sydney PEN

PEN magazine

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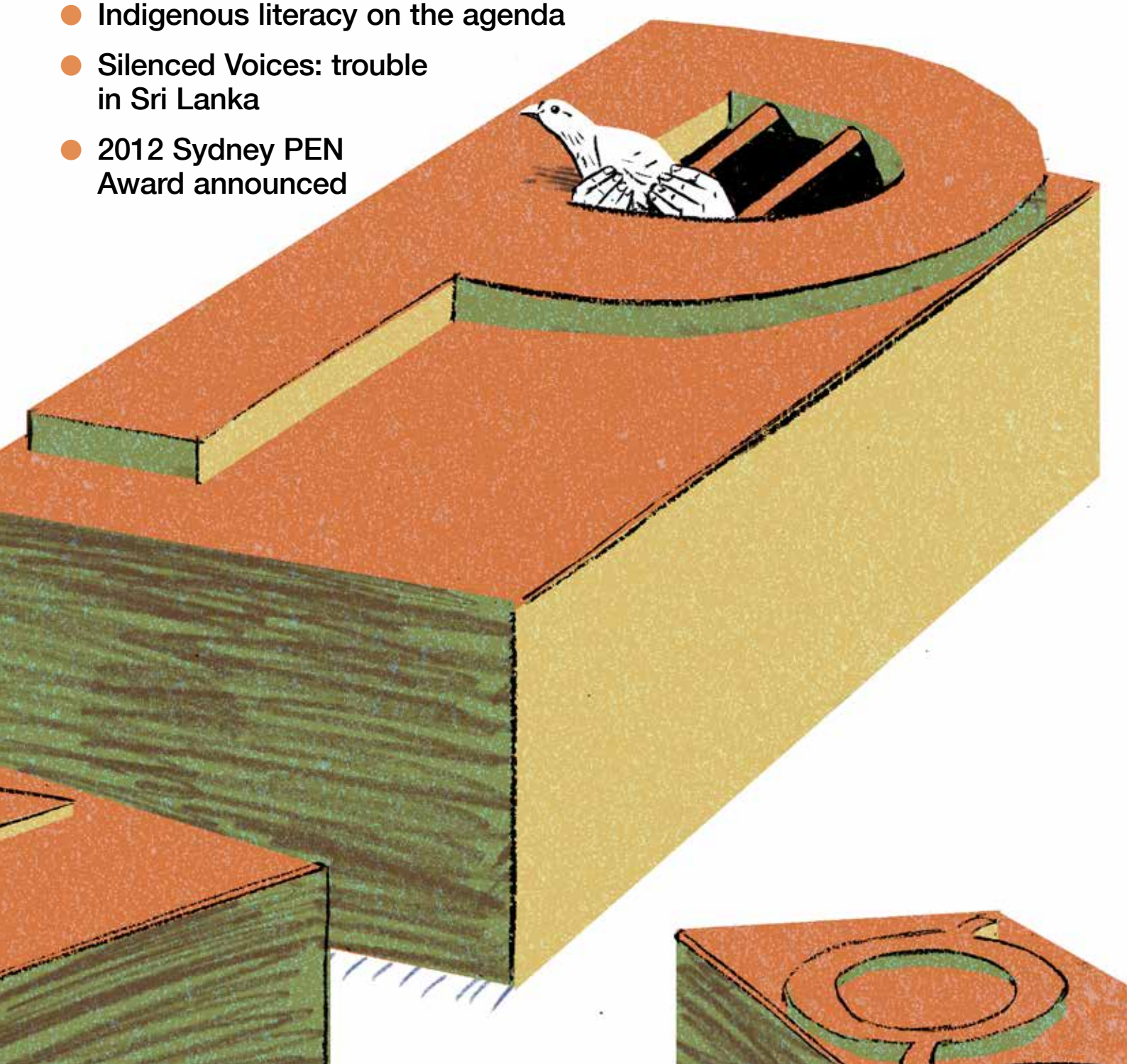

Another act to invade personal privacy ?

PEN stands for freedom of expression. The freedom to write and freedom to read depends on the maintenance of conditions favourable to free expression in our society including freedom from unwarranted intrusions into our privacy.

Excessive intrusions into citizens' privacy have always been an instrument of authoritarian governments. Invasions of privacy attack our human dignity and our community relationships and by weakening civic society lead to totalitarian rule.

Nonetheless, there is a legitimate role in a democracy for authorised surveillance by law enforcement agencies that are investigating crimes and national security agencies that are protecting our national security and safety against espionage and potential aggression. Yet law enforcement and security agencies must work within well-defined lawful limits that give primacy to citizens in their relation to the state and which respects citizens' rights.

The police and other agencies must obtain a warrant from a judge or from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal before doing any surveillance or interception of our communications.

Recently, to facilitate Australia's compliance with the *Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime*, the Cybercrime Legislation Amendment Act, 2011 was passed and received assent this September. The Act requires carriers and carriage service providers such as telecommunications companies and internet service providers to preserve the stored communications and telecommunications data relating to specific persons when notified to do so by domestic law enforcement or security agencies.

The agencies can give a notification to telcos and ISPs to store a person's communications information where an agency considers that there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that there might be communications that might assist them in connection an investigation that relates to that person. The Agency can also give such a notice on behalf of foreign organisations if their governments have acceded to the *Council of Europe Convention.*

However the agencies cannot get those stored communications unless they go on to obtain a warrant in the usual way from a Judge or from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Many privacy advocates object to the Act as an excessive invasion of privacy. Other commentators consider it a justified response to empower our law enforcement and security agencies to combat the threat of global cybercrime which causes great harms and costs Australia $10 to 15 billion dollars a year.

Be that as it may, there are now alarming proposals to extend surveillance much further still. The Australian Government has released a Discussion Paper called *"Equipping Australia against Emerging and Evolving Threats…* to accompany consideration by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security of a package of national security ideas comprising proposals for telecommunications interception, telecommunications sector security reform and Australian community legislation reform".

The Government is seeking the views of the Committee on a proposal that communications data relating to *everyone* must be retained for up to two years in case law enforcement or security agencies should wish to obtain a warrant to get those records at any time during the two year period. This in effect would make every citizen a suspect of the state. Routine storage of information about our communications on behalf of the state would be an attack on our human dignity and our individual privacy. Such measures would fundamentally degrade the relationship between citizens and our democratic state to a relationship of suspects to the Authorities.

Your papers, please?...

Michael Fraser

Sydney PEN

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Cover illustration acknowledging The Day of The Imprisoned Writer by Tom Jellett

Commitment to silenced writers

Andrew Watson

Letizia De Rosa

Letizia De Rosa was presented with the 2012 Sydney PEN Award by the President of Sydney PEN, Professor Michael Fraser, at the event at the NSW State Library marking The Day of the Imprisoned Writer. The Award was instituted in 2006 to acknowledge outstanding commitment by a Sydney PEN member in support of PEN's aims. **Indre McGlinn** reports.

Letizia De Rosa understands what it is to write. She understands writing, having done it herself since she was a child, and having published her first work, *Antonino's Niche,* a book about her father, seven years ago. Most of all, she understands why writing is important.

Ms De Rosa directs the writer's organisation Book Creator's Circle, which gives opportunities to people to write where they might otherwise not be possible. The organisation is also an active, financial sponsor of PEN. "We represent all writers," she says. "We've got aspiring writers, academic writers, published writers, self-published writers; we're trying to give writers a voice."

It might be this openness to all people, an overtly compassionate approach, that makes Letizia De Rosa successful in her work. In a regular working day, she may have one-on-one meetings with aspiring writers about the writing process, about belonging, and "helping them to address their writing role".

She also meets with academics, and manages conferences and the Book Creator's Circle website, which gives involved writers their own profile.

Ms De Rosa says that she has a great interest in the causes of those marginalised in society, and giving them an opportunity to express themselves. She says that this is something greatly influenced by personal experience. "I grew up as a first generation Italian girl in Cairns in the 60s. It was a very ❯

❯ *Continued from 3*

different world. Being Italian wasn't trendy 50 years ago, and it certainly wasn't trendy to be bilingual."

She says that from a young age she was attracted to the idea of working with marginalised communities. "At about 17 I had this real, I suppose calling, to do voluntary work in the area of disability. Years later I finished a Masters in Special Education. I've always worked in charity or human rights or feminist groups. I've just always done that sort of thing."

Ms De Rosa started writing her first book after losing two babies. She says that this was her reason to write. "It was very difficult to write. I didn't have a particularly close relationship with my father at that time, but it gave him a voice as well, and it gave our relationship power and an opportunity to grow. The written word, it helps to refine ideas and give power."

She says her involvement with PEN has had a great effect on her life and her writing. She recalls attending the World Voices Festival in New York in April 2009, learning about PEN, and then having the first PEN function for Book Creator's Circle in November 2009. The same month, she had a poem, *Silent Pens*, published in the Sydney PEN magazine

"PEN has influenced my writing. And it has influenced my life because it has made my values even firmer and, as a director of BCC, even more confident. It's one of the first things I mention to any new contributor to Book Creator's Circle, because this is what we stand for. We stand for the silenced writer, so we don't have the right to exclude anyone from joining and being given the opportunity to write and express themselves."

Letizia De Rosa is confident that more people are recognising the silenced writer, at least in Australia, as freedom of speech becomes a more frequent topic of discussion. "People are talking about it all the time. It's been growing as a topic, I would say. My understanding is that freedom of speech is something that we should work for, and have discourse and discussion around, but it has to be done mindfully and respectfully."

The Sydney PEN Award is presented annually to an individual who has worked especially hard to promote the centre's values and the PEN Charter. The winner is nominated by Sydney PEN's management committee, and made possible by the generosity of Sydney PEN member Jane Morgan.

Cross industry platform to share issues and issues

Letizia De Rosa set up an organisation to give members of the publishing industry an opportunity support common goals.

Jeff Li

The Book Creators Circle shares PEN's goal of protecting the rights of the silenced writer, but it goes beyond the authors themselves.

"It is not just the authors, but also the book industry people. That's why it is called the Book Creators," says Letizia De Rosa, founder of the Book Creators Circle.

"Because it's cross-industry and it's not only writers, we're not just with one group of people," she says. "It is cross-group, cross-interests, cross-areas and also working with academic writers."

Ms De Rosa founded the Book Creators Circle in 2008, to give people in the publishing industry a platform to meet and help each other.

"My intention was to give them a platform where they can meet to talk, arrange events like conferences, have an Internet presence, where they can share ideas. We have contributors from Italy, New Zealand, the States and the UK, and it's growing rapidly."

The Book Creators Circle works on PEN campaigns, taking part in its campaigns

"We're involved with the letter writing campaign," she says. "We also hold events. In 2009 we launched BCC internationally and commemorated it on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer.

"Professor Michael Fraser, the president of PEN, spoke at the AGM this year quite strongly about his views on the silenced writers being not only the imprisoned writers, but also those whose works are not getting out there and being read.

"I think it is healthy to have discourses and dialogue on what it means to have freedom of speech," she says.

The Circle also supports PEN with funding and publicity.

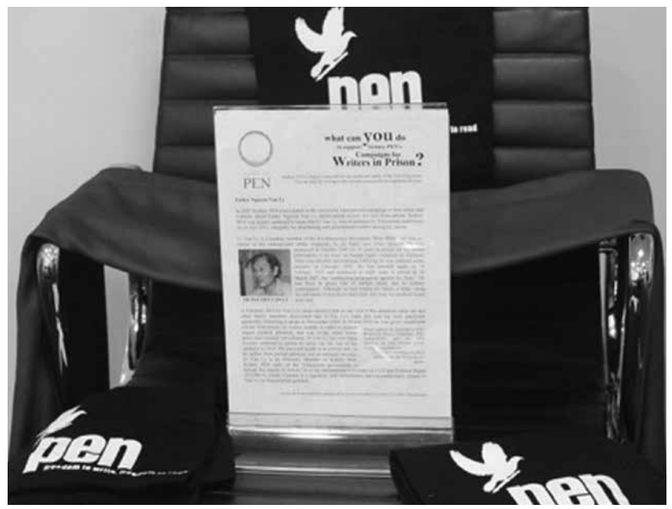
"We're corporate financial sponsors of PEN. But we are not just corporate sponsors. The thing about the Book Creators' Circle is that we're active members and active sponsors of PEN in that we acknowledge The Empty Chair at all our meetings and all our correspondence.

"We not only acknowledge The Empty Chair, but we also wear PEN T-shirts. We raise awareness of PEN, and all new contributors know that we're affiliated with PEN."

Ms De Rosa says she wants to continue the BCC's involvement with the Day of the Imprisoned Writer and visit Father Nguyen Van Ly in Vietnam, who has been imprisoned for 15 years.

But she will only do so after consulting with PEN to see if the visit is appropriate or not.

"If it is not appropriate to go somewhere and you still go, you would cause that person more problems," she says. "For me it would be a mark of respect but I'm not sure that it is advisable if it should cause the writer more problems."



Pussy Riot band member released, remaining two to serve sentences

Pussy Riot band member Ekaterina Samusevich has been freed on a suspended sentence. However, two other band members, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, remain in prison to serve the remainder of their two-year sentences in a penal colony following the band's conviction for hooliganism motivated by religious hatred. That the two women remain in prison, and that the third, while free, has not been acquitted, is deeply shocking to PEN. PEN International continues to call for their immediate and unconditional release.

Photo: Mr Rollers

Public protest on behalf of *Pussy Riot*.

The three women have been held for more than six months, having been arrested in March shortly after the punk band had staged a "flash" performance in a Moscow cathedral of their *Punk Prayer*, a song criticising the close relationship between the Orthodox Church and President Putin.

A video recording of the event, which was curtailed after a few minutes when church officials removed the band members from the premises, has been widely circulated on the Internet leading Pussy Riot to become internationally famous as symbols of the growing repression of dissent in Russia.

According to Miriam Elder, who has been covering the trial for *The Guardian*, Ekaterina Samusevich was freed when the judge ruled that she did not engage in the "aggressive movements" that had offended Russia's Orthodox believers as she had been thrown out of the cathedral before she could take part in the performance.

As the other two women bid Ekaterina good-bye from the glass-walled box in which they are held during the trial hearings, Miriam Elder reports, Maria Alyokhina told the court, "I have lost all hope in the court but I want again and for the last time, because we probably won't get another chance, to talk about our motives. Dear believers, we did not mean to offend you."

