in the Netherlands through bioretention basin design and

bioswales rather than dam walls. The influence of a new approach is evident in the New South Wales Flood Inquiry Report (2022: 101) which recommended 'flood mounds' be installed to provide high ground for stranded cattle.

Failure of existing policies to manage and anticipate human responses to risks

Separate from the cultural features of risk discussed above there are other more complex social-hydrological reasons for continuing to live in flood zones such as flood ghettoization and community bonds shaped by living in a flood zone.

Communities living in flood-prone areas are often a lower socioeconomic cohort (Ilbeigi and Jagupilla 2020), and as discussed earlier, the Lismore flood zone is a low socioeconomic area (Rolfe et al. 2020). Wilbourn (2020) called for policymakers to consider how risk management strategies such as housing insurance create 'flood ghettos' that intensify poverty. These are areas where insurance premiums are raised due to increased risk from floods. These premiums decrease the house values to the point where homeowners can no longer afford to leave. Wilbourn stated '[t]hese properties start to fall down the social-economic ladder and become a major barrier to social mobility' (2020: 2). One respondent of the 2022 Flood Inquiry recounted 'We now feel economically trapped in our home' (NSW Government 2022: 229).

Many Australians living in areas of increasing flood risk are currently experiencing rising insurance affordability pressure (The Actuaries Institute 2023). The Lismore community felt they could manage floods based on generational experience and knowledge, but as climate change intensifies, the risks are increased, and insurance premiums become unaffordable. As a result, people feel there no longer is an option to leave Lismore. The federal assistant treasurer Stephen Jones recently tabled a motion calling for a parliamentary inquiry into insurer responses (Australian Government Treasury Portfolio 2023). An investigation into insurance is timely but the lack of forward planning on insurance assessment is evidence of policy failure, a policy failure with widespread implications for natural disasters across Australia made more urgent by the impact of climate change.

Social-ecological relationships are complex and require sensitive analysis. Poverty and social vulnerability may be increased through risk management such as insurance, but due to living with the threat of floods, community bonds have been found to grow (De Vries and Fraser 2017). In a case study known as 'Lincoln City' in North Carolina studies by political ecologists De Vries and Fraser (2017) found that poorer African Americans were disproportionately represented in the low-lying flood-prone

neighbourhood. Lincoln City had experienced reoccurring floods, the worst of which resulted in a relocation program. However, the program discounted the communities of these 'waterscapes' (De Vries and Fraser 2017: 937) and their reasons for living there in the first place. They felt a sense of comradery and a connection to place as they made Lincoln City their home. They developed community risk management strategies which became a point of pride and connection. After a significant flood, the houses were relocated but it was found that the relocation policy, while seemingly rational, intensified poverty and further underscored community dislocation by not considering the community bonds that grew there (De Vries and Fraser 2017).

Policies may encourage relocation of the Lismore townsite, but the community has a genuine connection to place. As one respondent stated in the Flood Inquiry:

I adore Lismore and this region generally and believe that it is truly unique and I cannot imagine wanting to live anywhere else but within the broader community here. They have carried me through extremely difficult times with creativity, much laughter and incredible love and generosity and I feel that I have an important place and role here within the Northern Rivers which I do not wish to lose (anonymous respondent in NSW Government 2022: 228).

Regardless of motivations for staying in Lismore such as increasing poverty or connection to place, communities will continue to need services, support, and material outcomes not properly administered through previous policies (NSW Government). The report recommends that a program be instated called the 'Community First Responder Program' designed to provide training and risk management to members of the community (NSW Government 2022: 123). Further, the report finds that increasing employment opportunities for the local people who stay in Lismore is key to supporting the continued economic aspirations of its people (NSW Government 2022). As previously discussed, improving economic well-being has important outcomes for handling risks from future floods.

Failure to Harness 'Resilience'

Rather than managing real problems of what Murphy calls potential and known 'material risks' (2010: 284) such as preparing for floods in Lismore, previous government policy had instead prioritised building 'resilience' through bureaucratic channels.

