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PART 1 REFLECTIONS OF THE COVID CRISIS BY WOMEN IN LGAS OF CONCERN

Australia's Covid-19 crisis reached unprecedented levels of cases, deaths, hospitalisations, restrictions, fear and dread, as the Delta variant spread from Bondi, NSW in June 2021 to the western suburbs of Sydney and beyond¹.

On 23 July 2021, NSW Premier Berejiklian declared that it was a “national emergency” and on July 28, eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) were targeted in a third lockdown extension as total locally acquired cases had risen to 2812 from 43 cases on 23 June 2021. On 29 July 2021, ADF troops joined police in door knocking and providing logistical support such as roadblocks in these LGAs. In August 2021, total locally acquired cases had risen to 9950, and by October 2021, there were 12 LGAs of concern.

A dire Covid-19 crisis was also unfolding in Melbourne which entered lockdown on March 30, 2021, when 46 locally acquired cases were detected². On 4 October 2021, Melbourne marked 245 days of lockdowns and became the city with the longest cumulative time in lockdown in the world.

In all the above LGAs, the pandemic further disproportionately affected vulnerable groups in these LGAs as lockdowns to help mitigate community transmission of COVID-19 meant substantial costs, with economic activity and jobs being severely impacted.

In August/September 2021, I invited the following women from Sydney and Melbourne LGA's of concern to share their experiences of the Covid-19 crisis for the Leading Issues Journal.

- Najla Turk from the Canterbury-Bankstown LGA
- Pauline David from the Fairfield LGA
- Anyier Yuol from the City of Blacktown LGA
- Suzan Nikanora Manyok Aguer from the City of Brimbank LGA in Melbourne
- Summayyah Sadiq-Ojibara from the Wyndham LGA

It is with a sense of deep gratitude to them that I present their articles. Their insights and wisdom are a testament to their inner sensemaking of the incredible adversities that abounded their personal and community spaces during these unprecedented Covid-19 targeted restrictions.

¹ Snow, D. 2021. *Delta's Dawn: Our winter of discontent*. 28 August 2021.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/delta-s-dawn-our-winter-of-discontent-20210827-p58mjc.html>

² Dunstan, J. 2021. *Melbourne marks 200 days of COVID-19 lockdowns since the pandemic began*. 19 August 2021.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-19/melbourne-200-days-of-covid-lockdowns-victoria/100386078>

Najla Turk reflects on life before and after the lockdown. She shares the journey she took to find meaning and how this invaluable empowered her *Self*, and enabled a stronger commitment to Self, moving forward. Her willingness to dive deep within her Self, and her positivity is awe-inspiring.

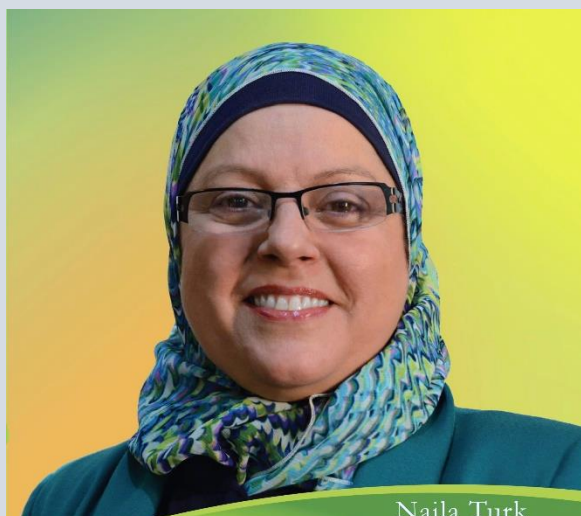
Pauline David who shares that she is a person with physical disability, and has experienced cultural, structural and systemic barriers throughout her life, reflects on how barriers worsened on multiple fronts of her life, on a day-to-day basis, personally and professionally, making her feel like she was on home detention. Her account captures how simple things like going out for exercise and wearing a mask, were challenges. It also elucidates how an LGA was immersed in a short space of time, into fear, and how she saw it impacting her family and her community. Her courage to lead by reaching out to media to voice what was happening around her, signifies her relentless drive to be the change she wants to see in the world.

Anyier Yuol observes how collaboration in multicultural communities catalysed preparedness and response planning in addressing the crisis and, in particular, how the Australian-South Sudanese community enlivened what community participation meant during the lockdown. It is particularly saddening to see how leaders of this community, in addition to guiding their community, were also protecting the community from further discrimination, given past media headlines of the Australian-South Sudanese community. One cannot go past Anyier's recommendations for an engaged community approach to this or any form of crisis.

Suzan Nikanora Manyok Aguer's reflection on navigating hardships on so many personal fronts shows how traumatic this crisis was for her as a single mother with teenage children, facing economic hardship and the constant and insidious digital presence of an ex-partner via mobile phone texts. Her approach to rise above all of this and simultaneously provide leadership in her community to assist other women and families who are struggling in this crisis, is exceptional.

Summayyah Sadiq-Ojibara's reflection, poetic in style, traverses many layers of meaning and contexts to arrive at a very positive appraisal of the shift she sees that each person is being called to, as she herself finds comfort in moving forward, in a heartfelt, and not just headful way.

NAJLA TURK



For over 30 years Najla (pronounced 'Nudge-La') has specialised in the areas of diversity and education. Najla is committed to the development of knowledge and the leaning of a valuable skills, attitudes and belief set. Najla is a Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) woman of influence, helping people from all walks of life learn, grow and succeed.

As a best-selling published author of "The Art of Diversity," an international presenter and recipient of multiple community awards, Najla

prides herself on having a global approach to building individual capacity, reframing and promoting effective engagement skills as a tool for personal, social and global understanding and interaction. More information about Najla Turk is at <https://najlaturk.com/>

BUSY WARRIOR

BY NAJLA TURK

Prior to COVID restrictions and stringent lockdown orders, I lived an 'extraordinarily' busy life.
 Busy running the business.
 Busy caring and engaging with family, work and community and
 Busy pursuing interests

Where did I find the time?

Even though I struggled to find time, I always seemed to manage. Yes I was burning the candle at both ends but hey, like all warriors, we soldier on. As an influencer I believed it was important to role model good conduct and behaviour. "Whoever performs a good act will receive ten times as much" [Quran 6:160]. As an educator, I gave up nights and weekends to help students. As a parent, I gave unconditionally. As a leader I was in service to others.

The coronavirus outbreak has begun. There was no escaping the pandemic. The pandemic had taken its toll on most people's mental wellbeing. At first Australia adopted a 'go slow' approach to combat the virus, then restrictions ramped up, pushing people to the brink.

Citizens of the state, including myself, had no choice but to succumb to the stay-at-home order, 9-5 am curfew, exercise limits and essential and restricted travel. The world had changed.

Even though the tally of deaths and cases of infection increased, I did not fear the coronavirus. Given my age, precautionary measures and home restriction orders, the risk was minimal. So why was I experiencing a tsunami of emotions at a time when I was thankful to be experiencing social isolation and lack of busyness?

Was it because I was missing 'flying off the seat of my pants?' Combating the adrenaline rush of being busy or was it because I was deprived of social connection; nurturing, supporting and doing for others?

NEITHER ARMoured WOMEN

I felt safer contracting the virus than exploring the strong, deep and negative emotions that surfaced. Mental health is real and like others I felt broken.

I now had more time. "How do I keep myself busy?" I asked. That same afternoon, I read Shel Silverstein's poignant and classical children's story, "The Giving Tree." A relationship between two people; the boy and a tree. The tree generously gives her apples, branches and trunk so the boy can profit from the apples and build himself a house and boat.

One gives and the other takes! Ahh haa! A defining light-bulb moment. I liken my life of generosity and selflessness to the giving tree. Convinced both traits are noble I question the difference. Generosity is about giving and sharing, yet to be selfless is to self-sacrifice. Research has shown that people who care about others and neglect themselves are more likely to suffer mental health issues. Clearly the act of self-sacrifice is a risk factor for burnout.