A career shaped around personal passions

Randa Abdel-Fattah is a lawyer, human rights activist and a doctoral candidate in the Centre for Social Inclusion at Macquarie University, researching Islamophobia. She is regular guest commentator on radio and television. In 2010, she was invited by the US State Department as the Australian representative in a three-week program across the United States to investigate multiculturalism and policy. She is the third writer in Sydney PEN's 'Free Voices' series. **Alex Johnson** reports.

Randa Abdel-Fattah

In introducing herself, Randa Abdel-Fattah says she "expects to get a full night's rest sometime after 2020"; it may seem like a whimsical statement until you realise that she might not be joking. Since 2005, Ms Abdel-Fattah has written seven young adult and children's novels, recently released her first adult novel, *No Sex in the City,* contributed opinion pieces to various national newspapers, worked tirelessly as a human rights activist and forged a successful career as a lawyer. To top it all off, she has just put law on hold so that she can complete her PhD at Macquarie University. To describe her as busy is probably an understatement.

"When I chose to do law, I thought it would be an arena where I could really explore my passion for human rights but it didn't work out," she says. Finding that her legal career was increasingly being sidelined by other commitments, Ms Abel-Fattah decided to take the leap and change paths. "I thought, 'Why can't I just revert to my passions as a career?'"

So, which passion is she referring to – writing, or her ongoing commitment to social justice? For Ms Abdel-Fattah, the two aren't mutually exclusive. Both are about stories.

"When you're open to stories, it means that you're open to other people's perspectives and experiences, and that is at the heart of being an engaged human being and someone who cares about other people's lives," she says.

"When you are able to broaden your perspective from your own limited experience and actually care about what other people go through, I think that develops an ability to empathise."

From an early age, Randa Abdel-Fattah felt an urge to talk to older people, using their tales as inspiration for her own works. While she views her novels as capturing a broad audience, there is an obvious young adult appeal in her work. She spends a large portion of her year speaking at Australian schools about her novels and the themes that arise in them.

"I really love the fact that I am able to connect with younger audiences. I love the fact that I'm able to offer them a window into stories that they might not have thought about and increase their awareness about social justice, from a personal perspective as well as within wider context."

The opportunity to share her knowledge and experiences with a younger audience provides a necessary counterpoint to the recent rise in Islamophobic rhetoric, both within Australia and globally.

"It just seems that it's become almost acceptable to say things that people would have said behind closed doors before," she says. "Maybe social media has played a part in that. It's mobilised people and given them a platform, an anonymous platform in some cases, so people are able to vent more without necessarily being subject to a rebuttal."

By filling a significant gap in the representations of Muslim women in Australian popular culture, Ms Abdel-Fattah breaks down the negative stereotypes associated with Islamic culture. "It's still very difficult to find Muslim characters who aren't represented in a very tokenistic or very stereotypical way," she says.

"We still have a very white-washed popular cultural content manufacturing in Australia. Which is why, even though the reality of our day to day existence is pretty much diverse and multicultural, when we try and create drama to reflect what's happening in Australia, very often there's a huge gap."

She says she does not like to be categorised as a Muslim writer. "I find it so patronising. Just because I write some books that happen to contain Muslim characters, I'm sometimes branded in that way. Or there's an assumption that all the books are autobiographical. It's as though Muslims don't have an imagination, it must be about our own angst."

Having her writing and identity categorised in terms of her Egyptian/ Palestinian heritage is something that Ms Abdel-Fattah is intimately familiar with. "Being the daughter of migrants, and being part of a misunderstood and maligned minority faith and ethnicity, has meant that my identity has always been defined in terms of resistance; resisting people's stereotypes and feeling like you're on probation in the country in which you were born and raised," she says.

Rather than defining identity as a static element based on faith or ethnicity, she believes that identity is fluid. "Identity crises are not just the monopoly of people who come from non-white ethnic and religious backgrounds. You can have an identity crisis and be white and fifth generation Australian and still feel conflicted about your identity," she says. "My identity changes all the time. Sometimes I question my role as a mother, as a lawyer, as advocate, as an Australian."

However, given the current political climate, she accepts that sometimes she has to start over at square one. "I am forced to forget the liberation that comes with thinking of my identity as fluid and go back and talk about these very frustrating questions about what it means to be an Australian," she says.

"Frankly, I don't buy into that idea that we can define Australian values. I want people to embrace human values and stop thinking of Australian identity in ethnic terms."

For democratic society to flourish, free speech must be upheld

This essay by author and lawyer Randa Abdel-Fattah, presented in Sydney at the special event to mark The Day of the Imprisoned Writer, is the third in Sydney PEN's 'Free Voices' lecture and essay program, running from 2012 to 2014 using funds granted by Copyright Agency Limited. The program is designed to build public awareness and concern about freedom of expression, and to galvanise a larger, broader demographic of supporters who will challenge human rights abuses and stand up for the freedom to write and read. It offers new and established writers the opportunity to raise or utilise their profile and express their commitment to freedom of expression in a contemporary context.

In 2010, a member of Israel's parliament gave me a gift: a booklet entitled 'Letter from Israel', produced by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Fifty-nine pages long, the booklet purports to provide a history of Israel and the Land of Zion and covers topics such as The Land, History, The State, People, Culture and Leisure.

I carefully read every page. Not once is the word 'occupation' used. The following statement appears under History: "Inspired by Zionist ideology, thousands of Jews began to arrive in the Land, then a sparsely populated and neglected part of the Ottoman Empire. The early pioneers drained swamps, reclaimed wastelands, afforested bare hillsides, established industries and built towns and villages."

Palestinians are absent from the booklet, unless they appear as demographic statistics.

This is an example of the Israeli version of terra nullius. Whereas the Mabo case in Australia rejected the mythology of Australia as an 'empty' land, the similar idea that the land of Palestine was, as Israel Zangwill the writer claimed, a "land without a people for a people without a land", remains an enduring part of Israel's grand narrative.

In Ghada Karmi's book, *Married to Another Man*, she writes about how, following the first Zionist congress in Basel in 1897, at which the idea of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine was proposed, the rabbis of Vienna dispatched two representatives to "investigate the suitability of the country for such an enterprise". The men reported the result of their explorations in a cable to Vienna and said: "The bride is beautiful but she is married to another man." That statement has always struck me as an elegant rebuttal of the claim that Palestine was 'empty'.

From 1948 onwards, Israel has attempted to expunge the pain, history and identity of Palestinians from memory. Palestinians in the occupied territories, Israel and in the diaspora, traditionally mark Israel's official Independence Day on 15 May as a national day of mourning, the day that for Palestinians represents the loss of 78 percent of their historic homeland.

The creation of the state of Israel resulted in a catastrophe, a *Nakba*, for the indigenous Palestinian population. Israeli historian Illan Pappe is one Israeli historian (neither the first nor the only one) who has meticulously documented the carefully planned campaign to expel the majority indigenous Palestinian population from their land. In his book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, he writes, "Plan D or the Plan Dalet in Hebrew, detailed the methodology that was employed to achieve the Zionist plan of creating an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine. The orders given by the architects of Plan Dalet, the Hagana, included, 'large-scale intimidation; laying siege to and bombarding villages and population centres; setting fire to homes, properties and goods; expulsion; demolition; and, finally, planting mines among the rubble to prevent any of the expelled inhabitants from returning. Each unit was issued with hits list of villages and neighbourhoods as the targets for this master plan'.

My talk today will not detail how this plan was carried out. Suffice to say that when the plan was completed in six months, almost "800,000 Palestinians had been uprooted and became refugees, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants".

The denial of this catastrophe, this Nakba, has resulted not only in the denial of the right of return of the Palestinian refugees as required under UN resolution 194, but Israel's refusal to concede, let alone be held accountable for, the ethnic cleansing committed in 1948.

What I want to focus on today is a law that was last year enacted in Israel that strives to censor commemorations of the Nakba and so perpetuate the mythology that persists in casting Israel as the state that 'made the desert bloom', as a state founded on noble, lofty principles, as a peace-loving state, as the 'only democracy in the Middle East'.

What I am talking about is the so-called Nakba Law.

In March 2011 the Israeli Knesset passed amendment No. 40 (2011) to the Budgets Foundations Law (1985) – Reducing Budget or Support for Activity Contrary to the Principles of the State, otherwise known as The Nakba Law.

The Law authorises the Finance Minister to reduce state funding or support to an institution if it engages in an "activity that is contrary to the principles of the state". Relevantly, the activities include:

- Rejecting the existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state;
- Commemorating Independence Day or the day of the establishment of the state as a day of mourning.

The effect of the law is wide-reaching. I spoke to Salah Mohsen, a lawyer with Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, and he said this: "We have argued that the law creates a chilling effect. Schools, theatres, municipalities, teachers are afraid to be politically active because it may affect their funding or, in the case of individuals, employment opportunities. There is a fear that the Shabak [the Israeli Security Service] will use their authority to mark institutions or individuals as seditious. In effect, the law is about the politics of fear."

The Nakba Law is an explicit expression of what has been happening to Palestinians from 1948 until today. That is, an assault on the collective memory, free speech, history, equality and dignity of Palestinians.

From 1948 onwards Israel took steps to erase all traces of the Arab presence in the newly formed state. In 1949, Ben-Gurion instituted an official policy to rename the Arab names of places and change them to Hebrew, using "ancient or biblical equivalents for the Palestinian towns and villages" and producing a Hebrew map of Palestine. The policy continued after 1967, with Muslim and Christian sites in the Old City of Jerusalem renamed. The appropriation of Palestinian culture, or cultural property theft, was also critical to disappearing Palestine. Consider the Israeli National Library's handling of 70,000 valuable books that were looted from Palestinian homes in 1948. These books were declared the 'property' of the library and hidden in the National Library's storerooms until in the 1960s, when about 6,000 of these books were labeled AP: "Abandoned Property".

The Nakba Law simply codifies what Israel has had the power to do since 1948, which is censor Palestinian citizens of Israel, forbid them to study their cultural inheritance and, for those who attended and attend Israeli schools, compel them to learn about the so-called "heroic establishment of the modern Jewish state with no mention of the catastrophe that befell the indigenous Palestinian society of which they are a part".

Salah Mohsen, lawyer at Adalah, said this to me: "The Nakba is blocked out of civic education in Israel. The education authority is teaching the Zionist narrative to Palestinian children: that this was an empty land, that the Palestinians ran away and were not expelled and therefore have 'nobody to blame but themselves'. So, on the one hand, they are being indoctrinated with a Zionist narrative. At the same time, the Palestinian narrative is neglected and denied. Their very identity and history is denied."

On 4 May 2011, Adalah, ACRI (the Association for Civil Rights in Israel), five parents of school children who study at Galil (a joint Jewish-Arab bilingual school), and an NGO of alumni from the Arab Orthodox school in Haifa filed a joint petition against the Nakba law to the Supreme Court, requesting that it find the law unconstitutional.

Sawsan Zaher, a lawyer with Adalah, argued in the petition that the Nakba Law, "is an ideological law aimed against the national identity of Arab citizens in Israel and against their collective memory. It harms their legitimate status as equal citizens and punishes them for having a different identity and being the 'other'. The incitement and racism against Arab citizens, and the alienation in Israeli society, stand to increase as a result of this law". Legal counsel for ACRI argued that the law "harms the public interest of the society as a whole. For a democratic and open society to flourish, free speech must be upheld particularly when sensitive and political issues are at hand. Silencing the minority stands in clear contrast to basic democratic principles".

One of the mothers of a student of the Arab-Jewish school Galil, argued that the petition was "about education without censorship. There were people who suffered when the state was founded, why should we hide it? Why not choose to acknowledge the pain and heal it?"

The Supreme Court rejected the petition in January 2012, ruling that the case was premature, as the law had not been used against any specific institution.

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March 2011. We were driving along the freeway from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv via Modin when my guide, an American activist and teacher of creative writing who lives in Ramallah, drew my attention to an Alpine forest near the Modin settlement. I immediately understood what it was that she wanted me to see. The site of a Palestinian village evacuated and destroyed in 1948. For after 1948, non-native European pine trees had been used as "instruments of concealment", planted by the Jewish National Fund to strategically cover the remains of decimated Arab villages. There was nothing ancient or romantic about the forests that

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sprouted up where towns and villages once stood. Instead, just an eerie feeling that these trees were 'green-washing' history, sinking their roots into the stories, memories, bodies, homes of the dead and the dispossessed.

Last year, I visited the ancient port city of Jaffa, noting the rustic stone homes in the curving beautiful alleys along the coast that once belonged to Palestinians. They were now quaint artist studios for the hip and trendy. A woman noticed me peering into the window of one of the studios and invited me to step inside to browse through the display of hand-crafted jewellery. I politely declined. It felt as though there were ghosts floating in the alleys. It was surreal to walk in this haunted, gentrified, trendy artists' hub that could have been snatched out of a European city, and yet know that I had friends in Sydney whose families had been expelled from Jaffa, forbidden to ever return.

I took a photo standing in front of the Ottoman clock tower, one of Jaffa's most famous landmarks. My friend and I stood beside it, accompanied for a few moments by a Palestinian who worked in a nearby café. I noticed the plaque on the structure. It is written in Hebrew, and the young Palestinian translated it for me: "In Memory of the Heroes who Fell in the Battle to Liberate Yafo."

Next in my walking tour along the cornice of the Mediterranean Sea, I took photos of tourist information plaques offering a multi-lingual history of the city covering thousands of years until the present day. There was nothing in Arabic. I subsequently came across a description of these signs online. I do not recall seeing the sign in English but it apparently says: "In the year 1936, Arab barbarians attacked the Jewish neighborhood."

Schools, theatres, municipalities, teachers are afraid to be politically active because it may affect their funding or, in the case of individuals, employment opportunities.

The systematic expunging of Palestinian and Arab identity, history and memory from Israel, as well as the collective forced amnesia around the Nakba, confronted me everywhere I turned, whether in the West Bank, Israel or Jerusalem. It is truly a remarkable feat in censorship to construct an entire state around a falsehood. To attempt to systematically expunge a people's existence, displacement, loss and nostalgia from both the past and present. To maintain the idea that nothing coherent, beautiful, legitimate, meaningful and non-Jewish had predated Israel. Fearful of Palestinian memory, it is little wonder, then, that this censorship is now law. Discussion of the definition of the state of Israel is potentially seditious. Historic truths about what happened to the Palestinian people, and what continues to happen to them, are not tolerated.