Resilience NSW was a peak body formed by the NSW Government in response to the bushfires of 2020

(NSW Government 2022: 123). The organisation was facilitated to provide policy support to government, welfare organisations, emergency services and the State Emergency Recovery Coordinator (NSW Government 2022: 118). The role of the organisation was to facilitate better policies for communities and government disaster preparation, lead welfare responses during crises, support organisations during recovery operations, and assist individuals (NSW Government 2022: 119). Resilience NSW was a policy response to the inadequate handling of the 2019-2022 bushfires (NSW Government 2022: 118), however, the flood inquiry found that Resilience NSW did not act within its remit, and the organisation was described as “chaotic”, “shambolic”, “disorganised” [and often] ... proved a hindrance to protecting the community’ (NSW Government 2022: 120).

Matthew Allen (2013), an adjunct professor at James Cook University, convincingly argued that resilience is used as a ‘buzzword of post-disaster scenarios’ (2013: 45). Through a discourse analysis of a 2011 Australian federal government website, Allen found a common rhetorical device prioritised the ‘resilience’ of communities regarding environmental problems. The website stated:

This Australian character of showing resilience in the face of natural disasters and the natural cycle of drought, fire and floods has helped define our language and sense of humour as well as our music, poetry, literature, and comedy (cited in Allen 2013: 47).

These discourses of the resilience and ‘toughness’ of the ‘Aussies battler’ are explored by Williamson (2012) who found such labels to be a rhetorical strategy used by leaders to ‘engender collective views of self’ (Williamson 2012: 33). However, Allen (2013) asserted that on the ground communities saw bureaucratic statements of resilience as offensive and patronising ‘government speak’ (Allen 2013: 59). The resilience discourse did not pay attention to the intersectional factors impacting on community resilience such as ongoing generational poverty, lack of services, the subsequent decreasing physical and mental health as similarly demonstrated in the Lismore community (Rolfe et al. 2020). Moreover, the report established that the ongoing weather events of 2022 caused ‘major dynamic systems’ to become ‘stuck in place’ (NSW Government 2022: 62) overwhelming the people and infrastructure of Lismore. The Flood Inquiry stated Resilience NSW was deficient and ‘community resilience [was] hard to operationalise’ in times of environmental crises (NSW Government 2022: 232). In response, the Flood Inquiry recommended that Resilience NSW be disbanded (NSW Government 2022: 232), but this does little for the ongoing problem of

generational poverty, lack of service provision, worsening environmental stressors, and decreasing physical and mental health in Lismore.

Discourses that emphasise building ‘human’ and ‘social’ capital are associated with neoliberal policies where hazard management is framed as a problem to be ‘solved’ via the social capital of communities, organisations, and individuals as opposed to infrastructure and state-based intervention (Tiernan et al. 2019: 30). As Murphy articulated, ‘the need for urgent action and a timely response is determined by the forces of nature, not by socially constructed strategies’ (2010: 283). Allen further argued that when the ‘state’ discursively frames social capital as a priority, it doesn’t answer the real needs of communities in flood zones which are ‘hard capital’ (2013: 61). Despite this, while the SES beacon system crashed, the community organised a flotilla of civilian boats known as the ‘Lismore Boatie Brigade’ (NSW Government 2022: 107). The report states that without the ad-hoc civilian-led rescues, the floods of Lismore would have been a ‘mass casualty event’ (NSW Government 2022: 108) and yet as extraordinary as the community effort was, sadly no ‘formal record’ or recognition is given to the civilian contribution to the rescues (NSW Government 2022: 107).

While Resilience NSW was found to be an organisational policy failure, the report recommended increasing community engagement through better training (NSW Government 2022: 123), increasing professionals employed by the SES, and localising operations closer to Lismore (NSW Government 2022: 112). Moreover, the current ‘rain and river gauge network [was found] not fit for purpose’ (NSW Government 2022: 72) as it was maintained and monitored by communities, not the state. The report recommended the state take ownership and responsibility for maintenance and monitoring of the gauges as there is currently no cohesive policy to do so (NSW Government 2022: 69). These are responses to flaws in previous policy designs which prioritised human capital yet neglected to provide material infrastructure, services, better collaboration between organisations, and healthier inclusion of communities.