I needed a starting point for an honest conversation with 'self' about healthy behaviour and healthy relationships.

Why did I work so hard?

I aspired to be like my late mother. She exemplified motherhood; attending to the insurmountable needs of a cultural family, serving the patriarch and supporting the community.

I wanted to strive to be like mum but I also aspired to have a career. At some point, work-life boundaries blurred. Over time and decades later, I developed unhealthy behaviours working the 24/7 treadmill. Could that explain moments of reactivity and an unpleasant personality?

Why did I never ask for help?

Again I saw my mother's resilience and strength. She did everything herself and never reached out. Unlike mother, I was independent and liberated. Maybe this explains why I consciously avoided asking for help.

Giving unconditionally has not served me. Every day is a physical and psychological struggle, not to mention emotional exhaustion resulting in unhealthy relationships? Any wonder why I'm

left asking, why I do not feel cared for, valued or supported in times of need. I locked all doors and threw away the keys.

“It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life.

Where you stumble, there lies your treasure.”

Joseph Campbell

WARRIOR WOMAN

The upside to the crisis was guidance from a different compass. The imposed restrictions to daily life ‘forced’ me to muster courage, confidence and clarity to address my mental, emotional and spiritual state.

Exercising leadership skills, I called several board meetings inviting mind, body and soul to unpack the negative emotions lurking beneath the surface. I marvelled at how they collaborated; shared insights and highlighted areas needing change. Precious moments indeed and so many learnings.

I learnt that it took a pandemic to meet the inner person

I learnt that it is okay to set boundaries and be in control

I learnt that time with self is essential, valuable and sacred

I learnt that I must not accept the narrative, women are selfless

I learnt that whole is greater than the sum of the parts. For the first time in my life I felt wholesome, listened to and cared for. This is true freedom

I learnt that pride can get in the way of asking. There is no shame in asking

Don’t wait for another lockdown to change your course.

Stop – Listen – Grow!

Change is not hard. Deep dive into your inner self and reap the rewards of truth, authenticity and bliss. Only then can you develop sustaining and healthy relationships.

PAULINE DAVID



Born in Australia to parents from Assyrian background who migrated from Iraq, Pauline who is a person with physical disability, has experienced cultural, structural and systemic barriers throughout her life, which has fuelled her passion to work in the disability space.

As an advocate, facilitator and peer mentor, Pauline continuously challenges perceptions, attitudes and stigmas to help improve community access and promote independence for people with disability from CALD backgrounds.

Pauline has extensive experience in providing advice to local councils on the implementation of Disability Inclusion Action Plans; ensuring real change for people with disability within their communities.

As a peer facilitator, Pauline facilitates discussions on issues such as the NDIS, accessible events, living independently, accessible transport and advocating for yourself. As a peer mentor, Pauline supports peers to be empowered to live the life they choose under their own terms.

STRIVING TO LEAVE MY MARK IN THE WORLD, DESPITE COVID BY PAULINE DAVID

Being a woman with a physical disability from an Assyrian (CALD) background having experienced so many barriers, and challenging stigmas throughout life, it had been challenging finding my place in this world. At the age of 25, I made the brave decision to move out of the family home out on my own. It was indeed the catalyst that altered the course of my life.

Life in 2019 was great. I had the perfect work-life balance; Working as a Peer Worker and Board Member of a NFP organisation run by and for People with Disability, as well as travelling NSW, doing public speaking gigs as part of a 2-year contract and being involved in several access and inclusion related focus groups and committees. My social life was great too!

In March 2020 the start of the pandemic, it had all come crashing down. Speaking gigs that were booked were all cancelled, and I found myself having to work remotely via Zoom. Being a people person, thriving on human interaction and connection, I found the change to working online, personally extremely difficult. Being online meant that the organisation I worked for grew, we employed more staff than ever before, ran more workshops and training, engaging with more people with disabilities from CALD backgrounds that found themselves isolated yet connected via Zoom. For me, being on a laptop constantly, I found fatiguing and overwhelming. While I loved working my peers, I decided to put myself first and cut back on my workload a little as I began struggling with my mental health.

This struggle came about as I found myself unable to travel anywhere outside my LGA due to taxi drivers being unable to work outside their own LGA and being stuck at home. Public transport had been my only mode of transport. Whilst others were able to go for walks to get some vitamin D, I couldn't, as the condition of footpaths surrounding my home weren't safe to do so. Also having to wear a mask whilst out meant that my breathing was restricted. I hadn't been someone that has an extensive medical record as I hardly go to the GP, so I wasn't able to have an exemption from wearing one. Being stuck at home and living in the LGA of Fairfield and all the negative press this area has received has made me feel like I have been on home detention (3 months plus and counting).

Fairfield (an LGA I grew up in and lived in all my life) was constantly on the news and in the mainstream media it was painted with a certain brush. People from this area (myself included) felt targeted for no fault of our own. I spoke out to some mainstream media wanting to express my opinion and views on this whole situation, but never heard back from mainstream media channels. I felt as being someone that does speak out on issues that I'm passionate about, I could create some awareness on what it was like being a person with a disability experiencing this pandemic and sharing what it was like living in this LGA in these times.

Fairfield LGA, being one of the largest of a migrant/refugee population in my opinion was unfairly targeted and I often thought of those residents who came here from war torn countries suffering PTSD from trauma they experienced overseas. If I felt how I did, and I was lucky enough to be born and raised in this beautiful country, I often thought of the PTSD they would be experiencing with the constant over policing. There was one period there when there were police helicopters in the sky almost every night. It was then I decided to completely switch off from mainstream media and follow independent journalists.

For medical reasons, I have up until now decided not to get the 'jab', although I know for some of my peers it hasn't been easy to access, as there has been issues with accessibility of vaccine

hubs for people with disability and language barriers for people from a CALD background, up until recently when information in language has become available. It has taken a while for government to make considerations for people with disabilities and those from a CALD background, almost as if we are an afterthought. Why did it need to take months into a pandemic for access needs of people with disabilities interested in getting the jab, and information in language to be readily available?

Having parents who migrated here from Iraq myself I found that I had to research for them during the first half of the pandemic. My parents found something as simple as checking in to venues with their phones difficult, my dad showed me his check-in once and it was an actual picture of a QR code he had taken with his phone camera. I ended up getting dad, mum and myself the Service NSW QR check-in card. It has since made it easier for my parents to check in and out of venues with ease, so that has been a plus! I haven't had the opportunity to use mine yet, but I feel it will help as I had to previously locate the app in my phone with staff looking down at my phone, seeing what's on it while I flip through it trying to find the app invading my privacy.

I had been lucky that I could see family members under compassionate grounds when they would drop off a meal or essentials as they live in the same LGA, home school my niece, and have a great support network that has been my rock in this challenging and uncertain time. I have support workers that help me a couple of hours every day and during this time I had two leave which added to the stresses of covid. Trying to replace support workers has been challenging in this time. The one support worker I had left ended up being a close contact and had to isolate for two weeks as well.

Having all this time to myself during this pandemic and taking a step back, I have reflected on what's important in life and what's not. Suffice to say once things go back to a new normal and this nightmare ends, I look forward to new adventures and continuing to leave my mark on the world creating change where possible and I will continue being grateful for this thing we call life.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world." – Mahatma Gandhi

ANYIER YUOL



Anyier Yuol is an Australian-South Sudanese Kenyan born. She is an inspiring entrepreneur with aspirational dreams for social change. She is the Founder and CEO of Miss Sahara and Anyier Model Management, a Diversity and Inclusion advocate, and the former chair of the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW).

Anyier currently divides her time between endeavours as broad as community activism and providing consultation to local councils, state and national government agencies, and businesses on numerous issues on women and girls' rights, refugee and gender equality, youth participation and improving representation of minority groups in the

Australian beauty and fashion industry.