But there are people willing to risk arrest, intimidation and abuse in order to raise public awareness of the Nakba, particularly challenging the prohibition against teaching and commemorating the Nakba in schools and civic groups and challenging the Nakba law.

Zochrot, which means 'remembering', is one such Israeli grassroots campaign. On its website, the organisation says that it seeks to raise public awareness of the Palestinian Nakba, especially among Jews in Israel who bear a special responsibility to remember and amend the legacy of 1948. Zochrot carries out different projects to advance understanding of Nakba and its legacy. This website is one of those projects. The site presents information about the Palestinian localities that Israel destroyed in 1948 and about the Nakba's place in our lives today. The Nakba is spoken in different voices on this site — in photographs, testimonies, maps, prose, and more. Zochrot's is one of these voices, a voice that seeks recognition for injustice and new paths toward change and repair.

On 9 May 2011, Zochrot carried out a protest against the Nakba Law in Tel Aviv aimed at "spurring discussion about this dangerous, anti-democratic law". The video of parts of the protest action is on Zochrot's website. It is a fascinating insight into pedestrian Israeli conversations and interactions about the Nakba, how the Nakba is perceived by ordinary citizens, and how Israelis who attempt to advance an awareness of the Nakba are treated.

But Zochrot is not just about protesting on Israel's Independence Day. It also seeks to reverse the ongoing process of cultural genocide. No more apparent is the rendering of Palestinian identity, history and trauma invisible than in the Israeli education system. Like the myth of terra nullius in Australia's books of history, the myth of 'a land without a people for a people without a land' persists in Israel's schools, and teaching the Nakba is considered subversive and anti-Israeli.

Zochrot trains educators and has produced a study guide, *How do you say Nakba in Hebrew?,* that provides advice on the "pedagogy of teaching the Nakba in the Israeli school system". Zochrot provides training on "the Nakba and the Palestinian refugee community, the relationship between dominant and silenced history, the right of return and more". A seminar is interested in asking 'how can we deal with the challenges, fear and questions about our identity that arise from learning about the Nakba?'

On 19-20 July 2012, Zochrot held one of its education training seminars at the Bezalel Academy for Art and Design in Jerusalem. The participants were teachers who wished to teach the Nakba in their schools.

The Legal Forum for Eretz Israel asked the Minister of Education to prevent the education seminar from taking place, complaining that Zochrot "offers a different, critical perspective on the land's history" and implies that Zochrot would rather live in a state not only for Jews, contrary to what is a "fundamental principle of Israel as a Jewish state". The Legal Forum asked the Ministry of Education to see "whether it possesses information regarding the identity of the teachers and educators who participated in the abovementioned course".

The seminar was also attacked by the Chairperson of Im Tirtzu (meaning the second Zionist revolution). In a letter issued to Zochrot, government ministers in the Knesset and Bezalel, the chairperson wrote: "You, who bear responsibility for setting the tone of the educational system, should be aware of the activities of those whose goal is to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel as a democratic, Jewish state."

The letter is interesting in that it cites the Nakba Law in support of its condemnation of the education seminar, stating that "Zochrot's study guide is aimed at bringing about the refugees' return and undoing the Jewish and democratic character of the state of Israel. In doing so they are using academic facilities in a manner inconsistent with the 2011 Budget Law (Amendment No. 40)".

Finally, the education seminar is accused of being part of a "series of subversive, anti-Israeli activities".

The Nakba Law is an explicit expression of what has been happening to Palestinians from 1948 until today. That is, an assault on the collective memory, free speech, history, equality and dignity of Palestinians.

The teaching of the Nakba in schools apparently undermines Israel's 'democratic' character. It "undoes the Jewish and democratic character of the state of Israel", the letter claims. Thus, we clearly have a distorted reality where censorship of the Nakba in schools seemingly protects democracy. The Nakba purportedly 'undoes' Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

The notion of undoing is interesting. How can a state 'do' Jewish? How can it 'do' democracy?

Israel 'does' Jewish by 'undoing' Palestinian. It is a state that legally discriminates against its Palestinian citizens, granting differential legal rights and privileges to its own Jewish citizens and to Jews anywhere in the world. And it does so on the grounds that it has the 'right to exist' as a Jewish state. The concept of rights is meaningless without reference to the opposing threat. To invoke a right implies that there is a space or opportunity that exists where such a right has the potential to be challenged or extinguished. One has the right to life. This makes little sense without understanding that this means one has the right not to be killed. You need to identify what you are threatened by in order to identify what protection you need. Put another way, you can't have a right without a wrong.

The irony is that the greatest threat to Israel is itself. Its rights discourse implies that it understands full well that its existence as a Jewish state is threatened. Not physically, but morally and intellectually. And the moral and intellectual threat to the 'right to exist' is the Nakba. The Nakba is Israel's wrong. The problem is that in Israel's topsy-turvy view of the world, the Nakba was right. It was necessary in order to produce the state which it now asserts has the right to exist. It cannot tolerate the claim that in fact it created a wrong to exist.

And so, Israel cannot 'do' Jewish and it cannot 'do' democracy if the Nakba is commemorated and acknowledged. Because this would automatically elevate the Nakba to a wrong, and threaten Israel's right to exist claim. It is easier for Israel to censor the Nakba than it is to accept the consequences of its history. And that is why doing Jewish only is to undo Palestinian. Because the Nabka is at the core of Palestinian identity, memory, history and being.

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But what about democracy? One can understand why Israel claims that the Nakba undermines and undoes its Jewish character.

But how does awareness and commemoration of the Nakba undermine and undo democracy? For Israel, the introduction of the Nakba Law, and the years of suppression and denial of the Nakba in Israel, reflect a peculiar Israeli version of democracy. A version of democracy that promotes censorship and stifles freedom of speech. What is a democracy if it isn't a space in which the right to be subversive is upheld? There is a curious Alice in the Looking Glass logic that pervades Israel's notion of democracy.

On 2 May 2012, MKs Hanin Zouabi and Masud Ganaim sought to move a motion to include the following topic on the agenda in Israel's parliament: "Tel Aviv police blockade Zochrot's offices to prevent a legitimate protest."

This was a reference to 15 Zochrot activists who had planned to stage a protest in Tel Aviv by placing on the road leaflets bearing the names of the Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948. The building was surrounded by police and the entrances had been blocked. The activists were "prevented from leaving in order to prevent what they called a disturbance of the peace".

Excerpts of the discussion in parliament reveal some interesting dimensions to the Nakba debate. Ms Zouabi argued that, "what's involved is something much more fundamental than a simple fear of disturbing the peace…A country convinced of its innocence would not do such a thing…this is a country that has something to hide… legislation was even passed about this, so that everyone would be aware that no Israeli citizen should hear the word nakba, no pupil, no citizen would know it".

The interesting thing about the subsequent parliamentary exchange, is that the Chair, tasked with maintaining order, felt compelled to intervene, against parliamentary protocol, in order to lambast Ms Zoubai and "correct" her for making a "factual error". He explained that in fact the "truth" of the legislation is that it "states explicitly that funds allocated to the Ministry of Education shall not be used to commemorate that topic", as opposed to censoring public discussion as contended by Ms Zoubai.

Minister of Sport and Culture, Limor Livnat, responded to the motion. The thrust of his attack on Ms Zoubai was that she was "inciting hatred against the Israeli public". He asks, "What normal, democratic state would even allow

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❯ *Continued from 11*

you to mount this podium to incite against and express hatred for the country you live in?"

The tenor of the remainder of the exchange makes it clear that recognition of villages demolished in 1948 is equivalent to 'incitement of hatred' and that Ms Zoubai, an Arab-Israeli citizen, in raising this in her capacity as a member of the Israeli parliament, is in fact abusing the privileges of democracy. When she attempts to argue that what happened is "history", she is attacked and marginalised. Clearly, in Israel, democracy is not evenly distributed and is allocated in proportion to whether you support the official narrative, or challenge it.

Yet, it would be wrong to conceive of this state of affairs in terms of a mere freedom of speech debate. As Zoubai declared: "Is accepting my history considered incitement? The Nakba is a historic truth, not a position or freedom of expression." This is not censorship of an idea or opinion or personal ideology. This is about disappearing Palestine. It's about a "process of cultural genocide that threatens Palestinian identity at its core".

The Nakba Law seems to reflect a hyper-paranoid state. A state that does not suffer criticism of Israeli government policy, deeming it to constitute "de-legitimisation" of the Jewish state. While constantly reminding the world that it is the only democracy in the Middle East (as if Saudi Arabia, Jordan or Iran, for example, are yardsticks by which any state would seek to measure itself against in order to prove they have the moral political high-ground) Israel forgets that it can call itself a democracy and still be a bad democracy. It can be a state that pretends it upholds democratic principles while simultaneously dismantling them.

The Nakba Law is one example. There are others. For example, last year Israel passed the 'Law for Prevention of Damage to the State of Israel through Boycott" effectively banning citizens from calling for academic, consumer or cultural boycotts of Israel. Under the law, an individual or organisation proposing a boycott or publishing a call for a boycott of the State of Israel may be sued for compensation by any individual or institution claiming that it could be damaged by such a call. Evidence of actual damage will not be required. Israeli intellectuals have denounced the law. Amos Oz, a leading Israeli author, issued a letter condemning the law as the "worst of the anti-democratic bills in the Knesset. The bill will turn law-abiding citizens into criminals". The Association of Civil Rights in Israel described the law as "a direct violation of freedom of expression".

There is a link between the boycott law and the Nakba. The two are not isolated. There are growing numbers of Israelis on the left who support boycotting products from illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The Boycott Law does not prohibit calls for a boycott of settlement products. It is a blanket prohibition. Under the legislation, the precise definition of "a boycott against the State of Israel" is "deliberately avoiding economic, cultural or academic ties with another person or another factor only because of his ties with the State of Israel, one of its institutions or an area under its control, in such a way that may cause economic, cultural or academic damage".

In researching this subject I came across an excellent article by Eitan Bronstein. He said: "Israel's right-wing government, on the other hand, has for some time been showing signs that it understands all too well what the Israel-Palestine conflict is about: the conquests of 1948 and the Palestinians being prevented from returning after the violent Judaising of the country. So, although the left has been telling us for years that the issue is the "destructive" occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and although it's succeeding in portraying the colonial localities established there as "settlements" ("political," Rabin added), it's actually the Israeli right that reminds us, in its contorted manner, of course, that the source of the conflict is the Nakba and the establishment of the Jewish state." This will always be about more than the settlements. This is about the very core of Israel's legitimacy.

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On the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba, a group of individuals decided to release hundreds of black balloons in to the French Hill settlement in Jerusalem. Worried about getting caught by the Israeli police, the organisers kept changing the location. I have a friend who lives in Jerusalem with her husband, a Muslim Palestinian, and their two daughters. My friend is, in fact, an American Jew but conceals her identity in order to avoid her daughters being conscripted in the army. She is also a Palestinian activist.

She told me about the absurdity of having to drive around town looking for the activists and their balloons, and being sent on a wild goose chase to find the final location. Eventually, she found 40 people in a back room at Al Quds University, gathered without permission, holding hundreds of balloons. They were forced to leave and so they piled into cars, still holding their black balloons, and went to a large, private home in Shufat. The sense of fear was palpable.

While such commemorations were not illegal, there was still a fear of getting caught. Nonetheless, the group, now about 50 to 60, walked out to an open rock-strewn field and released the balloons into the sky. They watched the black balloons fly over the highway and skirt French Hill. It was a haunting image, my friend says. "Poetic and depressing and empowering and scary all at once." My friend laments that because the settlements are so segregated, the activists could not gauge whether the balloons had any impact. But, she says, "It was still meaningful for my daughters and me because we had a community event remembering the history and making an effort to make sure others remembered it too."

A balloon can be popped. But once released into the open sky, it is beyond reach. Free. It dances with the wind. Like balloons in the sky, memories are untouchable. Which is why the Nakba Law and all efforts to censor Palestinians will fail. You can't legislate against a people's memories and mourning. If there is one place where Israel has no right to exist, it is our hearts.

Telling a story about closing the Indigenous literacy gap

Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technolgy, Sydney, and Sydney Story Factory marked Indigenous Literacy Day on September 5 with story telling workshops for primary and secondary school students at UTS Library. The workshops set out to show the students how much fun writing can be, encourage them to find their own voice and think about higher education as a possibility, report **Melita Rowston and James Saunders.**

Indigenous school students from the greater Sydney region converged on UTS Library to celebrate Indigenous Literacy Day in workshops run by Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning and Sydney Story Factory.

Sydney Story Factory took primary school students on an intergalactial story- telling journey involving Martians, space travel and lots of laughter.

Anna Zhu

Joshua John from John Warby Public School.

Anna Zhu

Faith Williams, Naeem Salah and Rose Lord, from Chester Hill Public School.

The workshop developed the students' use of expressive language, increased their enthusiasm for writing, and encouraged them to find their own voices. At the end of the day, they left with their own bound book, which they had written, complete with their author photo on the back cover.

Secondary students took part in (IN)DIGISTORIES, a workshop developed by Jumbunna staff that used alternative story telling methods such as photography, script writing, spoken word and music to explore themes of family, identity and place. At the end of the day they had completed a multimedia movie about their lives.

"The partnership between Sydney Story Factory and Jumbunna is important for us as our goals overlap so neatly," said Catherine Keenan, co-founder and executive director of Sydney Story Factory.

"Sydney Story Factory seeks to engage students with writing by showing them how much fun it can be – an important step when trying to open pathways to tertiary education.

"Literacy rates for Indigenous kids lag behind those of non-Indigenous kids. So, we are in favour of any effort to try and shrink that gap, this includes supporting the excellent programs developed and run by Jumbunna," Catherine said.

Professor McDaniel, Director of Jumbunna, said that while enrolment rates for Indigenous students have increased, much can be done to encourage more students to pursue tertiary education.

"Bringing students onto campus from a young age is a great way to engage their minds and start them thinking about higher education as a possibility post high school," Professor McDaniel said.

Cathy Costello brought 11 students from Winmalee High School to UTS and found the day to be incredibly valuable,

"The students all commented on how much they enjoyed their story writing session and especially the friendly people at Jumbunna," she said. "They also had the wonderful opportunity to explore and express their identity in a very safe and inclusive environment."

Published courtesy UTS Newsroom

Show Me The Way students and Learning Partners from across Australia meeting in Sydney for the first time after communicating online for a year.