Policy Learning

Policymakers learn by identifying and correcting design flaws in policies (Althaus et al. 2018), and a critical stage of the policy cycle is to evaluate a policy’s efficacy to result in improved future policies. Baumer and Van Horn (2014) state ‘perspectives on the effectiveness of public policy are possible when meaningful comparisons can be made’ (Baumer and Van Horn 2014: 287) highlighting the importance of policy evaluation that interrogates ‘outputs, outcomes and causality’ (Althaus et al. 2018: 205). Political ecology offers an exemplary critical theory

in policy evaluation. In the case of Lismore, political ecology has highlighted the following policy failures: a lack of a broader humanities perspective in Lismore's policies such as how human emotions and socioeconomic status affect risk assessment; not provisioning for 'safe to fail' principles; failure to address increasing poverty; not providing adequate services for a community at risk from floods; and funding of programs which failed to support community resilience.

Although the Flood Inquiry Report of 2022 makes excellent evidence-based policy recommendations, without critical engagement and accountability, it should be seen that recommendations may lack rigour affecting the potential for policy learning. The lessons learned may not be applied in the 'next run' of the policy process or what Althaus et al. (2018) call the 'policy legacy' where problems 'can accumulate without consideration of coherence' (Althaus et al. 2018: 10). Political ecology has been used to highlight policy failures. However, without proper accountability for those failures, it is possible that policy directions may not be changed. Further discussion and accountability for policy failures of the state are required.

Conclusion

While the extreme nature of the Lismore floods of 2022 was affected by intensifying weather systems exacerbated by climate change, the problems experienced by the community were a conflation of previous policy responses to risk, a lack of understanding of complex nature/human relationships, and policy responses designed to encourage 'resilience'. As the impacts of anthropocentric climate change gain momentum (IPCC 2022), the Lismore floods and response provide an important case study to examine the way complex ecologies and 'natural' disasters intensify existing inequality in Australia and the need for more nuanced policies for prevention and response. Political ecology can play an important role in evaluating risk management. As French et al. stated 'geophysical and geotechnical understanding is rarely brought together with social profiles of risk and response...[and] are still not adequately understood' (French et al. 2020: 2). Through political ecology, scholars from diverse disciplines can engage with hazard management and policy responses by including the marginalised voices of those that will be affected by those policies.

As infrastructure continues to be built in Lismore, insurance claims escalate and people are relocated to higher ground, poverty increases, and communities in flood-prone areas become stuck in flood ghettos. Climate change induced increases in natural disasters will result in Australians facing a widening economic and social divide unless evaluation and accountability for policy failures are addressed. Political ecology has helped the

author highlight and analyse the intersectional issues that contributed to and intensified the devastation of the effects of the Lismore floods of 2022, and while the 'Aussie Battler' battles through the impacts of climate change, now is the time to understand the complexity at play and improve policy design more broadly by incorporating critical theories such as political ecology into the policy cycle for a more equitable and fair future.

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Author

Morag Cook is an early career researcher and a PhD candidate at Flinders University. Morag brings lived experience through a 15-year career as a community artist and theatre designer to her research. She has a degree in sociology from Griffith University and first-class honours in environmental sociology from the University of Adelaide. Her PhD thesis focuses on what a group of older women can teach us through their experience in attainment of Ramsar status impacting wetland conservation, and the way they circumvented local hegemonies through global policies. Morag is interested in stakeholder driven state-based policies for environmental/human problems of the Anthropocene.

Plucked

OLA KWINTOWSKI

Three seconds prior

Their bodies landed gently; Penelope watched as bubbles dispersed all around. She surged forward.

*

Two minutes prior

The straw was thin but sufficient. It was far more inconspicuous than a fat snorkel.

She pushed both her legs against the corner to keep from floating – she'd need all the stealth she could muster.

The goggles fogged. But it didn't matter. She knew their routine and would be able to feel their presence without having to see them; she already felt they were nearby.

*

Ten minutes prior

The Blood Red went on smoothly. She smeared two thick lines on one cheek. Two on the other. And a stroke down her nose.

She was still wearing last night's dress.

Her toes crushed the gossamer thin spider webs as she crossed the lawn. The rising sun caused everything to glimmer; a vibrant yellow hibiscus flower was spangled with dewdrops along its rim. Penelope didn't notice any of these marvels, nor did she smell the scent of the yesterday-today-tomorrow bush that filled the yard on a gentle breeze.