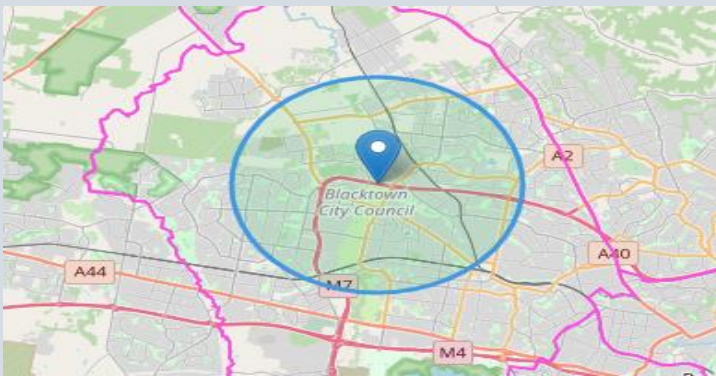
Anyier has been influential in her advocacy activities in creating a space where women are able to use their voice to bring about change through educational platforms. Anyier believes education is the key for individuals to achieve stability and economic independence. More information about Anyier Yuol is at https://youtu.be/mCtb_VRQ7mg

COVID-19 CRISIS: REFLECTION ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AMONG THE SOUTH SUDANESE-AUSTRALIANS IN GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY BY ANYIER YUOL

Abstract

This article highlights the resilience, strength, and community participation of the Australian-South Sudanese community in Greater Western Sydney at the time of adversity brought about

by COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing government restrictions, approaches and interaction with communities. I draw on this group's experiences and amplify the voices of activists and leaders within the Australian-South Sudanese community. The reflection is drawn from my position, experience, observations, and engagement as a young woman of South Sudanese descent, and as a leader within my community and in the Blacktown City Local Government Area (LGA). I am writing this article from my own voice, I speak from my own view, and in doing so my intention is not to impose it on you but to invite new thoughts and conversations through which new impact and understanding of community participation can arise. My view of COVID-19 and the South Sudanese community participation may differ from yours, but I hope that my message will still resonate with you and serve as a gateway to appreciating what it means to be part of a community during tough times.



Introduction

In early July 2021, the second COVID lockdown in Sydney came like a wildfire – those who had plans of socialising, traveling or just spending some quality times outdoors, were

suddenly shattered. In a matter of days, this new delta variant spread from Sydney Eastern Suburbs to Western Suburbs, and with it, came visible signs of political instability and blatant lack of political leadership. We observed many foreign governments shutting their countries down as well as the rest of Australia's states and territories shut their borders to New South Wales (NSW) residents. While the sheer incompetence within the NSW Government meant that we were unveiled to contain in time before it spread across Sydney and NSW.

Within the first 2-weeks of lockdown, several Local Government Areas in Greater Western Sydney, including Blacktown City Council were declared as hotspots. Suddenly, communities in Greater Western Sydney were finding themselves subjected to new rules that felt like punishment. Compared to the approaches used in Sydney Eastern Suburbs, the way Greater Westers Sydney residents were handled was heavy-handed; the use of exclusive hard lockdown, the increased police presence, the use of military personnel, the constant air surveillance and extra health requirements were dominant and destructive approaches. Nevertheless, communities came together to support their fellow community members and aid local Councils to combat the spread of COVID-19. Everyone came together from different parts of community life and took on the initiative to call on their leaders and communities to come together and help fight the spread of COVID.

Like many multicultural communities in Greater Western Sydney, some leaders and community advocates from the Australian-South Sudanese community came together and called on their community, religious leaders, and youth ambassadors to help find community-driven solutions to provide accurate and consistent COVID-related information. These involved translating the key messages for ease of consumption and acceptance by their community members and ensure right and consistent information reach all members of the family, in particular young people, and elderly. They formed the Australian-South Sudanese and Sudanese COVID-19 Response Taskforce. This taskforce, as per their terms of reference, is tasked with the purpose of providing a conduit for information sharing, coordination, collaboration and the development of effective responses on COVID-19 prevention, community protection, community education and local response activities; focusing on information provision, social wellbeing and material support, COVID restrictions and vaccine education, youth engagement and stakeholder advocacy.

Why Community participation is central in the fight against COVID-19

Community participation empowers and enables the community to make informed decisions in matters affecting their community. The term community participation has multiple meanings and can reflect diverse perspectives and approaches (Fraser, 2005). In this paper, I defined community participation as a process by which a community initiates and takes responsibility to serve its community members by working collaboratively to improve the health status of its community and those around them. The Australian-South Sudanese community amplifies what community participation means during this lockdown. They adopted and implemented its preparedness and response plan for the pandemic and translated it into their community. The community participation approaches were activated to ensure proper networking and dissemination of the necessary information at all levels.

The COVID-19 crisis has been devastating for most vulnerable members of our society, mostly the multicultural communities and so it is not surprising that communities across NSW have been coming together to help those most affected. While the nature of spread of this virus has meant stricter restrictions and hard lockdown, many local groups and charities have found interesting and novel ways to combat the spread of COVID-19, and provide essential support to those most in need, and to keep the community united to emerge stronger.

As uncertainties prevail around the actions and policies to be used to contain and mitigate the second lockdown in Sydney, communities move farther ahead with their own initiatives. The Australian-South Sudanese community came together and through their leaders and ambassadors developed an ongoing support plan for their local councils, health professionals

and multicultural services. What I saw during this tough time was great leadership, a community coming together and taking ownership, which in turn, influenced and motivated the community members to participate and spread positive and consistent messages through different channels.

The government restrictions including public health orders putting a ban on gatherings and the lockdown of Greater Western Sydney LGAs to suppress the spread of COVID-19 saw virtual and online social platforms become crucial parts of adequate access to COVID-related information within the Australian-South Sudanese community. Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp groups and Teleconference forums were used to share recorded health messages to keep the community up to date with ongoing COVID-19 changes, especially around government policy, health requirements, travel restrictions, material and social support, and wellbeing checks. This also included connecting with vulnerable families to reduce isolation, and with some leaders using virtual meetings and information sessions to support community activities and information sharing. These platforms were not just linking families and communities but providing space to convey health and safety messages on the virus.

COVID has shown the required understanding of multiple vulnerabilities not only at an individual level, but also at community, structural and institutional levels. For the Australian-South Sudanese community, it is important to emphasise how structural and institutional disadvantages and discrimination have contributed to our community vulnerabilities. As we are aware of our visibility, we came together quickly to prevent any discriminatory headlines and called on the Australian-South Sudanese leaders and ambassadors to help our community. This community participation approach was drawn from a variety of sources, including lessons learned from previous failures and media representations of our community over the years. Nonetheless, it was driven by passionate leaders who have the best interest of their community at heart and gave all they could to support members of their community by engaging all sections of their community. However, it is important to note that, this is the beginning and that more could be done to leverage on this approach. I leave you with food for thoughts with my recommendations below.

Recommendations

- Community participation in the context of COVID-19 should involve the need to value the scope of influence and community empowerment.
- The need for a community approach: At a time like this, the need to shift the emphasis from the individual to the community is significant. Even when the influences are at the national level, it is often community participation and involvement that will influence

individuals. As such, local government engagement with communities can be complemented by the efforts which can be made within local communities.

- Drawing on community knowledge: Communities often have detailed knowledge and awareness about their surroundings. It makes sense to involve communities in making plans because they know their communities and the possibilities for change.
- Collective approaches to community participation can add value within the COVID-19 response by ensuring people are working within the right structure to deliver the best results and increase the effectiveness of interventions.

Reference:

Fraser, H. (2005). Four different approaches to community participation. *Community Development Journal*, 40(3), 286-300.

SUZAN NIKANORA MANYOK AGUER



Suzan Nikanora Manyok Aguer is currently the Director of Joy Community Care Pty which she established in 2017 as a service-based organisation to empower participants to create great relationships and provide high quality support to a range of different people, from those with complex needs to those who require less intensive assistance.