Social networking site shows the way

While the proliferation of social networking sites has made many of them the scourge of teachers and classrooms everywhere, the first Indigenous social networking site may prove a vital tool in the effort to improve Indigenous education. **Brendan Gallagher** reports.

The latest phase of the initiative between *Show Me The Way*, Australia's first Indigenous social networking site, and the Exodus Foundation, an organisation that assists marginalised and disadvantaged people, was launched this year after eight years of planning and development.

Show Me The Way was conceived by broadcaster Lola Forester, and multimedia producer Chris Maguire, as a way to improve retention and attendance rates of Indigenous children at school, and raise Indigenous numbers in tertiary education.

"We saw the way forward as being an online mentoring program," Mr Maguire says.

Ms Forester, Chair of *Show Me The Way* and long-running executive producer/presenter of the Aboriginal Program on SBS Radio, is one of Australia's most experienced Indigenous broadcasters.

She says that although many mentoring programs already exist, *Show Me The Way*'s use of technology and engagement with the corporate world gives it a unique advantage.

"Kids in this generation are using computers from a very early age. We need to use the technology that we have, because that's what young people are right into these days," she says.

She says *Show Me The Way* also differs from many existing mentoring programs that use secondary and tertiary students as mentors.

"We thought we should connect it to the corporate world so that students can talk to people who are actually out there within the real world."

She points out that *Show Me The Way* retains a strong emphasis on maintaining Indigenous culture by allowing students to both learn about and teach Indigenous culture while engaging with the corporate world. She says this teaches students they don't have to give up any of their culture in order to get a job.

"The bottom line is to maintain who you are and always be proud of who you are as an Aboriginal person," she says.

Show Me The Way matches Indigenous students with learning partners from corporate Australia who are not necessarily Indigenous. The 16 students involved in this phase are paired with a learning partner from one of two law firms, Minter Ellison and Allens Arthur Robinson. The students will be able to access computers at the Exodus Foundation's literary centers once a fortnight to communicate with them.

"It's about making school relevant," says Mr Maguire. "It's about having a learning partner who has experience in the real world and can share their mistakes with a laugh."

Photo: courtesy of *The Australian*

The Nunukul Yuggera Dancers with *Show Me The Way* trainees (l-r) Jamaya Wightman, Breeanna Suey, Corrina Ross, Katherine Zaro, Khandra Stafford, Kasey Singleton.

Pete Tattersall, Youth Program Manager at the Exodus Foundation, says the Foundation is very happy to be participating in the program and is looking forward to replicating the successes of the trial.

"The most worthwhile aspect of it is that it broadens the experience of the young people," he says. "When the young people come to this program, they have a narrow experience of the community and society as a whole. Show Me The Way opens up the corporate world to them and lets them see that it's not the enemy, but rather something they can be a part of."

The learning partner title is used to emphasise that it is an equal and mutually beneficial relationship.

Kate Vaughan, a lawyer at Minter Ellison, was a learning partner in the trials and is now the learning partner coordinator at Minter Ellison. She believes the relationship between student and learning partner is definitely a mutually learning one.

"I think that for the junior lawyers, it's an extra opportunity to hone in on their communication skills," she says. "When junior lawyers are working with their clients here, the expectations are very similar – that you'll be able to think on your feet and be able to articulate yourself quickly. Because you are really honing in on those skills, the relationship is mutually beneficial."

The learning partners are also provided with education about Indigenous history and culture and must complete and pass competency quizzes.

Ms Vaughan believes it is a unique delivery of student mentoring.

"It can be quite daunting for a student who has had no exposure to corporate Sydney whatsoever," she says. "The fact that it's online really breaks down the initial barriers so that student and learning partner can have a meaningful conversation."

The program also forms part of the two law firms' individual corporate social responsibility aspirations.

"Our focus area is disadvantaged youth, so the link up between *Show Me The Way* and Exodus fits within that aspiration very easily," says Ms Vaughan. "These are students who've sort of fallen through the cracks at traditional education facilities. At Exodus, the education is delivered uniquely. If Exodus didn't exist, then some of these students simply wouldn't finish."

Show Me The Way is closely monitored and certain words such as 'meeting' and explicit words are flagged to administrators. The students and learning partners don't meet until a graduation ceremony at the end of the 12-month program.

Kathryn Greiner AO, has worked extensively in Indigenous health, education and welfare. She has been involved with *Show Me The Way* since its inception and became its patron three months ago.

"I could see this was a logical program for young Indigenous people in terms of allowing them to see that there's a world beyond their own four walls," she says. "That is a challenge for all adolescents, but especially so for Indigenous adolescents."

Mrs Greiner was also a member of the Gonski Review of School Funding.

"It was patently obvious that we are failing our Indigenous community members in education and we have to do something about it," she says.

She believes that *Show Me The Way* goes beyond the traditional one-way street approach to support for Indigenous people. She believes the two-way relationship empowers learning partners with knowledge of the Indigenous community and their culture and heritage and allows the Indigenous and broader community to embark on a journey together.

"We can't possibly allow any of our youngsters not to get full access to education and into the trade or university of their choice to follow a degree and give them a sense of a future with a job where they can be happy and get a personal sense of reward and satisfaction, which is what we ask of everybody."

Giving Indigenous children an education, and a voice

Newly appointed as Professor of Australian Indigenous Education at the University of Technology, Sydney, Dr Juanita Sherwood is committed to improving literacy among children and adults in Indigenous communities and ensuring everyone gets the gift of an education. **Mayrah Sonter** reports.

Professor Juanita Sherwood is an accomplished Wiradjuri woman and academic who has overcome a difficult start to her own education to become the Professor of Australian Indigenous Education in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the University of Technology, Sydney.

"Schooling wasn't a great space for me and it was the last place I wanted to go," she says. "Growing up, my literacy wasn't great and we moved all over the country, making schooling difficult."

Professor Sherwood began her career as a nurse at St Vincent's Hospital during the time of the discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus infection/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). After a mass exodus of other staff at the hospital due to fear of contracting the virus, she found herself working double shifts and managing multiple wards in her early 20s. It led to burnout.

Wanting a change, she thought she would like to work with children and so went back to university to study teaching.

On graduation, she found there were limited jobs for teachers so she began working as a child health nurse in Redfern and Central Sydney where she was responsible for health screenings at schools. During this time she discovered many of the Indigenous children had hearing issues.

"Out of every 100 kids tested, 86 had an educational significant hearing loss that hadn't been picked up, and was impacting on their learning and their literacy," she says.

This finding was also significant because, as she says, learning to hear is "really critical from the age of nought to three as that's when you learn to listen; if you're not necessarily tuned in to hearing the right things, you miss consonants, you miss vowels and you miss intonations that make sense of what you're trying to listen too.

"If you can't hear, you have great trouble learning," Professor Sherwood says.

The identification of this health issue was significant for the education of Indigenous children across the country.

"Health service providers did not link hearing loss to education, or talk to parents or teachers about the students with hearing loss and so nobody was acknowledging poor hearing as an issue in learning."

The local Aboriginal community in Redfern, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and colleagues encouraged Juanita Sherwood to research the serious middle ear disease known as otitis media that can cause permanent hearing loss and inhibit language and literacy development.

The research lead to funding from the then minister of Education to undertake further research regarding the development of educational strategies to address otitis media and these included, the development of a book for the Board of Studies, and an educational film for schools in NSW through to ear, nose and throat clinics. The work became part of both State and Commonwealth policy.

"It's a really big outcome that started from something really small," she says.

The Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF) acknowledges that otitis media is one of the barriers to achieving good literacy but there are others.

"Poor self-esteem, learning issues and dyslexia are things I'm starting to see are pretty common," Professor Sherwood says. "Children's self esteem is the core of how a good school should work at building and supporting and promoting of identity and that is so vital to our kids learning."

"If you're confident about yourself and you're comfortable about learning then all the other bits and pieces fit around," she says.

Language is also a key issue according to the ILF in improving the literacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Professor Sherwood believes that in order to improve literacy "every child should be taught their first language – we know from research that children learn best in their first language and then you build on and teach another language.

"'We have the oldest living languages in the world and they should be promoted. They are important, they're our sustainability, they're our signs, they're our language that meets with country, they're our story of things that English will never be able to speak to and it's vital that language is maintained and sustained."

'We have the oldest living languages in the world and they should be promoted. They are important, they're our sustainability, they're our signs, they're our language that meets with country, they're our story of things that English will never be able to speak to and it's vital that language is maintained and sustained"

Other key factors to Indigenous success at school include strength in community, respect, engagement and connection. While Professor Sherwood acknowledges there are many programs that help Aboriginals succeed, there are some that are yet to be introduced.

"It is important to be aware of the institutional racism that remains within the society. For the last 20 years we've been teaching mandatory Aboriginal studies to primary school teachers and now high school teachers. This has been a big shift, but if people still believe Aboriginal people are a 'problem' as promoted through the media and government policy namely the Northern Territory Emergency Response and Intervention they're setting up a whole cycle of misinformation again which can undo the knowledge development provided within the schools."

As the new Professor of Australian Indigenous Education at UTS, Professor Sherwood is in a unique position to influence how Indigenous education is perceived and linked with the curriculum.

There tends to be a "silo ideology around how we get Indigenous education across the curriculum and there's a belief that Indigenous education and issues don't fit into departments other than education or health.

"My working history has shown that we need Indigenous education on every level, that Indigenous housing and engineering issues are really diverse and we can actually explore curriculum that needs to be more relevant to our communities," she says.

"There are lots of avenues for building Indigenous issues into every aspect of university faculties.

"There's a big agenda to push and the university here has taken it on – yes, we've got a policy, a program, and yes, we need to support that and we need to take it seriously; so, too, does the Department of Education, so do the schools – they need to back up this process."

Having worked in universities as an Indigenous person, Professor Sherwood has realised the need for dialogue.

"We need to appreciate people are sometimes fearful of how to approach Indigenous education. There needs to be some time and space for dialogue around how to do this safely.

"Literacy is very important and education is the most important gift we can give a child. But we've got to make sure that education is given and provided in a safe way because a lot of people turn kids off by being culturally unsafe, rude and disrespectful of the kids and their families and that doesn't make for a positive learning environment.

"We've come a long way and we've got a long way still. The more of us who support each other and realise that we've got a long way to go and that we need to do it together, the more we'll achieve.

Journalists in exile tell their stories

The Sri Lankan Government may claim it has lifted restrictions on the media since the civil war ended but two journalists in exile and a documentary filmmaker who visited Australia recently say oppression of the right to free speech and freedom of expression may be getting worse. **Marcella Willim** reports.

Journalists in Sri Lanka risk their lives to do their job: they routinely face death threats, abductions and indefinite detention. Among them are Bashana Abeywardane, co-ordinator for Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka, and Lokesan Anputhurai, former correspondent from the war-zone for TamilNet. Their courage and faith in what they do is told in the documentary film *Silenced Voices – Tales of Sri Lankan Journalists in Exile*, directed by Norwegian filmmaker Beate Arnestad, who has risked her own life seeking out journalists at risk living in exile.

The film was screened in Sydney in September, followed by a discussion with Bashana Abeywardena, Lokeesan Anputhurai and Beate Arnestad.

Mr Abeywardane pointed out that Tamils in Sri Lanka continue to suffer severe oppression and that by the end of the war in 2009, the size of the Sri Lankan army has increased. He said many Tamils are unable to return to their homes because the land is occupied by the military. Beate Arnestad said there is widespread sexual violence against Tamil women.

In the film, the first image is that of Beate, crouched down in the backseat of her guide's car, filming her surroundings in Sri Lanka. She had to hide the camera when her guide spotted a soldier.

"I was shocked by the situation that I saw before me, even three years after the civil war ended. I couldn't talk to people and I couldn't use their answers because I knew it would only put them in danger.

Tamilnet

Bashana Abeywardane, co-ordinator for Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka
Photo: Deutsche Welle Unternehmen

"However, I managed to talk to a doctor at a local hospital and he said that there are hundreds of amputations being carried out and thousands of orphans and widows. The situation was absolutely horrible."

Beate knew what she wanted to tell her audience, and she was not going to soften her message.

Bashana Abeywardane, a Sinhalese supported by PEN International, now lives with his wife in Berlin. In one scene, they sit, a married couple on a bench under a tree, seemingly like lost orphans hoping to one day find where they belong. Bashana's wife says in a lonely, comfortless voice: "Our shoes are not suitable for winter."

Lokesan Anputhurai, a Tamil, is also living in Berlin thanks to help from Bashana. He says there is no way for journalists to do any kind of independent reporting in his homeland. "People are living in fear and have been denied justice and normal life." However, Lokesan made a video during the war in 2009 that shows thousands of civilians bombed by the advancing army. A woman is lying motionless, and beside her a little girl is crying and moaning.

As Lokesan watched the footage, tears spilled down his face. He was unable to contain his emotions any longer about the dreadful life he had to go through during those months of war. Sitting quietly beside him, Bashana was equally horrified by the footage before him, and all he could do was to let Lokesan have his moment to pour out all his grief. It was clear that the ethnic differences between the two did not matter to them, they were there for a reason they had longed desired: to speak out and make the world know of what really is going on.

"It seemed like it was only a few days ago that I had to arrange a wedding. And now, a few days later, I had to arrange for a funeral." This was the life that Sonali Samarasinghe described in the film. Her husband, Lasantha Wickrematunge, was the editor-in-chief of Sri Lanka's newspaper, *The Sunday Leader,* and a fierce opponent of the Sri Lankan Government. He insisted on reporting on what was really happening.

He was gunned down by eight men in broad daylight a few days after he and Sonali were married. As a lawyer and journalist, Sonali worked closely with him and the government forced her to leave the country not long after his death.

However, Sonali wanted to find out who her husband's killers were. The film shows her in New York, where she now lives, trying unsuccessfully to interview Sri Lanka's representative to the United Nations, who was accused of war crimes in his previous role as a military officer.

Tamilnet

Norwegian filmmaker Beate Arnestad, director of *Tales of Sri Lankan Journalists in Exile*

"I wanted to ask him as a father and husband how he felt about the thousands of innocent Tamil civilians who were killed in the last days of the war. I guess he did not want to answer that," Sonali says.