As she approached the pool a ghostly mist hovered above the water. Any other time she may have paused to admire the graceful movement of the water particles evaporating into a dance; she may have enjoyed how they swirled around each other and warped into fluid formations illuminated by the morning rays that snuck through the nearby trees.

Instead, she tossed her clothes aside and slipped beneath the surface, focused only on her mission.

*

Five hours prior

Penelope paced the room and flung her pumps into the corner.

The outing was a waste of time. She looked down at her hands. They were covered in cuts and calluses. Her nails were cut short and the nail polish chipped. *Had anyone noticed?* She didn't care anymore. Her friends were a disappointment. Walter was a disappointment. When did they become so drab? Her chest was pounding, but it wasn't from the fake-champagne or the over-cooked *Con it de Canard*. It wasn't food induced but the sharp burn had begun in her stomach. It travelled to her liver and continued to spread like wildfire to her heart which pumped it around her entire body and inflamed her mind. The feeling taking hold of her being was an itch she couldn't quite reach – like a phantom limb, you feel it and sense it, but it's somewhere out of reach in the depths of your mind. The more she thought about it the more confused she became. Her mind whirled like a cyclone; she felt a lack of control and direction, it was pure instinct that pushed her forward. Tonight she was doing her best not to give in to lethargy. All the strategising and putting plans into action had drained her energy, but she was close to her goal. She could feel it.

Walter watched Penelope walk up to the window. The air seemed thick around her; her movements laboured and heavy. He was in bed already, hoping she'd join him. The dinner earlier was tiresome – normally he didn't mind too much, it was a routine catch up to keep in touch and stay connected with the old crew. Normally Penelope was good at the schmoozing. But tonight was a disaster. He could tell the others were trying to be patient with her. He ignored their worried looks and raised eyebrows. He couldn't deny it though; he'd also noticed the change in her – the way her eyes darted wildly from person to person, how she continuously bit down on her bottom lip, the manic way she picked at the skin around her thumb and her usual poised posture now sat slouched.

She stared out the window intently.

“What was with Charlie’s comment about me being *obsessed*?” She turned from the window and looked at Walter. “That was uncalled for. Don’t you agree? Rude even? And you didn’t say anything in my defence. He bangs on about shares and policies for hours on end – I humour him with questions, even though I think he’s boring as bat-shit – and he has the audacity to call me *obsessed*?”

Penelope returned her attention to the window, squinting into the night. The light from the full moon shone through the curtain, casting floral shadows onto her face; the lines morphed and twisted giving her a wild expression. Strands of loose hair escaped the unruly bun that had slid sideways from its intended position. Her eyebrows furrowed deeply as she moved her neck almost mechanically left-to-right and right-to-left, trying to see into the dark.

“He means well, Penny. You do have to agree though, you have become a little preoccupied lately.”

Her nostrils flared in response.

At first it was cute – her preoccupation – endearing almost. Walter was enjoying her being home early – she even spent time outdoors. He saw a side of her he hadn’t seen in years – adventurous, innovative, daring even – but now it was turning into an obsession. This morning he saw her commando-crawling along their lawn, so she could spy on them from behind the tree. It was an effort to convince her to come out tonight – in hindsight he shouldn’t have tried so hard.

It was beginning to take its toll on her – on them.

“Penn, it’s after midnight, come to bed?”

She ignored him.

Walter rolled onto his side and pulled the blanket over himself.

Two silhouettes appeared by the pool.

Penelope pressed her face against the window.

*

A week prior

The coffee machine whirled into life. The smell of ground beans and warm almond milk filled the kitchen.

It was another sunny spring weekend. Penelope made her way over to the pool area. She was determined to relax today – sprawl out like a cat and soak in the sun. Maybe even go for a swim.

In a branch overhanging the lawn a magpie warbled. The tune was slow and melodic, a perfect welcoming to a relaxing morning – it was accompanied by the trilling of a couple of robins that flitted near the fence chasing each other in a loop-the-loop fashion.

Walter was halfway across the lawn when the birdsong was pierced by a scream. Penelope’s scream. He ran over with the coffees partially spilt and running down his hands.

“Duck muck!” Penelope shrieked, standing over the outdoor couch. “There’s duck shit all over my designer lounge!”