Suzan Nikanora has been a mentor for young South Sudanese women and men in Victoria since 2013. She voluntarily helps victims of domestic violence by directing them to the right services they require. She is currently also working for a number of service providers, providing support and counselling to adults and young persons with disability in residential care and to their families, around Victoria.

Suzan is a proud Australian migrant from a South Sudanese background

who calls Australia home and says she “keeps Australian values first above anything else.” She speaks Arabic fluently.

Suzan Nikanora studied a Bachelor of Architecture (in Arabic) at Khartoum University and also has a Diploma in Early Childhood and Education Care, Certificate IV in Community Services Work and Certificate IV in Disability in Melbourne Australia.

MY STORY

BY SUZAN NIKANORA MANYOK AGUER

I am from a Sudanese background. Sudan was a multicultural country with more than one hundred and fifty tribes and different languages respectively, at the time before the breakaway of the present South Sudan. I was born to a family of a minister, who held numerous ministerial positions, and my family lived a more private life where our culture was a living scripture. Our society is a male dominant one. For that reason, I felt compassion for women facing family violence and became an advocate for them.

Nevertheless, I was a lucky father's daughter because I used to provide catering services to his colleagues during their meeting at our residence and kept their conversation confidential and I learned the meaning of leadership.

When the pandemic restriction continued to 2020, I faced a hard time in my life especially when the lockdown and restrictions started taking a longer period than expected. COVID-19 pandemic started as if it was just a flu that wouldn't reach Australia. I thought it would come and go, but it has now proved to have come and stay with us permanently.

As a single mother who has been facing family violence from two different relationships, I live with three teenage boys and a younger son. I had no more than a Centrelink payment which was not enough since these boys had nowhere to play and nothing to do than keeping them busy with television and games. This meant, I would not keep up financially because they always wanted to eat each time, they came near the fridge. I became more nervous and worried in the sense that I felt like I was imprisoned in my own home and my life became harder because all I had with my kids was social media, television, news of death and rumours about pandemic infection from different sources, with all governments around the world getting worried and announcing emergency measures about people's safety.

All that made me afraid of the future of my children and I lost confidence in anything around me, and I only kept my kids around me. Sadly, while I was handling the children on one hand, one of my ex-partners, on other hand, was busy sending me unwanted text messages that put me under enormous unnecessary pressure.

I was trying to control my children's emotions during the lockdown and trying to get things moving forward. I used to love visiting places during holidays, but this did not happen during the pandemic which I and my children missed.

Despite all the dramas of the pandemic, I realised that as I alone was responsible for my children, I said to myself that I should be strong, because I did not want my kids to know my weaknesses. I decided to engage in activities that make me feel good and calm myself, to work-out how to overcome my depression and look after my mental health. I had to apply my coping mechanism. I started doing my hobbies, such as keeping records of events, going for a walk, reading my favourite books, watching documentaries, cleaning the house, to mention but a few. In this way I became stress-free and hence I was able to organise my house's programs, and how my kids would fit into this program, for instance how are they going to read online and how to calm them too.

I contacted services providers to assist my children and me, financially and emotionally. Thanks to them, I received winter clothing, food vouchers and other handout items from the services. I also, started applying for jobs online, and I am now working for three companies, one full time and two part time jobs. I finally got an exemption or permit to travel to different work sites which made me feel good. As result, I had the opportunity to teach my kids how to behave themselves and play peacefully.

I observed that COVID-19 stage four had impacted some of my friends, families and community: their loved ones who died during COVID were buried by their friends, families or community. This left many people heartbroken because they did not get an opportunity to say goodbye to their loved ones.

Community functions were suspended for good and those people who organised some parties were at a financial loss because lockdown had come without enough warning.

Some women have been suffering in silence because their husbands are grounded overseas by COVID-19 restrictions. These women are now unable to work and lost their jobs because they have nobody to look after children, as their husbands used to do this.

Since, I realised that I was among women leaders in the church, we decided to start making phone calls to families and engage them in sharing their experiences and scriptures. I continued to engage in my hobbies such as writing and reading philosophical books and used the time to teach my kids a range of domestic and academic activities, since learning was online. These times have been good for us for community and personal growth.

I have been volunteering for the community for a long time by advising people who are facing challenges and referring them to government services I know, as well as counselling young

people to assist their family during the pandemic. I am hoping to continue working for women facing domestic violence because most families who are not financially stable always have unstable relationships.

I am personally, someone who loves to stay with my kids. During the pandemic, I learned a lot from my kids and taught them about respect and compassion, and now they have a better world view about others. I also have become financially stable because COVID-19 gave me the opportunity to exercise strong resilience to overcome the challenges of this pandemic.

I am thankful to Australia for their beautiful justice system that respects everyone's rights, regardless of their belief, background, gender and other attributes. I am Proud to an Australian.

SUMMAYYAH SADIQ-OJIBARA



Summayyah Sadiq-Ojibara is a Nigerian, African - Australian Muslim, a Psychotherapist, Counsellor, Life-Coach, Mindfulness Guide, Entrepreneur, Poet, and Writer, Author of her most recent book; Time Travel In My Worlds And Let's Travel Together In (Y)ours.

She is the Founder, CEO/MD of ComXtra - a Counselling, Coaching and Creativity Consultancy and DEW Counselling - her private practice.

She works with individuals, groups and organizations, designs and delivers programmes, workshops and talks in Australia and overseas.

Summayyah is a wife and mother and lives in Melbourne with her family. Her work is featured at www.comxtra.com

THE COMING OF C, AS I WRITE BY SUMMAYYAH SADIQ-OJIBARA

I watched as report after report told of a strange thing ravaging relentlessly all that was in its path of lives and living. I heard how communities, cities, countries were being razed down with casualties in their numbers and counting. They were not casualties caused by culprits or catastrophises of war, by masters of manipulation in world politics or economics, or by some mysterious power or magical entity. It was a microscopic organism that came with the force of multiple mammoth herds stampeding through the globe with the speed of multiple spaceships orbiting between dimensions!

A powerful imagery that may captivate with its graphic depiction, a fused metaphor of prehistoric life and Sci-fi that may earn me some creative writing stars, maybe some raised brows and side-eying looks, but one that cannot possibly capture depths, descriptions, dimensions of lived, living experiences of billions of people, whose lives have been, are being touched, tested, traumatized, taken by this 'thing'.

It started as another disease in a distant country, a disease in a part of the world that would soon pass over; just like other ones, and just like the others; this too would become lodged in the archives of history. This too would soon be in the past tense of sentences. This too was just a matter of time, or so we thought.

I remember where I was when I first heard of the coming of Corona. I remember sitting in the comfort of one of my corners in my home and watching the screens. I remember how I moved between named and unnamed emotions; curiosity and confusion at the chaos unfolding, care and compassion for the people in the country unravelling, contemplation on what to cook for dinner and other comings and goings of my thoughts and emotions.

Then, the reality of the world, my world, started to change and my conflicted choices on what to cook started to take changing numbers on the list of life priorities. My life, life and living started to mean, matter, move in my many dimensions, in many directions.

For me everything has, is taking new, renewed, different, deeper, more, less meaning. It was, has been, are about missing hugs, throat tickles, sharing spaces, safe spaces, stress, anxiety, mismatched clothes, time dissonance, hyper-states, messages on walk paths, Masquerades, binges, fasts, creative explorations, caring expressions, duty, responsibilities, courage, fear, connections, separations, highs, lows, sensory overloads, prayers, practices, procrastination, wellness, wellbeing, helping, healing, burdens, blessings, births, breath, grit, grace, gifts, God.