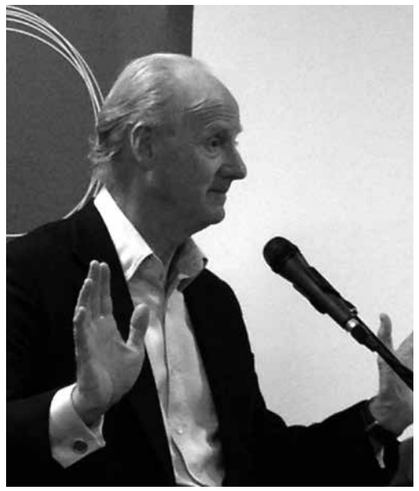
According to the Australian Tamil Congress, mistreatment and subjugation of the Tamil people continues. Thousands of Tamils refugees still linger in transit camps awaiting resettlement. Rape, disappearances and police arrest without trial is forcing Tamils to continue to flee Sri Lanka as asylum seekers.

In April 2011, a report released by a UN Expert Advisory Panel found allegations of war crimes committed during the conflict in which up to 150,000 Tamil civilians died to be credible and called for an independent international investigation into war crimes in the island.

A United Nations Human Rights Council resolution passed in March 2012 called for constructive recommendations of a Sri Lankan internal inquiry to be implemented, while pointing out that it does not however adequately address serious allegations of violations of international law.

Tea and empathy with John Ralston Saul

It was late afternoon on a Friday in August. When most of Sydney was heading home at the end of another working week, a group of Sydney PEN and Australian Society of Authors members gathered to welcome John Ralston Saul, the president of PEN International. **Jeff Li** reports.



JRS at tea with Sydney PEN and the Australian Society of Authors.

I love coming here. This country is very lucky because there are PEN centres in two great cities," he said, referring to the Centres in Sydney and Melbourne.

The Canadian author and essayist was in Sydney to deliver a sell-out lecture at the Sydney Opera House, before travelling to Tasmania and then to the 2012 Melbourne Writers Festival.

He said PEN was one of the few organisations that realised the threat posed to writers as early as during the inter-war period, and was one of the few international organisations that realised the threat posed to freedom of speech by Nazism and fascism.

"The politicians were walking away from it; the bankers were saying 'sure we can do a deal, surely trade would solve all the problems'. Everybody was walking away from reality."

Seeing how the German branch of PEN was influenced by Nazism, the then-president Herbert Wells made the decision to revoke the branch. "He made the right decision, and basically the German PEN was thrown out. It was the first stance made by an international organisation."

Mr Saul pointed out that the mission of PEN to defend freedom of expression has not changed, from defending the Nigerian author Ken Saro-Wiwa to the former president of the Independent Chinese PEN centre, Liu Xiaobo.

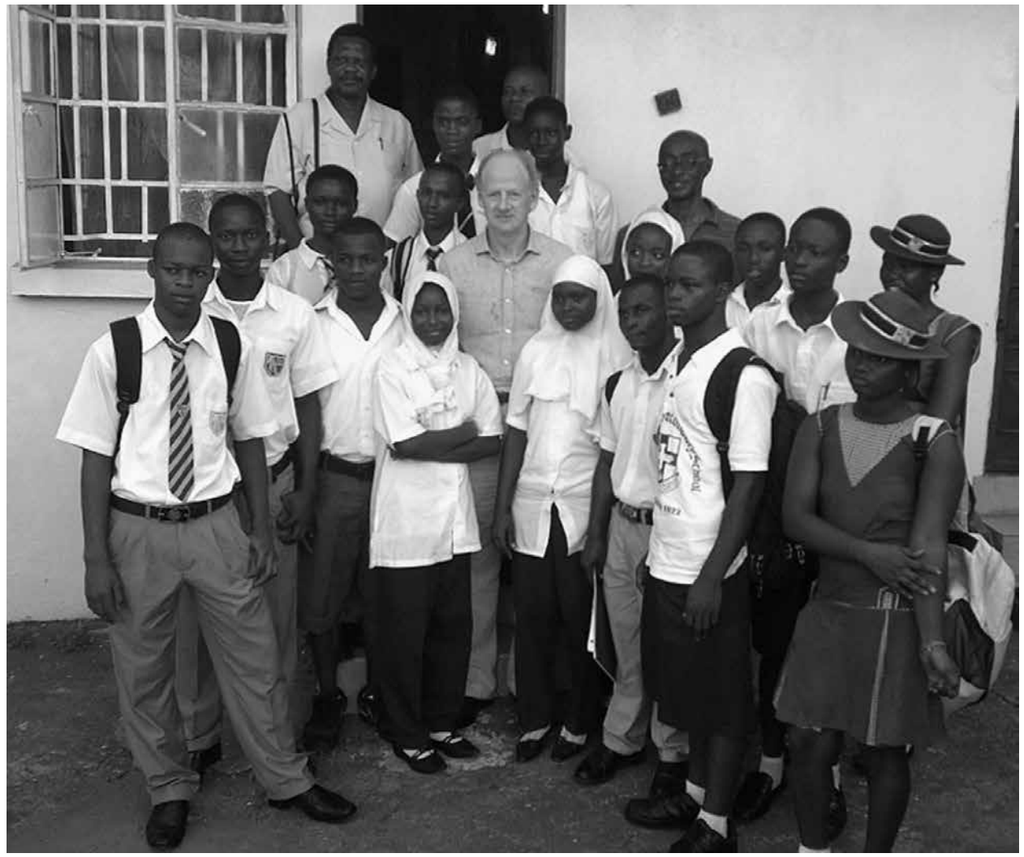
An Empty Chair reserved for Liu Xiaobo next to the podium highlighted PEN's determination to help the former president.

"Freedom of expression is self-respect, it is respect for others and it is taking responsibility for what you have said," he said. "The idea that one can just sit there and type out scathing insults against someone without identifying oneself – that's not freedom of expression, that's slander.

"Freedom of expression is supposed to make you unhappy, it's supposed to be about discomfort, about awareness that there are real problems."

He said the indiscriminate release of classified military and diplomatic documents by Wikileaks did not demonstrate such responsibility, and it was the reason why PEN did not make comments on the matter.

"There is a very long tradition of what journalists do, which is to get information that is not supposed to be made public and make it public. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. The fact the information has been – I use the right word – filtered through professional journalists meant that they sort of looked at it from the point of view of 'if we put this out, will this get someone killed tomorrow morning?' In that case, we won't put that out, we'll take that out. That's responsible."



JRS with a group of students during a visit to Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Half-way through the night, a member from the audience asked for his view on whether English would become the lingua franca of the world.

He said as long as people from different cultural or language background agreed on the basic rights, it was entirely possible for people to have an oral culture that may or may not be based in English.

"We are not the same, but doesn't mean we can't live together provided we all agree on freedom of expression, ethics, social standards, inclusions, egalitarianism, access to education. As long as we have agreement on this, we have a humanist civilisation.

"I think what is interesting for Australia is that you have an Aboriginal tradition, which is a great strength. Instead of looking at it as a problem, it's actually an enormous strength that you have access to the oral, which the Europeans and Americans don't really have."

He said Australia and Canada were both immigrant countries, and the oral relations between first generation immigrants and their new host countries gave them great flexibility when working with fellow immigrants or the existing population.

"It's an incredible strength, because you're way ahead of the countries that are locked into the written. You actually have a lively oral tradition here, working with the written tradition. That's good."

Mr Saul concluded the evening by speaking about a new initiative by the PEN Centre in Sierra Leone to introduce literature to high school students.

"We started volunteer literature clubs in secondary schools in Africa in our African PEN centres," he said, explaining that students are encouraged to read and talk about literature and then write novels and poetry. "And then we get them to perform it.

"Mohamed Sheriff, the president of the PEN Centre, explained to me that it was very simple: 'These kids are not from the middle class, they're not going to finish high school. So what we're giving them is what a middle class family gives them which is the ability to take language and turn it into power, force, imagination, creativity'.

"For three hours, these 300 students performed plays they written – church stories, essays. So it was the power of literature, the power of freedom of expression for people who really, really need it."

Have we bought enough yet?

The author and activist philosopher John Ralston Saul traces how we in the West became Walmart societies, with lots of stuff and not much substance. We bought ourselves here, and we can bring ourselves out. **Mike Seccombe** reports.

John Ralston Saul has every right to say 'I told you so'. He was way, way ahead of the pack in recognising that the international financial model he calls "globalism" was unsustainable.

Now that it is collapsing, you would excuse a little smugness. But ask him if he feels vindicated and he is far from smug.

"Well," says the 65-year-old Canadian novelist and essayist, "it's a pretty lousy vindication.

"Yes, I was right and I've been right since the early nineties, and it's turned out exactly as I feared, but there's not much joy in all that."

The fact that others have now come in large numbers to recognise the problem is of no great satisfaction in the absence of a solution.

"What's distressing is the incapacity of our system to respond," he says.

He notes that the people who devised the dysfunctional economic system are now the very ones charged with fixing it. And while the fixes they propose may serve to entrench them and their interests, they are ultimately unsustainable because they are toxic to the broader society.

We started with the threshold question: if the system's broken, who broke it?

"I guess we all broke it, really. In the 1970s there was a crisis and the people who had put the society together over the preceding 50 years were unable to deal with the crisis. They failed — the Keynesians failed. And there were these marginal people sitting round, who were laughed at as bad economists, and they threw themselves into the breach and took over.

"So you can blame the people who rushed in and filled the void or you can blame the people who were there and didn't deal with the crisis. You can blame you and me because we didn't do anything about making sure they weren't able to do all this stuff."

Clearly, though, Saul mostly blames the people who filled the void, the people who called themselves neo-classical or neo-liberal economists and who he calls neo-conservatives. After the crisis of the 1970s, their views — advocacy of free trade, open markets, privatisation and deregulation, smaller government and a bigger role for the private sector — quickly came to dominate political thought. He calls that idea of a deregulated international marketplace, in which goods and finance travel far more easily across borders than do people, "globalism".

So complete was the hegemony of its advocates, says Saul, that ultimately "everyone, whether they are Labor or Liberal or social democrat or whatever … adopted their language."

Even now, he says: "The biggest problem we have is that we don't have anybody [in a position of power] on the democratic/humanist side who believes it's possible to admit to being wrong and to change direction."

Globalism, Saul long argued, weakened nation states in the name of economics, and took away the democratic power of citizens to determine their futures.

This was perhaps a bit theoretical, at least as it might apply in the major developed countries — although familiar to those elsewhere, as in Asia and Latin America, for example — until relatively recently.

But now, with corporations accorded the democratic rights of people in America, where banks get bailed out but home-owners don't, with the bond traders serially picking off European nations, and with citizens of struggling countries everywhere increasingly subject to externally imposed fiscal strictures, Saul's prediction has become distressingly real.

"We've now had 40 years or so of neo-conservatism, of globalism … and it's clear they're doing a very bad job and werein a very deep crisis and they have absolutely no idea what to do," he says.

"Their only answer is austerity."

And, he says, there is not "a single example in history" of austerity restoring prosperity.

"These people seem all to have been very badly influenced by 18th-century medicine. They actually believe that bleeding people works," says Saul.

"It's also very low-level Judeo-Christian morality. Very low-level stuff. Punishing people for their sins."

And punishing the wrong ones.

He points to the United States, where the Global Financial Crisis began with a mortgage crisis. The financial sector made stupid — and often downright corrupt — loans to people who could not afford to repay them unless a real-estate bubble kept inflating. When it deflated instead, it set off a chain-reaction around the world.

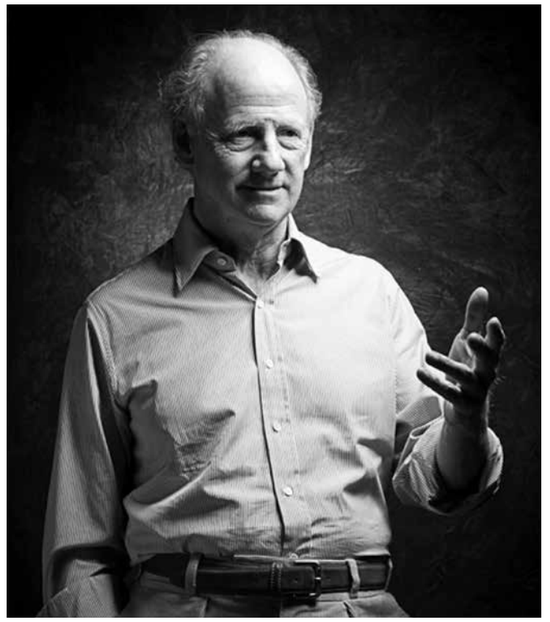
The US government reacted by throwing money at the banks. According to figures prised out of US officialdom by Bloomberg last year, the total was USD7.77 trillion.

But why bail out the banks?

Because, Saul says, of a gross misunderstanding of debt "and what you do about debt when it's actually out of control."

In the case of the US housing crisis, he says, "Obama could have, instead of giving money to these large mortgage holders, said 'We will pay off all mortgages up to $300,000.' It would have cost far, far less than what they gave the banks."

Those home owners, again feeling flush, would then have borrowed and spent, as before, which would in turn



John Ralston Saul

have gone through to the banking system; a trickle up rather than trickle down approach.

"So you would have re-launched your economy. You'd have done something solid — people would own their houses. That's real. It would be real that they would not owe money and that the banks would not have gone bankrupt," he says.

Alternatively, the government could have simply cancelled the dodgy mortgage deals.

"That would have had the same re-launch of the citizenry, but you'd have cleaned out half the banks. That wouldn't have necessarily have been a bad thing," he says.

It would have been, if you like, an act of creative destruction, because "as I keep pointing out, the amount of money traded, the amount of financial instruments traded, versus the amount of real goods traded, has gone from something like 50 times in the Seventies, to something like 150 times.

"There's just never been so much money. Actually, we have a kind of invisible inflation."

So, cancelling mortgages would have made a lot of money — debts — disappear, but real assets would remain. As he put it in a piece in The Sydney Morning Herald:

"When faced by unsustainable debts, the fools, the weak, the degenerate civilisations become obsessed by what they owe. They convince themselves that money is real, not an agreed-upon convention. They become its slave. And they destroy themselves. Successful civilisations make these impossible debts disappear — clearly, intentionally, massively."

"History is filled with examples of this being done on purpose," he says.

Iceland provides one example. Relative to the size of its economy, the collapse of Iceland's financial sector was the most spectacular of the entire GFC. But the government did not bail out its banks; it let them fail. And it forced a big hit on foreign creditors.

Iceland suffered a sharp recession and a massive drop in the value of its currency, but guess what? Its economy is growing, unlike most of Europe, and its unemployment rate is way lower than most of Europe and the United States too.