Two brown plump ducks floated in the glass pool. Walter, amused, went to inspect them closer. They didn’t like the attention, so they paddled across the length of the pool, hopped out onto the white tiles, left another nasty deposit behind them, shook their feathers and took flight. Penelope glared at them, unimpressed.

“There are a few ways to deter ducks from suburban pools. Walter? Are you listening?”

Walter had returned from a visit to the local bakery with their lunch. He was surprised to see Penelope still outside and impressed by her interest in the ducks. He couldn’t recall the last time she’d spent so much time outdoors and talking about something other than work. He settled next to her on the lounge as she read off her phone.

“According to Google-bot, we could get a dog.” She turned to Walter with raised eyebrows tilting her head sternly. He looked back nonplussed. “That’s obviously not going to happen,” she said, making sure there was no confusion about the insanity of the idea. “Another suggestion is to set up animal pool toys.”

“We could do that, right?” said Walter, treading carefully, unable to gauge her position. This was new territory.

“Don’t you think it will look garish? I mean we could give it a go. Better than getting a dog. Another option

is to place a net or cover over the pool – but the idea of the glass-walled pool was for it to be a feature of this house, not to keep it covered. They do also suggest a duck repellent.”

“How does that work?” he asked.

“Something to do with the chemistry ... probably stinks. People suggest getting water guns and scaring them through combat. How wild is that? Other options include an automatic pool cleaner or floating eyeballs.”

“Floating eyeballs?”

Penny exhaled sharply. She was up and making her way across the yard.

“Where are you going?” Walter called after her.

“Shopping. Are you coming?”

*

Two weeks prior

Penelope exhaled wearily, releasing the tension from an arduous week. She had let go of two staff, prepared an international conference and reports of a length worthy of a novel. But now it was done. She could finally unwind. Tomorrow they would have their weekly dinner with the Polo Club crew, but all she wanted to do tonight was relax at home. A glass of wine and some take-out. That was exactly what she needed.

She pulled into their driveway – the sensor identified her car and the garage opened. Cruising the car into its spot, she unclipped her seatbelt, making sure the lambskin cover didn't rub on the delicate fibres of her chiffon shirt. She got out, plugged the Tesla in to charge and unclipped the top button of her blouse.

The door leading to the house from the garage was fingerprint activated. Penelope slipped off her driving gloves and watched the door open with a familiar shoosh. She slipped off her Louboutin heels, placed them in their designated spot and exchanged them for ugg boots. As her foot touched the soft wool, her arches screamed in relief.

The smell of sautéed onion and mushroom filled the hallway. Walter was in the kitchen prepping dinner.

“Hi Darling,” he called out to her as she walked in. “Hope you don't mind – I invited Charlie to join us tonight. He's by the pool. Give me a second and I'll be done here.” He tossed pasta into the pan and threw loose spinach leaves on top. “Oh, and before I forget, this came in for you,” he said, pointing to a small package across the bench.

Dumbfounded Penelope barely whispered a word.

They stepped outside, she swapped her uggs for Zimmerman slides before she crossed the garden towards the pool. Fairy lights lined the outdoor area and the blue pool lighting gave the glass pool a crystal appearance. Charlie was seated on the white lounge, his legs outstretched on the chaise, enjoying a beer. They exchanged a polite hello.

Penelope settled on the far end and unwrapped her package.

“Another lipstick, Penny? Really?”

“Not just any lipstick, Walter. It's an Ellis Faas.” She unboxed it from the luxurious box, pulling out a long silver casing.

Walter caught sight of the price. ‘Sheesh, Penn – that's the price of a good wine.’

Penelope pouted her lips. “Now Walt, don't be such a spoilsport.”

She unscrewed the lid and dabbed a touch of colour onto her palm. Blood Red. She admired the rich hue but didn't dare put it on. It would need a special occasion.

Author

Ola Kwintowski recently completed an Honours degree in Creative Writing at the University of The Sunshine Coast, focusing on the connection between environmental narratives and sense of place. Currently, she is embarking on a PhD project, delving into the fascinating intersection of environmental writing and the creation of multimodal eco-novels through the incorporation of photography to deepen the connection with current environmental issues. Her previous publications can be found on HerStry, Arts Front, Sisters in Crime (book reviews) and SWAMP.