As the days count on from 600 days of its known arrival; December 2019, the Corona virus, COVID19 as so named, has become a mighty force of life that has forced, is forging new and emerging realities of, for lives and life. The 'Normals' of life as we knew them, are no longer as we know them. Corona and its companions are demanding from us; that we defy our natural instincts of physical connection, that we deny our collective longing for social interaction, that we delay gratification for milestones celebrations, that we distance and draw closer in loss and love, that we unlearn, learn, relearn, unlearn, learn, relearn, learn in successions of sudden, uneven, unexpected turnover speed. We are being called to stretch, shift, adapt, clarify, modify, purify, channel, change in our intentions, expectations, conversations, actions, our meanings, reactions, responses, in our plans, in our persons.

As I write, I journey alone in my worlds, together with the world in the certainty of the uncertainties of the times. As I write, I am being called to be heartfelt not just being headful, to take handfuls of moments and make them into life full of memories. I am being called to live mindfully, meaningfully, beautifully, truthfully, gratefully, faithfully. I am being called to live, believe, to birth, to be, to become, to breath, again, and again, and again.

So, here I am, as I write, striving to live, believe, to birth, to be, to become, to breath, again, and again, and again, and trusting that I will be blessed in, rewarded for my strivings, beautifully, awemazingly, abundantly.

PART 2 YOUTH LEADERS CHANGING CONSENT EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

On 31 March 2021, NSW High School students took to the streets in Sydney for March4Justice. **Gemma Thomas-Pike** led this event calling for change to consent education to include direct consent & early consent education.

The courageous speech that Gemma Thomas-Pike delivered on the day at Sydney Townhall is featured in this section. It impressively reflects why she felt compelled to stand up and lead her peers, despite the ramifications of leading a public march.

The photos of the student march on 31 March 2021 reproduced in this section show how influential Gemma Thomas-Pike was in galvanising student voices on consent reform in NSW.

Gemma was interviewed on ABC TV by ABC Journalist, Patricia Karvelas, on 1 April 2021, following the Sydney march. Ali Ibrahim Aziz Abboud was also interviewed on the need for changes to Consent Education in High School. The interview can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=144151674295100>.

Gemma Thomas-Pike's actions were against a backdrop of hundreds of young women sharing stories of teenage sexual assault, when on the 22nd of February 2021, Chanel Contos, a former student at Sydney's Kambala Girls' School, posted an Instagram Story asking:

"If you live in Sydney: have you or has anyone close to you ever experienced sexual assault from someone who went to an all-boys school?"

Within 24 hours³, she received nearly 300 responses, 73 percent saying 'yes'. Contos went on to create a petition⁴ calling for earlier sex education in schools. Within three days, the petition rose to 11,000 signatures and Chanel had received 1,200 horrific anonymous testimonies of sexual harassment and assault among high school aged students. In May 2021, the new national curriculum draft was released by ACARA⁵, strengthening guidance and resources on

³ <https://www.mamamia.com.au/sexual-assault-private-schools/>

⁴ <https://www.teachusconsent.com/>

⁵ Chrysanthos, N. & Visentin, L. 2021. 'Still a way to go' on consent and power content in new Australian curriculum, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 30 April 2021. <https://www.smh.com.au/education/still-a-way-to-go-on-consent-and-power-content-in-new-australian-curriculum-20210429-p57nfs.html>

teaching about respectful relationships, sexuality and consent⁶, but experts called for more explicit links between those themes to sexual relationships and gender-based violence.

Chanel Contos's petition⁷ stands today at 44165 signatures today and 6742 testimonies. In a final bid to push for reform, in September 2021, Contos organised a Roundtable following the National Summit on Women's Safety⁸ held earlier this month. The Roundtable was attended by 70 high-profile representatives from a cross-section of political parties, education authorities and survivors of sexual assault.

Contos urges that "The shortcomings of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) national curriculum, drafted in May are that "consent is not mandated in it" and "It needs to address it in an explicitly early way from when high school starts and it needs to be holistic in that it addresses power from a young age before we bring in concepts of sex⁹."

Both Victoria and Queensland have introduced mandatory and specific classes on consent in recent months.

The updated Australian Curriculum will be made available at the start of 2022. Given the gravity of 6743 testimonies at <https://www.teachusconsent.com> "by those who passionately believe that inadequate consent education is reason for their sexual abuse during or soon after school¹⁰" it is hoped that the Australian Curriculum will mandate explicit Consent Education in Australia.

Leadership and cultural change is also needed at a school level. As Gemma Thomas-Pike says in her speech, "*we need earlier consent education and direct education rather than irrelevant and frankly useless tea metaphors; we need principals and educational officials to understand the consequences of their words and actions and how that will and has continued lighting the fire of victim blaming.*"

⁶ NSW Government. 30 May 2021. *Consent package for NSW schools and parents - A suite of initiatives is being rolled out to support the teaching of respectful relationships.*

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/news/latest-news/consent-package-for-nsw-schools-and-parents>

⁷ <https://www.teachusconsent.com/>

⁸ <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/payne/2021/national-summit-key-step-towards-ending-violence-against-women>

⁹ Nine.com.au. <https://honey.nine.com.au/latest/survivors-of-sexual-assault-address-key-australian-policy-makers-in-consent-roundtable/61651c20-1a52-4de6-ad2d-b43b4cb7da0e>

¹⁰ <https://www.teachusconsent.com/testimonies>

If this section or articles brings up any issues for you, please call 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) – the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service. It is free to call this service. More information: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/telephone-and-online-counselling>

GEMMA THOMAS-PIKE



Gemma Thomas-Pike is currently finishing year 11 at Riverside Girls High School in Sydney, and entering year 12.

She has always been passionate for women's rights, she says, "since the very first day I was made to feel less than others, just for being a woman."

After her Graduation, Gemma hopes to pursue the art and practice of Medicine, while also still actively being a part of the fight for justice, ethics and equality.

CHANGING CONSENT EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS TO STOP A VICTIM-BLAMING IDEOLOGY

Speech delivered by Gemma Thomas-Pike
on 31 March 2021 at
March4Justice, Sydney NSW



Photos courtesy of Gemma Thomas-Pike

Sixteen per cent of children by the age of fifteen have experienced some form of sexual abuse so you would think they would educate us about consent in early education but for the first time in my academic life at the age of fifteen, I learnt what consent was. In my year nine classroom they taught us what consent was for the first time, yet they still managed to mess up teaching us consent.

One would think consent would be taught in a direct and informative way that allows students to participate in a safe environment to be aware of the different circumstances and types of consent, but yet again the education ministers, federal and state failed us. We sat down and watched a decade old video about how sexual consent is equal to that of wanting or not wanting a cup of tea. Is that seriously how they are going to inform the future leaders of this world about such an important issue? Does comparing consent to a cup of tea make sense to any of you? They expect us to act like adults yet treat us as if we are children. In the video they claimed that consent is as simple as 'wanting tea or not wanting it' but see consent is not that simple. That line becomes blurred when any other factors are involved in this equation. Like drinking for example.

This isn't just an issue young children should be taught, but this should be taught at every school, especially at single sex schools. At various single sex schools, we are not taught the different perspectives on sexual consent. With the viral petition depicting acts of assault committed by students at elitist boys' schools¹¹, consent education is more important than ever before.

Of course, I don't blame the teachers as they are there simply to teach us the syllabus that the education ministers have approved. But the schools should know better and be better and understand that words and statements have consequences. For any principal to be advocating the message that children are to blame for adults' actions should not be in any educational environment. Federal and state ministers need to change the syllabus regarding consent education; consent needs to be taught earlier, in a more direct way, and in a relevant environment.

When I told people about this march and the fact, I was representing young women, I was asked time and time again if this was something I really wanted to do? I told them of course that I'm fighting for my human rights. They told me that future businesses or universities may not want me to work or attend there because they may not agree with my political opinion, but I told them, this isn't a political opinion, this is a breach in human rights. How is fighting for women's rights a political opinion?

¹¹ Visontay, E. 2021. Viral petition reveals more than 500 allegations of sexual assault in Australian private schools. *The Guardian Australia*. 20 February 2021.