During the Asian financial meltdown of the late 1990s, Malaysia ignored the prescriptions of the globalists, the IMF and World Bank — what Saul calls the "crucifixion theory" of recovery — and pegged its currency, raised tariffs, enforced capital controls and … made a stunning economic turnaround.

The irony is that now, just as the inherent contradictions of the global orthodoxy — that promised to spread international democracy but instead weakened national democracies, which vastly increased the supply of money but cut services, which delivered most to those who already had most, which produced more goods and greater insecurity — are being more widely noted, Saul thinks it is already over.

"Globalism basically came to an end in about 2000, and we had five to ten years in a vacuum, before we were hit by a moving truck. The financial crisis … was not a crisis in and of itself, it came out of the earlier crisis, the failure of globalism."

"Now," he says, mixing his metaphors, "we are frozen in the headlights."

A system which over-produced goods now finds that it can't get growth going again, absent over-consumption of those goods.

"I think most people are quite insulted by the idea that their principal purpose in life is to consume, to be stimulated to consume.

"There is no human relationship in it," he says. "It is based on a very utilitarian idea, that actually we don't want human relationships, we want goods.

"Is that what should drive society? Are there other things that could drive a society that is in surplus production?"

He has various suggestions: look for quality rather than quantity in what we consume.

"We've convinced ourselves that the winner will be the one who charges the least. Walmart doesn't work as a theory of how to launch a society to prosperity."

Whatever is to come next, to replace the failure of globalisation and the paralysis that has followed it, will have to come from people other than those now leading society.

"You're looking at an elite structure that is either in favour [of the current model] and doesn't understand why it doesn't work — that's the neo-conservatives — or is against and is terrified to do anything, or even to admit that they're against it," he says.

"If you want out, you've got to get democracy to work. You can't have major political parties that have 20,000 members, as you do in Australia. That's nothing.

"If you actually want to change the direction of society you actually have to take power."

This extract from Mike Seccombe's report of September 3, 2013, published courtesy of The Global Mail,

Burma ends media censorship, with caveats

The Burmese government has declared an end to pre-publication censorship for media outlets, a step that brings the country one step further from its long-time repression and one closer to an aid-attractive environment.

Countries with high levels of censorship are usually unattractive to donors, who view repressive governments as less than ideal partners in development.

The most censored countries – the list includes Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Uzbekistan, and Belarus –received less than $90 million in official development assistance in 2010, the last year for which OECD statistics are available.

The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Burma seventh on the list of ten most censored countries in the world this year, even after authorities took several steps towards press freedom.

The civilian government has been slowly easing its hold on media and expression since it took office last year. Media had been tightly controlled for nearly half a century, earning it status as the world's worst country in which to be a blogger, and an Enemy of the Internet," according to a Burmese advocacy website. Reporters Without Borders ranked it 10th worst for press freedom for 2011-2012, which was actually better than the year before.

Burma hasn't just been arresting journalists. It kept up to 1,700 political prisoners jailed until it began releasing them this year, in part because their release was a pre-condition set by the international community for ending the country's pariah status. Western governments have also predicated a lifting of sanctions on Burma having free elections, and making peace with the multitude of ethnic groups within its borders.

In keeping with the country's overall turnaround mentality, Burma announced it would dissolve its censorship office, known as the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department, in October 2011. It also freed 17 imprisoned Democratic Voice of Burma journalists, sentenced for disobeying censorship laws or engaging in "anti-state" activities such as disseminating information. In recent months, it gave journalists the green light to write about controversial topics – unacceptable under previous leadership, according to the BBC.

Critics were quick to point out that the announcement of an end to censorship does not mean government control is truly over. Films are not exempt from oversight, and written news must be submitted to the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department – which remains open – after it goes to press. Violations of press scrutiny policies could still result in sanctions and suspensions, according to the CPJ.

The government will also continue to be in charge of licensing publishers and printers, so new voices hoping to join in Burma's national conversation may still be silenced. – **Jennifer Brookland**

Acclaimed Latin-American writers join the Campaign

> "It doesn't remedy the tragedy, but the written word is the only resistance. Without it, we remain in the Kingdom of Death." Carmen Boullosa on *Write Against Impunity*

A group of prominent Latin American writers has joined PEN International's *Write Against Impunity* campaign. They are Nicaragua's Sergio Ramírez, Claribel Alegría and Gioconda Belli, Mexico's Sanjuana Martínez, Carmen Boullosa, Luis Felipe Fabre and Álvaro Enrigue, Argentina's Luisa Valenzuela and Carlos Gamerro, and Cuba's Jorge Olivera, Ricardo González and Julio César Galvez.

John Ralston Saul, president of PEN International, says the violence against writers represents "a terrible slippage" backwards. "Citizens cannot talk among themselves, publically or privately, if writers, the carriers of our shared language, are silenced," he says.

"Impunity afflicts everyone in a society," says Marian Botsford Fraser, of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee. "Every time a single crime goes unpunished, a family, a community, a nation, all suffer the burdens of injustice, self-censorship and further violence."

Argentinian novelist Carlos Gamerro says, "In the 60s and 70s, many of the governments in Latin America – and not only the dictatorships – systematically silenced, through terror or death, all opposition voices…the task today is done in a more private and decentralized way – police, local government or criminal gangs that are tolerated or encouraged by the authorities. The result continues to be fear and silence; only the methods have changed: now it's more difficult to identify and punish those responsible."

The *Write Against Impunity* campaign, launched in August, brings together the voices of well-known writers, PEN centres in the region and local communities in a unified literary protest against the violence and threats suffered by journalists and writers in Latin American countries.

In the first six months of 2012, more writers were murdered in Latin America than in any other region in the world. The violence against writers and journalists is relentless in Mexico, with at least 80 journalists, writers and bloggers murdered in the last 12 years.

Between January and August 2012, eight print journalists were killed, making Mexico the second most dangerous country in the world in which to be a writer. It is closely followed by Honduras and Brazil.

Along with PEN centres in Latin America, PEN International collected original poetry and prose commemorating fallen writers from across the region and protesting impunity for online publication this month.

The rules of the game


Antony Loewenstein

Antony Loewenstein is an independent freelance writer. His best-selling book on the Israel/Palestine conflict, *My Israel Question*, has been republished three times. His second book, *The Blogging Revolution*, focused on the internet in repressive regimes. He is currently working on a book and documentary about disaster capitalism and privatisation in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Haiti, Australia, the Asia-Pacific, the "war on terror" and beyond. He is the second writer in Sydney PEN's 'Free Voices' series. **Claudio Russo** reports.

Antony Loewenstein is a man on the move. He's writing books, making films and travelling the world. The journalist, author, documentarian, photographer and blogger has come a long way from his childhood days in suburban Melbourne.

Without any journalists or writers in his family, Antony had a difficult time deciding on the right career path. His father, a lawyer, provided some initial inspiration for a life at the bar, but Antony's high school marks failed him.

He says that if asked as a kid what he wanted to do with his future, people may have been surprised by his answer. "I was one of those kids that wanted to be a scientist," he says.

However, Antony enrolled in an Arts degree. "My grandfather used to say to me 'Yes, you should definitely be a writer'."

In 1997, Antony began editing the student newspaper at Monash University. "In it's time it was the biggest student newspaper in the southern hemisphere and I loved the experience," he says.

On completing of his degree, Antony made his first attempts at making a living from writing.

"I started freelancing, writing for the street press in Melbourne, doing CD reviews and live music reviews and entertainment stuff, getting paid $5, $10, $15 for a piece, just to get my by-line out there," he says.

While this provided something of an income, Antony had other goals. His Jewish upbringing spurred a growing desire to learn more about different points of view, particularly those of the Arab world.

"Growing up Jewish, I often felt very uncomfortable with comments I heard in the Jewish community, and in my own family, about Palestinians and Arabs; it was frankly racist. I didn't fully understand nor have the knowledge to respond to it."

In 2003, after obtaining a coveted Fairfax traineeship, Antony moved to Sydney. After a short stint at Fairfax Online, Antony started work on his book *My Israel Question*, which was short-listed for the 2007 NSW Premier's Literary Award.

The book, though popular with many including acclaimed journalist John Pilger, evoked widespread criticism from the Jewish community as well as Federal Labor MP, Michael Danby.

Before the book's release, Mr Danby said Melbourne University Press should drop "this whole disgusting project". Mr Danby went on to say, "If they proceed, I urge the Australian Jewish community, and particularly the *Australian Jewish News*, to treat it with dignified silence."

Antony Loewenstein was labeled "a self-hating Jew" and "an anti-Semite".

His persistence in seeing things from the other side has made him controversial, but he subscribes to the ethical journalism approach of discussing both sides of any story or situation.

His trip to Peshawar, a town on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, is a clear example. He recalls his meetings with Hayat, an independent journalist with great knowledge of the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that have become a target for US drone attacks.

To Antony, the stories are there, and people like Hayat are there to tell them, but the existence of no-go zones and a reliance by the Western mainstream media on government press releases have them silenced. He says Pakistani journalists face far greater risks than Western journalists.

"Inherent commercial biases towards perspectives that often don't hear the common view or common voice exist. Journalism should be about providing a voice for the silenced or a voice for the voiceless."

The threat to freedom of speech is in your own backyard

This essay by writer and commentator **Antony Loewenstein**, presented in Sydney and Melbourne earlier this year, is the second in Sydney PEN's 'Free Voices' lecture and essay program, running from 2012 to 2014 using funds granted by Copyright Agency Limited.

The two-hour drive from Islamabad to Peshawar is along a surprisingly smooth road. Mud-brick homes sit amongst lush, green fields. Police checkpoints are set up routinely to stop unwanted visitors. I am asked why I want to see the troubled Pakistani town near the border with Afghanistan. I say I'm a reporter, flash my International Federation of Journalists press card, which I'm sure the officer can't read, and am quickly waved through.

Islamabad is a relatively liberal city in one of the most volatile nations on earth. Peshawar is geographically close but a world away. Women, if they're seen at all in public, walk in shapeless burkas and men have thick beards and wear the traditional salwar kameez. Suicide bombers regularly attack government buildings, police and army in a continuing war against the Pakistani state and its Western backers. I arrive feeling uneasy.

A once stable town has been torn apart in the last decade as militants seek to overthrow both a corrupt central government and expel a Washington-led campaign against the resistance that is seen as illegitimate and lacking public support.

When I visit in March this year, I am surprised by the vibrancy of the Pakistani media. Multiple outlets joust for dominance, routinely publishing scandalous information about politicians and celebrities. But as I have seen first-hand in Iran, Palestine, Syria, Cuba and Egypt and a range of other countries, magical "red lines" exist that must not be crossed. If they are, journalists can pay an extremely high price.

I meet independent journalist Hayat in Peshawar. He's 35 with a wife and two young children. He wears a pink-stripped shirt and grey suit. His office is on the 3rd floor of a non-descript building. His knowledge about the FATA [Federal Administered Tribal Areas] is immense, having spent time in the various regions. He talks about the different Taliban groups, how they relate to each other and the government.

Peshawar is on the edge of this abyss, the entry point to a tribal land that remains impossible for Westerners and most Pakistanis to visit. Since 9/11, it has been occupied by the Pakistani army and militants and often remains lawless.

It is where President Obama, far more than his predecessor George W. Bush, has unleashed an unprecedented number of drone strikes, killing hundreds of civilians since 2009, according to a recent study by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. These men, women and children are rarely given names by the Western media. Instead our media classes are happy to simply repeat official Pakistani and American governments claims of killing "terrorists".

We degrade our profession by mindlessly rehashing White House press releases with no evidence to support the thesis. Sadly it has become a regular occurrence in both the tabloid and so-called quality press, including the ABC, Fairfax and News Limited. "10 militants killed". "7 Al-Qaeda terrorists killed". No evidence. Rarely any photographs or video. This isn't journalism; it's stenography.

Peshawar is an edgy city that has become a battleground for forces beyond its control. Hayat is on the front-line in a nation that routinely murders its own journalists.

2011 was one of the worst years on record, with countless reporters kidnapped, harassed, tortured and killed, many by the US-backed ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence] a feared institution that operates in the shadows with total impunity. I meet many of these reporters, men and women, young and old, brave to a person, unwilling to accept the official Pakistani narrative and paying a very high price for it. Kidnapping. Torture. Harassment. Threat of rape.

Take investigative journalist Umar Cheema, national security reporter for *The News* newspaper. He was abducted and tortured by unknown assailants in 2010 for challenging the state. Nobody was ever arrested or charged for the crime. He was threatened to remain silent about his kidnapping but refused.

In 2011 he co-won the British Martha Gellhorn prize for journalism – "an anti-imperialist award", he says – but wasn't able to visit London to receive the award due to a visa not arriving on time.

Talking about the freedom to write and read in a globalised world is an indulgence we should cherish but not waste. Too often we hear intellectuals, journalists and writers discuss the concept of free speech and the importance of protecting it but such pledges must go beyond mere words.

He is chatty, witty, in his early 30s with a wife and two children and speaks fluent English.

He explains to me how the ISI contacted him in early 2010 and wanted seemingly friendly chats about his work. Initially there were no threats. He was called by ISI officials and invited to meet one of them at Gloria Jean's Coffee shop in central Islamabad. The second time, not long after, he was instructed to go to a safe house in the city where a few officers were present and they expressed displeasure with his stories. The threats then escalated.

Cheema says the ISI wants to instil fear in anybody who challenges its behaviour and wants individuals to believe they can be reached, harassed or hurt no matter where they are.

The ISI is a state within a state, partly funded by Washington in a futile effort to convince its wayward members to support its imperial designs in Afghanistan. It has failed miserably and created a monster of immense proportions. There isn't a journalist in Pakistan who doesn't know the power of the ISI to ruin the life of anybody they chose; they sit above the law and media are often bear the brunt of its anger.

The ISI maintains a vast payroll of journalists and people from all walks of life promoting the company line and spying on colleagues considered anti-state. Hayat travels widely, including attending a fellowship in America and a trip to Auschwitz and Krakow organised by the Polish government. He says he was very moved by the Nazi death camp – it's surreal but refreshing talking about such things in a country where anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are ubiquitous – and he came back to Pakistan to try and convince the press club in Peshawar – "the only press club that's been bombed that's not in Iraq or Afghanistan", he says – to establish a museum dedicated to the countless writers and journalists who have been slain in the last decades in Pakistan. The only impediment is a lack of funds.