BOOK REVIEW

Issah Hassan Tikumah 2013 *Baptism of Orphanhood*, Strategic Book Publishing & Rights Co, Houston. ISBN 978-1-61897-549-2

The auto-biography details the life of being raised as an orphan from a very young age, through to a successful adult. The reader is given a strong picture of what it must have been like to be an orphan in Ghana. Issah Hassan Tikumah details both the emotions and the physical experiences that he had at various ages, in a clear and engaging manner. Tikumah was born in Tamale, and suffered the unfortunate loss of both his mother and father. In doing so, he talks about the loss of the primary love that only a parent can give their child.

Tikumah provides an overview of his experiences based on those that impacted upon him the most. Tikumah is selective in what he shares and is very clear about the impact this had on him as a person. As such, we are introduced to a very resilient person who overcame much adversity. In addition, Tikumah gives an insight into the social structure in Ghana and how that influenced his upbringing.

We see a slightly rebellious person; ultimately taking charge of himself and his own destiny, leading to a positive outcome.

The book certainly adds to the literature on the subject, and there are a number of occasions where the beliefs of the reader can be challenged. An example of this is his belief in the value of corporal punishment for young children as a means of managing their behaviour and upbringing. The reader builds a picture of what it was like to live at this time in Ghana, and also the social interactions and complexities that existed. We gain an insight into different belief systems that impact so strongly on how young people are treated and raised to adulthood.

The author admits that he was fortunate in having the ability to study, having an excellent recall of facts. Tikumah describes a range of occupations, with all of them leading eventually to studying at the University of New England, Sydney. Throughout the story there are some twists that demonstrate the very characteristics that enabled him to break free from the considered Ghana lifestyle; twists that keep the reader engaged.

Throughout the book, there was a strong sense of powerlessness as a young person, with so many other people controlling a life. As an orphan, the loss of connection with parents is profound, and the influence of people who are not always supportive in your best interests, is evident. Tikumah explains that orphans are seen as being responsible for all of the bad things

that happen, and are assumed always to be the guilty party, and given the most menial of tasks.

Tikumah is honest in his writing, creating frequent connections throughout the book, supporting his accurate and informative narrative of life as an orphan. He explores some of the reasons behind people's actions, and includes with the narrative, some first person paragraphs. Tikumah includes typical sayings from the Ghana people which engage the reader. There is also a message about the importance of higher education to bring people out of their existing lifestyle, describing himself as a scholar with a focus on self-improvement. At times Tikumah took a slightly philosophical look, such as relating that our parents want a better life for their children than they had themselves.

For someone who is studying the differences between African countries, and the impact of being an orphan in such cultures, this provides a useful reference. It is the perspective of one person as they go through life, which includes Ghana, his travels and experience in Australia. It is well written and explains how a person can change their life through a positive approach to what others may see as adversity. Tikumah shares insights into cultural pressures at home, and the difficulties that he had to cope with when taking the risk of travelling to a different country such as Australia to study.

Author

Stephen Harris Freeman
Principal
Woodend Primary School

Birth Canal Under a Microscope

You don't remember your original slippery slide; the tight hessian that tickled you on the way down head-first; how natural fibres left a soft caress on tissue, an itch to escape. Gravity pushed too like a circus strongman, but muscles mostly ignited your momentum; like the rifling inside a gun will cork-crew a bullet, you too were spun clockwise at times, but on a slow cycle, as the tip of your head emerged through the long barrel of your mother's birth canal. Fibres like shag carpet strands laid wall to wall, pink as baby marsupials in the pouch; echidna's potential as they twist their way teatward. A fig half. A cake's delicate piping work of wave crests; rosy icing that slid down the layers & set a new rich shine to you.

B. R. DIONYSIUS

Potholes

Get deeper every day, and the visitors get slower, and wrigglier. La Niña is here (now that you're gone), just as Motown, and even London Records, can be found in rural Australia, in the water. Yet broadly, I suppose, biosecurity stays intact. If we think of a farm as a fazenda, and not as a text. The ice cream in the apple tree is propitious. The bells have gone to the outskirts, too. When I discover something (roughly once a day), I build a dirt town hall, so I can

Rediscover it. Flag-planters are not serious people. A flag can blow away, but even if you drive your gentleman's muscle car (aka GTX) – while still on your Ps – into a town hall, and the car explodes, the resultant debris will mark the spot for many years, while the original idea may be mislaid, or rendered superfluous by new technology. You will tell me it already has, even before the thought was conceived, and I will reply, with deepening sympathy, that they

Were unable to pull you from the burning wreck. Such is the fate of interlocutors. Even now there is a galah on the clothesline, like a popsicle of cherry and ashes. A more modest vehicle, a more paranoid visitor, will be encouraged to not drive into anything but a stiff breeze, at least until they hit bitumen. I trace a cowbell so I have a picture of its ring. I look at an old photo, and remember 1966. Prince Charles was here then. Sammy Davis Jr. had his own TV show.