I should be in Biology right now, but instead I am here fighting for our fights, for my rights and for human rights. I shouldn't have to be here trying to educate the government on why direct consent education is important because that is something that they should already know and understand but clearly, they don't understand. Yet we try and tell them, but they silence us, but our voices need to be heard.

Together we can force the federal and state education ministers to listen to our demands for change to consent education syllabuses: we need earlier consent education and direct education rather than irrelevant and frankly useless tea metaphors; we need principals and educational officials to understand the consequences of their words and actions and how that will and has continued lighting the fire of victim blaming.

I can't express to any of you how grateful I am to each and every one of you for caring enough to support such an important issue. Time and time again the government has chosen to ignore us, but this time we are demanding change in consent education, and we are needing it more than ever before.

PART 3 YOUTH LEADERS MOBILISING AN INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The IPCC, or Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its Sixth Assessment Report on 9 August 2021. The Report provides new estimates of the chances of crossing the global warming level of 1.5°C in the next decades, and states that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach.

“For 1.5°C of global warming, there will be increasing heat waves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons. At 2°C of global warming, heat extremes would more often reach critical tolerance thresholds for agriculture and health.”¹²

Benjamin Hamill from the University of Wollongong (UOW) led a group of nine UOW students to formulate a climate change Statement with 5 key commitments for UOW. Benjamin’s account in describing what they achieved and how, points to the complexity of leading this extensive project with multiple and diverse stakeholders, within a large tertiary institution, and in a relatively short space of time.

The students have not just enabled institutional climate change reform, but are also leading global reform, as their Statement will be presented as a part of the Global Conference of Youth(COY16)’s statement to the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow this year.

Benjamin and Grace Mahon are to be commended for enabling the student group’s operational and strategic leadership. Particularly impressive is that Benjamin committed to this challenge, despite it being outside his studies in Psychology.

The group of 10 UOW students who developed the Youth Climate Statement are¹³:

Benjamin Hamill Project (Team Chair); Sarah Vogel (Project Team Deputy Chair); Carly Lavings (Project Team Events Officer); Grace Mahon (Project Team Executive Officer); Alexander Hall; Isabella Panozzo; Jackson Cocks; Matthew Hammond; Paris Rawaqa and Reisha Thaker.

These UOW students’ efforts echo the courage, passion and drive of youth climate leaders globally, in coordinating constructive climate change action.

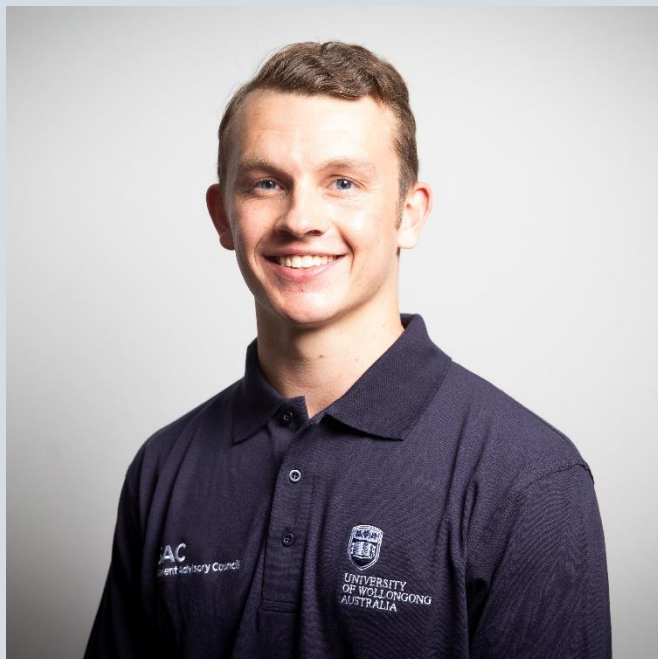
¹² <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>

¹³ <https://www.uow.edu.au/student/youth-climate-change-project/>

The willingness of UOW to support and endorse these students' outcomes, and the provision by the United Nations for youth voices globally to be heard¹⁴ during the UN Climate negotiations are tremendously significant for critical capacity building for youth to catalyse shared goals with organisations and the broader community to mitigate climate change.

¹⁴ The COY16 Programme. 28th October – 31st October. <https://ukcoy16.org/programmes#>

BENJAMIN HAMILL



Ben Hamill is a third-year psychology student at the University of Wollongong and Chaired the UOW Climate Change Statement Project. He sits on several committees within the University, including as Deputy Chair of the Student Advisory Council and representative on the University Education Committee and newly formed Sustainable Futures Committee. He has a strong passion for giving back to and engaging with the community and looks to pursue this project and its momentum into the future.

THE NEED FOR INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE BY BENJAMIN HAMILL

On August 9, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released their damning report¹⁵ on the state of the Earth's climate, emphasising the need for urgent global and local action.

A team of ten students from the University of Wollongong (UOW) stepped up to the challenge. The team came from a diverse background of experience and study across the University; along with youth from across the globe we are taking part in the United Nations 16th Conference of Youths on Climate Change (COY16).

We conducted extensive research, benchmarking across universities and institutions, and consultation with university students, professional and academic services staff, and community

¹⁵ IPCC. 2021. *Sixth Assessment Report*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

members as part of the project. By consolidating all this information, we produced a Youth Climate Statement¹⁶ with 5 key commitments for the University, all of which were endorsed by University Senior Executive.

These five climate commitments are:

- Working towards carbon neutrality by 2030.
- Supporting sustainable transport solutions, including active and public transport to and from the University.
- Improving energy management and a renewable power purchasing agreement.
- Cultivating research excellence in the climate and sustainability space.
- Educating and working with the local community on climate change and sustainability.

These commitments look to form the foundation for a robust climate strategy at the University, solidifying its place as a global university. To inform direction beyond an institutional level, we also made extensive demands directed towards individuals, institutions, local governments, the federal government, and global decision-makers.

Noting the implications of the IPCC report, their most poignant demand was for a structured federal response to climate change through a 2050 net-zero carbon emissions target.

Wollongong City Council has already pledged an operational 2030 net-zero emissions target and is working with the community in implementing several sustainability initiatives.

This statement is a significant step forward in the University's commitment to climate action and would not be possible without the dedicated students and University staff to make it happen. The University community widely lauded our statement; not only were our commitments endorsed, but they have also been embedded within a newly formed Sustainable Futures Committee. This Committee's prerogative is to establish a more robust Environmental strategy that our commitments certainly form a foundation for change and elevates the student voice.

It was a privilege to work with such a dedicated group of students, especially Grace Mahon, a management cadet at the University, whose research and insight made an incredibly difficult timeframe and complex project so much easier. It was a unique opportunity for all those involved, providing invaluable insight into what an effective institutional response looks like.

The project and its success highlight the power of individual voices to ensure institutional change. Now, more than ever, we as individuals must push for institutional accountability and

¹⁶

<https://documents.uow.edu.au/content/groups/public/@web/@currentstudents/documents/doc/uow270308.pdf>

global change in the battle against climate change. Bringing about change begins as an individual by living out the principles we believe in and leading by example to change the narrative.

The University of Wollongong was the only institution in Australia to make a submission to the Conference of Youth (COY) and as a result our final statement informed the creation of the Australian submission, which the team of ten worked together in creating. Our statement will be presented as a part of COY's statement to the UN Climate Change Conference of Parties in Glasgow on the 31st of October-12th November 2021.

The full statement is available on UOW's Youth Climate Change website at:

[https //www.uow.edu.au/student/youth-climate-change-project/](https://www.uow.edu.au/student/youth-climate-change-project/)

"The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard." ~ Gaylord Nelson

PART 4 REQUISITE FOR PEACE

Cloud Climbers: Declarations through Images and Words for a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace is a book that “reflects the conviction that the arts, literature, activism and scholarship can together contribute to the kinds of cultural shift requisite for a peace that flows from and extends to human relations with the natural world.”