Hayat's outlook on the ISI is pragmatic. He isn't blind to the brutality of some Taliban towards apparent enemies or "infidels" – there is no romanticising them for him – but he sees them as a product of circumstances created by outside forces in the West and inside Pakistan.

His journalism is grassroots, keeping connected to the various people in the regions and yet he refuses to work for any mainstream news outlets, believing they won't honestly report the truth about the tribal areas.

Hayat's voice is invisible in the West, despite speaking fluent English. Here's a man with unique access to one of the most challenging areas on the planet and yet most Western news outlets seemingly prefer to rely on familiar faces and voices. When was the last time you read an article about Iraq or Afghanistan by an Afghan or Iraqi actually based in their respective countries?

During research for my book, *The Blogging Revolution*, on the internet in repressive regimes, a work that took me to Cuba, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and China, it became clear that many in the Western media are reluctant to hear voices that don't conform to their idea of what a foreigner should sound like or think. It is the only explanation for the near-complete exclusion of indigenous voices from conflict zones in our mainstream press.

Their freedom of speech is ignored because of the inherent, Western-centric nature of our leading journalists and media practitioners. Let me be blunt; our white-skin dominated media often doesn't trust brown, yellow or black skin. The result is a wilful myopia that ignores both the nuance of a nation and the reasons post 9/11 that so little is understood about the reality of the rapacious "war on terror" and its reach in dozens of countries worldwide.

Why do "they" hate us? Because we occupy and kill "them".

Talking about the freedom to write and read in a globalised world is an indulgence we should cherish but not waste. Too often we hear intellectuals, journalists and writers discuss the concept of free speech and the importance of protecting it but such pledges must go beyond mere words. Commitment to supporting a writer's right to be heard, a right to offend and a right to challenge the state is a matter of life and death around the globe.

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❯ *Continued from 27*

Solidarity from the West can be a blessing. Sometimes it can be a curse. We need to go beyond mindless slogans – many key advocates in the Arab Spring speak publicly about clueless Western media coverage of a Facebook Revolution when the transformative events were far more complicated – and find new ways to engage persecuted activists, writers, dissidents and journalists that doesn't endanger them through our misunderstanding of modern surveillance technology.

A recent story by independent journalist Matthieu Atkins in the *Columbia Journalism Review* should be a wake-up call to anybody who believes that advocating free speech in a globalised world hasn't changed in the last decade. It has, hugely. Atkins details a recent story by a filmmaker from Britain's Channel 4 who worked with Syrian dissidents in the capital Damascus. The Syrian was providing secure communications expertise to the resistance and the Western filmmaker interviewed him about his work. But the dissident worried that the documentarian wasn't taking appropriate security precautions to protect his identity and work. For example, he was using a mobile phone and SMS without protections.

Last October the filmmaker was arrested in Syria, held for days in prison and had has laptop, mobile phone, camera and footage taken by the regime. As soon as he discovered this, the dissident fled Damascus, stayed with relatives in another town and then escaped to Lebanon. The dissident and his colleagues were scared that Syrian intelligence now had access to names, faces and information about opponents of President Assad.

Atkins rightly says that it's easy to condemn the filmmaker for not taking adequate digital precautions of his material but it's really systematic of a wider problem. Atkins writes: "We [as journalists] haven't kept pace with technological advancements that have revolutionised both information-gathering and surveillance".

We are all failing to encrypt our work when reporting from conflict zones and nations where intelligence services are ubiquitous. I have been guilty of this myself. When off-the-shelf surveillance equipment is now so easily available – Wikileaks' Spy Files revealed the vast number of Western security firms selling technology to repressive and democratic states, making the monitoring of email, Skype and mobile phone calls extremely easy – it is the responsibility of journalists, human rights activists and NGOs to learn how to protect information that could mean the difference between life and death for the people we claim to represent and protect.

This is putting dissidents in danger and curtailing their freedom of speech. I discovered while writing *The Blogging Revolution* that many Western companies are happy to assist China, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Libya and others to monitor citizens. Reporters Without Borders released a study in May this year highlighting its "predators of the internet" that included 41 nations and groups that prey on free speech. The Arab Spring has brought both new opportunities for fresh voices and threats by recalcitrant forces keen to suppress opposition.

But we are foolish to believe these threats only exist in the non-Western world. The Obama administration has accelerated the development of a surveillance state apparatus that now listens and records every phone call and email every day in the US. Some estimate up to 20 trillion calls and emails have been stored in the last years. Here's *Salon's* Glenn Greenwald writing recently about Obama's unprecedented war on whistle-blowers:

"…Issuing subpoenas to journalists to force them to reveal their sources is now obsolete — unnecessary — because the U.S. Government's Surveillance State is so vast, so comprehensive, that it already knows who is talking to whom. It now subpoenas and harasses reporters simply to force them to confirm in court what they have already learned through surveillance, but the limitless Surveillance State it has created has rendered undetected whistle-blowing — or undetected anything — virtually impossible."

It is already necessary to highlight the reduction in free speech in the supposedly freest country on the planet, the United States. Australia may be going down the same path. We ignore such impositions on our freedom at our peril.

Imagine this scenario. You wake up. You check your email. You presume government officials have already seen the contents before you. You go to Facebook. You want to post a link to a video that satirises your country's intelligence chief but you resist the urge. You think you're being watched. You check your Twitter feed and want to re-tweet a story about a militant group that killed three civilians last night in a town a few kilometres from your house. But you don't. You were attacked last week by a member of this militant organisation for speaking out against their brutality towards religious minorities.

Your freedom of speech isn't just curtailed by your own hand, it's a restriction based on a very real fear of retribution. Although the risks of these attacks are far higher in Papua New Guinea, Syria, Mexico or Honduras, Western nations are increasingly determined to restrict access to the internet under the guise of protecting the vulnerable.

In Pakistan and Afghanistan recently, working on a book and film about disaster capitalism, I heard countless reporters talking about self-censorship, a daily need to assess what to write and what to avoid. There was a constant internal discussion about navigating "red lines" and when it was worth risking your career or life.

Many Afghan MPs, journalists and writers told me about risks emerging from the state, militias, pro-Western warlords and criminals. The very forces we empowered since invading in 2001 have directly curtailed freedom of speech. Next time you hear advocates for maintaining a never-ending occupation in Afghanistan talk about fears of extremism breeding after most Western forces leave in 2014 and freedoms extinguished, remind them that we've partnered with the worst elements of the Afghan state for over a decade. My recent visit there revealed undoubted fears about abandonment by the West but very little desire for military forces to continue the occupation.

During a recent episode of Julian Assange's *The World Tomorrow* – an outstanding weekly TV program that interviews some of the key thinkers and players in our world, individuals largely ignored by the corporate media – he spoke to Alaa Abd El-Fattah from Egypt and Nabeel Rajab from Bahrain. Both men have been imprisoned, tortured, held without charge. Both men remain outspoken. Both men refuse to be silenced and curtail their own free speech. Both men should be heard in our media on a regular basis but they are not. I believe it is because they are ferociously opposed to US-backed repression. They are unapologetic. Passionate. Necessarily unbalanced in their views towards Washington's love of reliable autocrats. And yet their biggest recent audience is on the Wikileaks founder's current affairs show.

That is a shocking indictment of our wilful blindness in a mainstream media that much prefers hearing our own calming voices than alternatives that force us to recognise how our comfortable, Western world is sustained; through subduing, torturing, funding, arming and endorsing some of the world's worst brutes in the name of "stability".

An inquisitive media would be intrigued with a book

21st century has thrown up new kinds of challenges to free speech that don't fit neatly into 20th century thinking. We have never been more threatened by the surveillance state's reach, a desire for complete spectrum dominance of our thoughts and conversations.

such as *Poetry of the Taliban*, a just released tome that outlines without romanticising the love, adventure and fears of a group both pre and post September 11 that has beaten the world's greatest super-power. Supporting freedom of speech in its entirety, not merely claiming to appreciate all views but actually meaning it, as far too many liberals only endorse points of view with which they agree, means hearing the positions of groups or individuals with whom you may vehemently disagree. And defending their right to be heard because without which there exists an insular bubble that merely reinforces a dominant narrative. Truly free speech should make us uncomfortable, confronted and offended.

Back in Peshawar, Pakistan, I visit Khyber News Bureau in the centre of town, at a safe house allegedly once used by private military contractor Blackwater, one of up to 70 compounds in the area until the last years.

The building is whitewashed with high blast walls. Inside are many studios producing entertainment and news programs for the local area. Militants who oppose their probing journalism have attacked some of the reporters. We sit in the grassy courtyard at the front of the building while staff members eat food from the buffet meal served on the grounds. I only see men except one teenage girl wearing a hijab, powdered white face and red lips.

The news service produces one particular show for "youth" – the director says that means anybody from 15 to late 20s – and tackles sensitive social issues, such as women's rights and human rights in general. The employees, all men, seem liberal and articulate, some dressed in Western clothes rather than the salwar kameez worn by most men.

I mention visiting Kyber News Service because it is these voices that the West never hears. The image of Pakistan and a host of other war-torn lands are militancy, violence and bigotry. If we truly want to support free speech and the right to be heard in countries where talking truth to power can get you kidnapped, tortured or killed, we need to do a far better job of engaging individuals and groups with the use of new technology and digital protection. It is no longer enough to simply write letters to governments demanding they release jailed activists.

The internet has brought knowledge and information to more people than at any time in history. There are close to one billion Facebook accounts. There are 500 million registered Twitter users. Countless people use YouTube and Google every day.

But none of these tools provide human rights protections or ensure free speech. They merely give officials more opportunities to monitor and document a user's online footprint. Although they allow activists much easier access to friends and colleagues around the world – and using online proxies to communicate and surf freely are essential in both repressive and democratic states – the reach of Western security companies is far greater than most people realise. It is no longer paranoid to presume that we are being watched and monitored by the state.

The romantic notion of free speech is implanted in the Western consciousness. A lone dissident oppressed by an awful regime. Imprisoned by a dictator for speaking out against discrimination. Tortured for daring to call for free elections, women's rights or economic equality. But the 21st century has thrown up new kinds of challenges to free speech that don't fit neatly into 20th century thinking. We have never been more threatened by the surveillance state's reach, a desire for complete spectrum dominance of our thoughts and conversations.

Wired magazine recently revealed that the National Security Agency in the US is building a $2 billion centre that aims to "intercept, decipher, analyse, and store vast swaths of the world's communications as they zap down from satellites and zip through the underground and undersea cables of international, foreign, and domestic networks… Flowing through its servers and routers and stored in near-bottomless databases will be all forms of communication, including the complete contents of private emails, cell phone calls, and Google searches, as well as all sorts of personal data trails—parking receipts, travel itineraries, bookstore purchases, and other digital 'pocket litter.'"

The threat to freedom of speech globally isn't just in the obvious places - Afghanistan, Iraq, Mexico or China - but in our own backyard, instituted by our democratically elected leaders.

We have been warned.

A life devoted to improving rights

Daniel Rowland, recently appointed to the Sydney PEN Management Committee, is currently the Law and Development Advisor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney. Before taking up this position in late 2010, he was Senior Law and Justice Adviser in AusAID for 10 years, and before that, Principal Solicitor in the Australian Government Solicitor. In all of these activities, human rights, including the freedom of expression, have been central to his practice. **Leanne Elahmad** reports.

Growing up in a conservative English society plus liberal education equals social conscience. Well, at least for Daniel Rowland, 63, that's how it adds up. He comes to the PEN Management Committee with an impressive career as a lawyer, at both the national and international level, representing the Australian Government, and working for AusAID, and gaining insight into restrictions on human rights and freedom of expression.

He joined PEN to help tackle existing issues of freedom of expression and says that while he is not a writer, his legal background and experiences have equipped him to become an activist for freedom of expression.

"Can you imagine what a world would be like without freedom of expression, without a freedom to read and write? I've been to worlds like that through different roles in my life, and they're very frightening places," he says.

"It's very important that we pursue freedom of expression generally whether it's for writers, journalists, or Governments, whether in Australia or elsewhere."

He believes PEN's role is important because it highlights these issues and exposes the stories of those who have fallen victim to oppressive governments.

He also believes that privileged countries such as Australia have a responsibility to highlight these impediments on human rights and advocate against them. This is a challenge he accepted when joining PEN.

"You know, it might have something to do with taking things for granted. It's rarely an issue that comes home to the individual. 'So what if a Chinese dissident writer is locked up ... why do I care? The football's on tomorrow night, I'd rather be there'. So I think we have got to find ways of attracting an audience. It's going to be a very interesting challenge for me," he says.

Daniel attributes the foundations of his social conscience to his middle class upbringing in London in the 1960s. "One of the great things about my family was that we would have robust discussions and interrogation was the order of the day at the dinner table," he says.

As a teenager, he witnessed the UK Government's power to ban certain events and literature if they didn't conform to 'society's norms'. He recalls the end of the era in which the Lord Chamberlain banned *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a novel by DH Lawrence, because "he thought it was shocking in whatever way he thought that meant".

Daniel says he was lucky to enjoy a liberal education studying at a school in London founded in the 18th century by Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher behind the theory of Utilitarianism – the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The clash between liberal education and a very conservative environment in the early 60s fomented a cultural change that basically pulled down conservative Victorian cultural values that had remained for many years, he says.

"It lead to a flowering of artistic expression at the time and I think my own social justice thinking emerged from that transformation."

He studied law in England and later moved to America and Italy to complete a master's degree in international relations and international law, because he felt he needed to gain a context to law, something he says was lacking in his undergarduate degree.

Daniel Rowland

He moved to Adelaide in the early 1970s with his Adelaide-born wife before he relocated to Sydney to teach public law, including human rights, at the University of New South Wales. He says he appreciated the relative freedom of Australia, particularly when it came to raising children.

While at UNSW, he was elected to the Executive Committee of the Australian section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and, quite separately was involved in the early days of the Redfern Legal Centre. He says that his engagement in such activities was an expression of his interests in human rights.

During his time on the ICJ's Executive, he experienced two eye-opening moments: a human rights demonstration in Manila savagely stopped by President Marcos' police, and an ICJ mission to investigate the conditions of some 30,000 West Papuan refugees into PNG who were taking refuge from Indonesian violence across the border. "There was a significant number of the refugees and some of them were dying in dense jungle, and one of the things it brought home to me was the impact of a lack of human rights in countries neighbouring our border."