MICHAEL FARRELL

Disaster Painting

A car was smearing across my face. The nation had invaded my space. He would not directly cause the Vietnamese 'Resistance War Against America'. He would not read articles on my beauty regime (set to continue, even after my death). Have you read post-symbolist Greek poetry. Do you love your centuries, like I do. There was nothing running away from us, as we drove to the gallery. We were too sick to work. But contagion was rare, or close to. We were back in the twentieth century, wishing we'd never left. I assure you, it was a blast, if not always in a good way. Pop artists never talked to me at parties. They always seemed to be on the verge of

Asking if I'd sit for a disaster painting. Bad taste was fairly innocent, then, pre-AIDS (not that AIDS = Guilt, but rather, Courage). At the core of a complete poem – I'd never say 'a perfect poem' – is coded lyric, is a helping hand, or open door, to a neighbour. A slice of perfume. I did not want their DNA in my mouth, so that was the end of cocksucking for me. In a marriage that became a national symbol. Dropped from a great height. 'Hair should be like fabric', for those who do not prefer to go naked. Yet we all use light as a part of self-presentation. 'Stay home, write poems', said the psychic. I wrote a line, 'Don't take away my moon landing'.

MICHAEL FARRELL

MOSQUITO'S TOAST

In federal denim, leveraged to the brink by
their teeth
Drinking to each other's health - ¡Salud! -
they chew.
An overture belts round the brutalist cargo
stations
Their brood commits to making themselves
a brutish nest in.
It's carnyx-led, red, hot-blooded and when
it gets going
And the wealth trickles past, boy we'll get
to sucking.

If it bleeds: we drink!

MITCHELL WELCH

Chloe waiting

"This is the beginning of a great adventure"

Chloe sits at one of the outside tables & looks down the street. She is waiting—with no impatience—for her boyfriend to arrive. Is he that? May be. He will be punctual, about thirty minutes away. Justine could arrive any time. Now? An hour hence?

And laden with bags probably, her eye captured by the area's cheaper fashions. Nick won't have so long to wait ... to meet this unmannered stranger. If he sees it that way. Marian's, the florist's, is closing. Right on six. The yellow dress must be Marian. Yellow, with irregularly spaced but regularly shaped

whorls of white—gardenias, shells, commas? The man 'with' Marian has a number of hats, hands them to the woman & takes the flowers from her. They are in a long metal can. Roses. Chloe knows the woman to speak to. She closes, usually, later—"or have I kept her back?" Tho Marian

had seemed happy to have the girl there, buying flowers for her mother, choosing slowly. Marian had not been impatient: she liked the serious girl, she liked her mother. Saulnier, was the name. Equally serious. "Both of them," she thought—"Gravitas'." Or was it a question

of solemnity—the Houynhym factor? She tipped well— & un-ostentatious about it. Also the daughter. What was not to like? The girl made a joke once that Marian remembered. The mother always drily acerbic. At this moment Chloe's mother is at home, feeling a little lonelier than she might,

her daughter interested in a Russian boy, Nick—Nikolai—impressed with what she takes to be his Culture. Certainly he is serious. But the culture Chloe credits him with—what can it be, the son of a factory-worker father; a mother, who died when he was sixteen, a cleaner? A student here, a little over twelve months. Nikolai—the inverse,

she thinks, of what she wants for her daughter. And to lose her— something she thought she had worked towards all these years. She will be old suddenly, alone. Bitter—she can feel it. How not? Marian waves to her young customer, across the road, to a curly-haired Adonis, & another girl, colourfully dressed— high-piled red hair, large hoop earrings. Students of course. Different, each.

KEN BOLTON

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