In launching this unique book, Moira Rayner appreciated the transformative value of *Cloud Climbers* defining the precipice “we stand on” of “a global Pandemic, dividing the rich and the poor savagely,” “the unknown effects of climate collapse,” and “the lack of trust of the people in their leaders” to lead effectively, honourably and ethically.

For her, a requisite to peace, is truth-telling and acknowledgement of past hurts. She begins her speech by acknowledging the brutality and injustice committed by her Great Grandfather against New Zealand’s Maori people.

For Australia, she states that peace and reconciliation is only possible “if it is founded in justice, compassion, respect and dignity for Australia’s First Nations.” Acknowledgement must be predicated on listening with respect and dignity, and that it must entail properly making amends to people affected by decisions made by us and our forebears.

As we face “existential international problems such as global warming or nuclear annihilation,” she observes that “Laws, regulations, tribunals, courts, commissioners, all have very limited opportunities to achieve a just outcome. Because rules are never enough.”

Paying tribute to the insights and lived experience of her friend, Jeff McFadden, living in the United States on a small farming property, which he is rehabilitating slowly by taking his time, she resolves that we need to be “human” and that means “to slow down, be open to listening to and compassionate of our neighbours, those who are likely to be affected by our decisions and choices.

Moira Rayner’s wisdom is poignant at so many levels as the world accelerates in unprecedented ways each day, as values and beliefs that uphold humanity are challenged overtly and covertly, and as we strive to make sense of it all and find our place in it.

“Living consciously and kindly...as all kinds of diverse people and fellow creatures, in the care of the world and of one another,” is how we need to live.

MOIRA RAYNER

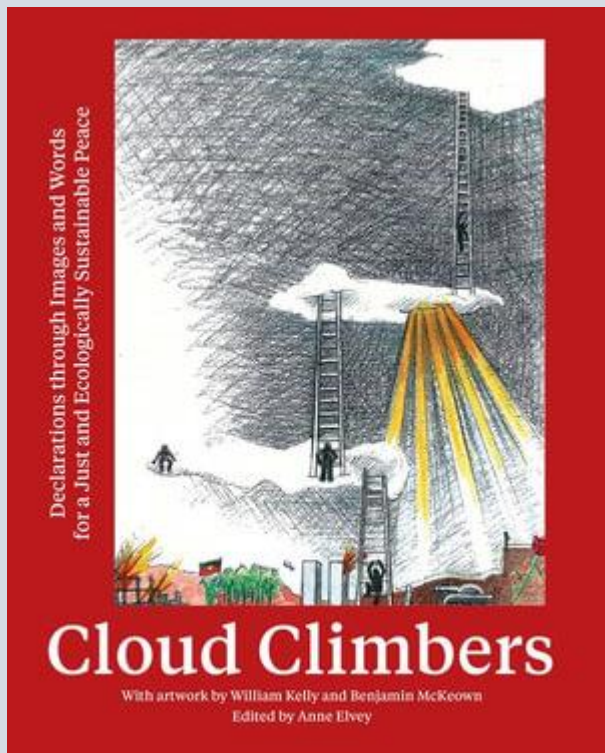


Moira Rayner is a senior lawyer with particular expertise in workplace relations and anti-discrimination law, management and policy advice and investigations with a penchant for working closely with employers who appreciate the benefits of diversity and workforce participation. She chaired the Law Reform Commission in WA; was Commissioner for Equal Opportunity for Victoria; a Hearings Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission; and an Acting Anti-Corruption Commissioner.

She is a practising lawyer, conciliator, mediator and educator some of her research and other appointments have included Melbourne University

(Advisory Board Labour Law Centre; Senior Fellow), Deakin (Adjunct Professor, Centre for Human Services), RMIT (Adjunct Professor School of Social Inquiry); Murdoch (Visiting Scholar), UWA (Lecturer, Senior Fellow Law School, Visiting Fellow at the Australian Centre) and Curtin (Lecturer) and Australian Institute of Family Studies (Deputy Director, Research).

SPEECH BY MOIRA RAYNER AT A LAUNCH OF CLOUD CLIMBERS ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2021



Cloud Climbers

Declarations through Images and Words for a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace

By Anne Elvey (Editor), William Kelly (Illustrator), Benjamin McKeown (Illustrator)

Published 12th June 2021

ISBN 9780648855132

I acknowledge that I am physically taking advantage of the theft by non-indigenous people of the land of the Wurunjeri people of the Kulin nation. I shall have more to say about them.

Personally, my physical body is located in the library of a stone Victorian terrace, once a brothel, which we call "old" but was built a mere 150 years ago, and now shudders daily beside the eight-lane highway known as Hoddle Street, which was built on Wurundjeri country of the Kulin nation, without their permission.

Our antecedents - I wasn't born here but I do acknowledge some kind of blood connection to that little digger, former Australian PM, Billy Hughes, through my maternal grandmother - did not know or value the stories and culture of the indigenous people who set up a tremendous network of 'countries' and whose culture survived for perhaps 65,000 years, well before the European traders exiles capitalists and carpet baggers arrived and took what wasn't theirs, and told them they were savages.

I am inspired by 'Cloud Climbers' to share some stories of my own, as a settler on these lands.

I was honoured to be invited to share the launch of this remarkable book and properly humbled when I finished reading it for the second time.

It is a hugely warm and hopeful collection of stories, ideas, art, poetry and spirituality premised on possibilities for sustainable peace arising from the collaboration of arts, activism and scholarship.

So, here's what arose in me.

The first is a story about respect for First Nations.

It's about my family's growing understanding about the dreadful acts committed by my great grandfather, Minister for Native Affairs for New Zealand, in 1883. His name was John Bryce.

It's because of this growth that I embrace as true the principle that peace and reconciliation is only possible if it is founded in justice, compassion, respect and dignity for Australia's First Nations.

In my family we were taught that Great Grandfather had been defamed by John Rusden, the author of a history of New Zealand, who claimed that he had brutally destroyed a christian, pacifist settlement led by the prophet, Te Whiti, on un-ceded land in Taranaki, known as Parihaka.

It is true Great Grandfather won his case - oddly, he chose to sue in a London court not a kiwi one - and all of the children of our family have a copy of the transcript, such as it was, and of the judgment in our libraries.

But the witnesses for Rusden were not able to travel to London for the hearing because (a) they were Maori and (b) they didn't speak English (c) they didn't have lawyers and (d) such evidence as they provided was taken down by Pakeha in simplistic statements out of context which meant nothing to an English court - and which awarded the judgment on a technical reading of those texts.

My Great Grandfather had led a 'militia' of mercenaries and volunteers who invaded the land, sought to provoke an armed or any forceful defence from the thousands of men and women there, didn't get it, but destroyed their farms, implements, schools, church and homes and arrested and jailed the lot of them.

Under legislation my Great Grandfather had put to the parliament, as Minister for Native Affairs, he had already removed all rights to Maori civil liberties, trials, Treaty entitlements and physical freedom, in legislation passed by him through NZ's single chambered parliament.

The liability to be seized, jailed and kept in jail until you died without any charge but being Maori was unique to Maori men who 'might' pose a threat. It was utterly shameful, and Bryce's claim to have done this because he had been attacked by Maori during the land wars that had been triggered by ongoing breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, was never established.

In fact, my Great Grandmother had been alone at home when the warriors walked through their land, and stood on the verandah and stared them down, so effectively that they kept walking, and one of them later asked for a job working for the brave pakeha woman. He was told to piss off by the old man.

The second story is about truth telling.

I want to hear the stories of the Australian First Nations massacres, their extra judicial 'executions', the secret cutting off of trophies from the dead bodies and the burning of the dead, and the sexual and violent abuse of Indigenous women and children, and I want what the

authors in this collection want, a culture of listening with respect, and of making amends, rather than a subculture of sadness, disappointment and despair.