His career took a different turn in the early 1980s when he agreed to help with a Federal Government supported initiative to establish community television, now called Metro Screen. That led on to running a private film and television company and then the Australian Film Commission, which in a way was all about the development of many and varied Australian film and TV cultural expressions.

But, after 10 years in film and television, he decided it was time to go back to law. "I had an offer and I like the law, it's been in my blood for 40 years," he says. And so Daniel became a principal solicitor with the Australian Government Solicitor, which is effectively the in-house lawyer for federal ministers, federal departments and federal agencies, and on one view, acting on behalf of the "Aussie taxpayer", he says.

Later he joined AusAID as the senior law and justice advisor. Over a 10-year period he visited many countries in Asia and the Pacific, like Cambodia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea where he says "much of my work was about advising on legal and judicial reform".

"Freedom of expression in these countries is not necessarily taken for granted to the extent it is here, and while it wasn't necessarily my main activity, I was always very conscious of that."

While he enjoyed the governance work he was doing at AusAID, he admits it could be frustrating at times.

"The work I was doing over those 10 years, was about seeing results, and results when it comes to law reform take a long time. It's not like building a bridge, or building a health clinic or inoculating people. Significant substantive legal reform leading to better justice outcomes takes many years whether in a developed or a developing country," he says.

Daniel's goal with PEN is to work with his committee colleagues to get Australians more engaged in human rights issues. While he believes Australians are complacent because "we commonly know what we like and what we don't like," he is optimistic about Australian society's concerns for basic freedoms.

"My view about breaches of fundamental rights is, stay engaged … you will probably gain an entry point for change eventually," he says.

Writers in peril in Vietnam

PEN is a leading voice against attempts to silence writers. It works on behalf of those who are detained or otherwise persecuted for their opinions. Here, the focus is on those imprisoned in Vietnam.

Cu Huy Ha Vu
A dissident writer, artist and activist, born in 1957, arrested in November 2010 and sentenced to seven years in prison and thee years of probationary detention for publishing critical articles online and and giving interviews to foreign media. His trial reportedly did not comply with international standards of fairness. Vu is known for his environmental activism and had previously twice sued the Prime Minister in an attempt to stop controversial bauxite mining project which he believed would be harmful to the environment. He holds a Doctorate in Law from the Sorbonne University, and is the recipient of the 2011 Hellman/Hammett award.

European Press Photo Agency

Cu Huy Ha Vu sentenced to seven years prison for publishing critical articles online and his environmental activism.

Ho Thi Bich Khuong
Born in 1967, Ho, a prolific internet writer and human rights activist, was arrested last November and sentenced to five years in prison and three years' probationary detention for "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". It was alleged that Ho and Nguyen Trung Ton, a priest and activist who was present at her house at the time of her arrest, had been collecting documents and writing online articles which tarnished the reputation of the Republic of Vietnam. She was also accused of giving interviews to foreign radio stations criticising the government's abuse of power, and of belonging to illegal human rights organisations. Ho's writings urged the release of prisoners of conscience and political detainees, and promoted freedom of expression, religion and association. Ho is recipient of the 2011 Hellman/ Hammett award.

Nguyen Huu Cau
The poet, songwriter, human rights defender and anti-corruption activist, born in 1945, was arrested in October 1982 and sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment. Reportedly arrested at his home by public security police for being the author of an "incriminating" manuscript of songs and poems, Nguyen Huu Cau was accused of committing "destructive acts" that were supposedly "damaging" to the government's image. During his years in prison, Nguyen Huu Cau has been placed in harsh solitary confinement. He has lost most of his vision and is almost completely deaf. He is in very poor health, according to his daughter after returning from an authorised periodical visit to the camp deep in the jungle. There are serious concerns about his well-being. This case was first brought to PEN's attention at its annual congress held in Tokyo in September 2010.

Nguyen Thanh Long (religious name Nguyen Cong Chinh)
Born in 1969, he is a pastor, online writer, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Vietnam, member of the banned human rights defenders network Bloc 8406 and the Vietnamese Political and Religious Prisoners Friendship Association. He was arrested in April 2011 and sentenced to 11 years in prison. He was accused of writing and spreading online texts that '"slandered Communist authorities" and "distorted the situation of freedom of opinion and religion" in Vietnam. He was also accused of sending to foreign media and international institutions his online critical writings and complaints about human rights and the persecution of ethnic minorities, and for giving interviews to foreign radio and newspapers. Nguyen Thanh Long has long been subject to harassment, interrogations and arbitrary detention by public security police, and has also been attacked and beaten.

Nguyen Van Ly
A priest, scholar, essayist and co-editor of the underground online magazine *Tu Do Ngon Luan* (Free Speech), Father Ly was arrested in February 2007 and sentenced to eight years in prison and five years of probationary detention. He was charged with "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". In September 2010, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for the immediate and unconditional release of Father Ly who it said had been arbitrarily and illegally detained and denied access to legal counsel by the Vietnamese authorities. Father Ly was released provisionally for one year on medical grounds in 2010 as he was in urgent need of treatment unavailable in prison. However, in July last year, he was returned to the labour camp to continue serving his sentence. His health is said to be still very poor. Father Ly is an honorary member of Sydney PEN.

Phan Ngoc Tuan
Born in 1959, he is a dissident poet, writer and human rights defender who was arrested in August last year and sentenced to five years in prison and three years in probationary detention. Phan Ngoc Tuan is the author of several satirical texts, lampoons, pamphlets and documents criticising the communist authorities for their human rights violations and denouncing corruption, social injustice and ideological discrimination in the regime's legal system. The indictment alleged that Phan Ngoc Tuan's writings "slandered" the government and its leaders.

PEN mourns the death of poet Nguyen Chi Thien

PEN mourns the death of Vietnamese poet Nguyen Chi Thien who passed away in October. Born in February 1939 in Hanoi, Nguyen Chi Thien was asked by a friend to teach one of his history classes as he was ill. The year was 1960. In the lesson, Chi Thien told the students that America had defeated Japan in World War II, not the Soviet Union which the official curriculum claimed. Nguyen Chi Thien was soon arrested and sentenced to two years imprisonment on the charge of spreading "anti-government propaganda".

During what turned out to be a three and a half year incarceration, he composed almost 100 poems and committed them to memory as he wasn't allowed pen and paper. He was briefly released in 1964, however, he was soon re-arrested in February 1966 on the charge of producing "politically irreverent poems".

For this offence, and without trial, he was to serve 11 years in prison camps before being temporarily released in July 1977 because there was no room in the crowded camp to cope with the increasing flow of new prisoners coming from South Vietnam.

Denied employment, Nguyen Chi Thien composed a further 400 poems. After the end of the Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979, afraid of being unable to survive if re-arrested, Nguyen Chi Thien decided to send his poems abroad. In July 1979, braving security police, he handed his handwritten manuscript to diplomats at the British Embassy after extracting a promise that the poems would be published.

On leaving the Embassy, he was arrested by Vietnamese security forces and imprisoned for a further 12 years. Nguyen Chi Thien was freed in October 1991 after international interventions, including by PEN members and granted asylum in the USA, where he was invited to address Congress. Between 1998 and 2001, he lived in France where he had been awarded a fellowship by the International Parliament of Writers.

His *Hoa Lo Prison Stories*, a prose narrative of his imprisonment's experiences, was translated and published in English as the *Hoa Lo/Hanoi Hilton Stories* by Yale Southeast Asia Studies in 2007. He returned to America and he settled in California where he continued writing. Nguyen Chi Thien's collection of poems was published abroad in eight different languages and in 1985 he won the International Poetry Award in Rotterdam.

Nguyen Chi Thien

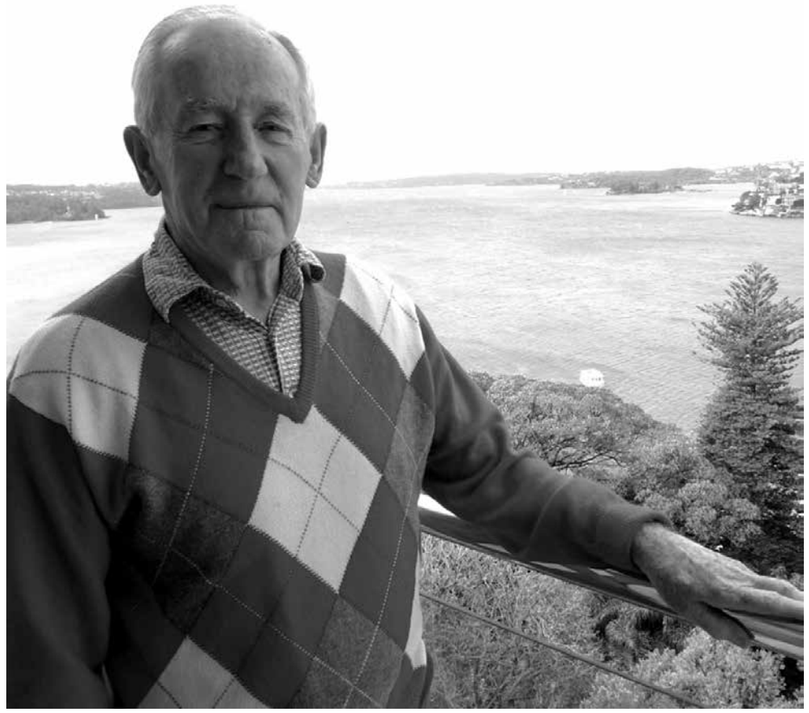
PEN celebrates Nguyen Chi Thien's life by sharing his poem:

Inside The Prison Trap of Steel

Inside the prison trap of steel,
I want to see no streams of tears,
And laughter I want even less to hear.
I want that each of us
clamp tight his jaws,
withdraw his hands from everything,
refuse to be a buffalo, a dog.
Soak up this truth: this jail will last
As long as it holds buffalos and dogs.
Unless were are mere clay
we shall stay men.

A potent force for free speech

Professor Ken McKinnon, who recently joined the Sydney PEN Management Committee, is an acclaimed academic educator and passionate advocate for free speech and the right of freedom of expression. In the nine years he was Chair of the Australian Press Council, he was a powerful voice for ethics, privacy and independence of the press. Professor McKinnon spoke to **Carrie Soderberg.**



Carrie Soderberg

Ken McKinnon

Encouraging writing and free interpretations of people's own culture is something Professor Ken McKinnon is passionate about, and as a new member of the Sydney PEN Management Committee, he wants to support more writers to be heard across the Asia Pacific region.

Professor McKinnon says that even though he has not worked with PEN for long, he wants to support Sydney PEN in its work on behalf of writers in the Asia Pacific region and to help figure out a forward plan that is workable regardless of resources.

"My impression is that PEN internationally is better thought of than most people realise and can be very influential," he says.

The former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong and Chair of the Australian Press Council from 2000 to 2009, he grew up in country towns across South Australia, in Auburn, Moonta and Port Pirie. His father was a schoolteacher, but this was not the reason Professor McKinnon pursued a career in education.

"At that time, the only scholarships that were available were teacher education scholarships and because my father had too many children that is what I did – and that set me off on that route and I stayed there."

After university, he was posted to a teaching position in Central Australia working as both teacher and headmaster. Did he have an affinity for teaching?

"No, I think I felt scared of the difficulty of teaching 30 kids and I worked so very hard because I was scared of failing the kids," he says. "In those days school inspectors came around once or twice a year and rated and berated and praised you. Fortunately for me I got a very helpful one."

He says it was a good experience, but he became tired of the bureaucracy in the education system and resigned, saying he might as well be working in Papua New Guinea. Nothing had prepared him for what to expect but he says it was the best thing he ever did.

Apart from a brief break to take up a Harkness Fellowship at Harvard, he stayed in Papua New Guinea for almost 20 years.

"What interested me in Papua New Guinea was the huge amount of work that had very little regulation and no pre-cut answers."

And it was a big job. During his time there, Professor McKinnon was responsible for a program involving 250,000 students, 13,000 teachers, two universities and 10 teachers' colleges.

He saw the difficult times of transition from colonial control to independence. He says one of the biggest challenges was "to get to the point where Papua New Guinea could become first self-governing and then independent".

He was friends with a young Michael Somare, who later went on to become Prime Minister, and was "privy to their plotting" of the future of the country.

"A lot of the governing became possible because we took young school teachers and really poured experience and training into them so that the first heads of government departments were former teachers, and the political side with Michael Somare went ahead on the same basis," he says.

Professor McKinnon says Papua New Guinea is still an exciting place. "How can it not be exciting when there are 700 languages and four to five million people, with all kinds of interesting customs and one of the richest cultures I know."

He returned to Australia in 1973 to take charge of the Australian Schools Commission under the Whitlam Government, followed by 14 years as the Vice-Chancellor of Wollongong University.

In 2001 he became the first non-lawyer Chair of the Australian Press Council. While in the job he says he "speeded it up and took the Press Council in a number of areas from reform of defamation law, to looking at how journalists are at risk if they get leaks.

"The concept of the Press Council is a very good one, involving people in the industry along with others who have a less industry-oriented view," he says.

On the issue of free speech, he says, "they say free speech in Australia's free, but it is not because it is limited by existing laws." He believes "you cannot cut freedom to speak down too much, defamation already limits it so there is no point saying there is no limit on it".

Towards the end of his time with the Council, he faced tough budget cuts that he says made it difficult to engage the public and do the work properly.

In his role on the Sydney PEN Management Committee, he is interested in pursuing more corporate sponsorship for the Sydney branch. He gives an example, saying PEN could sponsor a prize supporting Indonesian authors with the help and backing of an Australian company in Indonesia.

"If the company or the person who has done the most to help authors in Indonesia can boast about how it has helped authors through PEN, that creative process will mean everyone gains," he says.

He says Sydney PEN could also bring attention to the Crocodile Awards in Papua New Guinea, which were established three years ago to encourage a new generation of writers. This year the awards had almost 600 entries from 135 authors.

"If PEN acts as a communicator for these awards it will bring attention to Papua New Guinea and attract a number of people in Australia who have an interest in this region but don't know how to help because no one has told them how to."

Sydney PEN needs you!

By joining Sydney PEN you will be showing your commitment to reading and writing as human rights to be undertaken in the spirit of freedom.
Go to: pen.org.au/ to join.

Sydney PEN also needs
a Writers in Prison Campaign Officer to join its Management Committee!

If you have the time and commitment to work on campaigns to draw attention to the plight of persecuted writers, contact us on: sydney@pen.org.au

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