These stories are important as we stand on the very edge of a triple global catastrophe

1. An out of control, global Pandemic, dividing the rich and the poor savagely and increasingly
2. A Clear and present indication that the unknown effects of climate collapse, will be even worse than predicted as the snow disappears and the islands sink and it is too hot to live in parts of the world, including our own
3. Political fumbling to avoid addressing these, and the lack of trust of the people in their leaders to resolve these things, leading to outrageously Secretive and authoritarian decision making, with Public assurances that we can keep doing what we were doing before the fires, the storms, the disease, the financial and health system collapses, and from those same leaders, a blunt and ruthless abandonment of old ethics and ways of being - encouraging the breaking of ties between workers and the arts; the habit of cooperating and trusting one's relationships with other and respecting difference - and the brutalisation of women.

Here's another story for you, about why we decided we would not have a nuclear industry. This is an uncomfortable truth.

It was because of the nuclear testing, for our British government, on Aboriginal country, after the second world war.

It was jurisprudentially unlawful, and if it were not, it should have been.

We have learned about the real reasons for this abuse of First Nations' land rights. Hubris.

I was greatly affected by this memory after reading another of the essays in this book which built on a faith that the nuclear proliferation treaty we later signed up to, would hold.

By a facile 'announcement' this has just been torn up. Without even the pretence of a mandate, our Prime Minister 'announced' a pact with the US and the UK to establish a nuclear industry in Australia,

Yet there is no agreement, no contract, no deadline, no numbers, no financial information of the costs of cancelling an old order for submarines that were to be diesel-fuelled by French contractors - and the reason? 'because of' a so-called threat of war with China - in breach of our treaty obligations, and thoroughly pissing off our neighbours in Asia and our families in France.

Yes, I have a French great grandmother, as well.

Believe me, a nuclear submarine will be the last instrument of warfare on a ruined planet.

And whose land will be most fouled by this industry in Australia? The country of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Again. A convenient dumping place for nuclear waste from our new 'allies'.

So here I stand I can do no other. So said Martin Luther, when he decried the corruption of the Catholic Church and was hauled into judgment.

The contributors to this remarkable book are also witnesses to Truth. They demand a proper and measured acknowledgement of past hurts. Adopting ways of listening to people who will

be affected by decisions we and our forebears took, honestly and ignorantly believing them to be in their best interests.

What we have now, and must do better if we hope to survive as a species with the wealth of our earth, is a system of unrestrained growth and over use of the limited resources we have.

What can we make of a society which measures people's wellbeing in terms of the movements of the stock market and the 'unemployment' rate, desires to 'open up' the economy, as it has been, as fast as possible to buy, consume, sell, and profit those who do not work but do invest, and who exploit the natural resources of our planet as if they could never run out.

My third story is the importance of remembering our stories.

Jason Kelly writes about his experience as a member of the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria, and the importance of acknowledging the wrongs that were done in the settlement of this country. Yet we pretend to secure those wrongs by throwing money at organisations purporting to help indigenous people. Yet they have not.

We must listen to those who have been exploited and detracted.

In 2019 I was invited to and willingly jumped into a retelling of the story of the fight to save Northlands Secondary College. I had a very minor but career limiting role in its fight for survival.

Many of you won't know about this because it has been written out of the history of the education department of Victoria, and is smoothly overlooked by the leaders of the time, the ministers and secretaries of departments, under the leadership of Jeff Kennett, premier of Victoria in the 1990s.

Jeff ordered the closure of Northland Secondary College, because it had an unusual and hugely successful emphasis on immersion within its communities, and a culture which acknowledged the traumas of young people's lives, the effect of dispossession on Indigenous students, which treated all children, no matter their lack of wealth, possessions, and diversity of backgrounds and experiences, but especially the recognition of the uniquely disadvantaged Aboriginal children, the respect and dignity of choosing how they wanted to learn or what they wanted to learn. As a result, they completed this journey, their educational journeys, and they made something very, very special - kids who despite all, got to Year 12 and beyond who had been written off by the education offered everywhere else in Victoria.

Jeff had called in another Geoff, Geoff Spring from the Northern Territory who, under the NT government of the 1990s, had successfully, and I use that term ironically, closed down Aboriginal schools which were teaching children in the territory in their own languages.

Northlands Secondary College was closed down after a series of breaches of faith and trust, on the spurious ground that it needed maintenance, and that the government was going to do it. And as a result, all of these children were thrown out of education.

A rebel school was run for the balance of the time it was closed, two years, and a complaint was made to the commissioner for equal opportunity (that was me) by two students, and an advocate called Gary Foley, whose son was a succeeding student at the school and was doomed to stop succeeding.

Eventually, the case was won in the Supreme Court of Victoria, on appeal from a decision of a judge that the Equal Opportunity Board could not order the reopening of the College. The

Court of Appeal found, as I had, that closing down the only school in the education system of Victoria, which enabled indigenous children to succeed in their education, was indirectly discriminatory on the basis of race, and the school was again ordered to reopen.

In the two years that took, many of those children died or ended up in jail.

It was said that my position as commissioner for equal opportunity, having refused, or failed to accept Jeff's public instructions to reject the complaint on the grounds that it was government policy to ignore the duty not to discriminate, but instead bumping it upstairs for an order of the Equal Opportunity Board, and subsequently enabling the Supreme Court of Victoria to interpret the behaviours of Mr Kennett and his lieutenants, meant that I was no longer to be trusted because I wasn't just going along with government policy.

The truth was that the Equal Opportunity Act required the government to avoid race discrimination, and the Commissioner to defend the Act.

That story is important because wiping it from memory is a crime. We need to speak the truth about the bad things that happened and to highlight the good outcomes that were possible then and should be possible now.

Gary Foley completed a PhD on the black power movement in Australia and is now a professor at VU. And because of this story, he applied for and got a huge grant to record the battle for Northlands.

I was invited to add my story, and I did. We yarned, sang, wrote, rehearsed and filmed them, provided materials to back them up, and then ran exhibitions and plays and art displays, and a wildly successful cabaret.

We cannot have a just and sustainable peace, without equality of opportunity. And our experience of poverty and marginalisation and inadequate housing and services is another proof that equal opportunity is more than a matter of law. It requires access to justice, including 'social justice' - and most importantly, respect for and the dignity of spiritual acknowledgement.

Our current distrust of government - look at the anti-vaccination 'riots' - needs a good hard look, through the prism of an ethical institution, which is to be the bedrock foundation of society.

This is a phrase that turns up in Joseph Campbell Larry's essay in this book, on finding a path in the midst of crisis. To me our crises are so complex and interrelated, that it breaks my heart to see we are losing those who bear witness to what at caused them.

The power of bearing witness is one of the greatest powers that can be had.

That became very obvious to me when I read Ruth Mitchell's story as an activist doctor and Deborah's story honouring the people of Afghanistan before they were so shamefully abandoned this year by Australia and our imperial ally, the United States.

We hear a lot still about social justice. But not from our political parties. It is not just a phrase, but a principle, yet what we cannot do is rely on laws, alone, to achieve any kind of 'justice'.

Laws, regulations, tribunals, courts, commissioners, all have very limited opportunities to achieve a just outcome. Because rules are never enough.

On page 88 of this book, Justice Windeyer of the Australian High Court - whom I remember seeing snoozing on the bench when I was a young lawyer in Western Australia and there wasn't a High Court building in Canberra so they actually travelled the states and territories - alas, that they don't do it now - who is quoted as saying that the law "is always open, always in the rear and limping a bit when it comes, broadly speaking, to social issues.'

"This reactive nature of law has worked reasonably well to regulate issues between humanity in the past, but the question for our time surely is whether humans collectively are affecting the planet in uncontrollable and unforeseeable ways that can generate into existential international problems such as global warming or nuclear annihilation. So, the question becomes how can the slow processes of international law be adapted to enforce change that is equally effective and applicable on the wealthy and powerful as it does with the crushing force on the weakened and the oppressed. And to do this by empowering the human voice of the people."

Amen, to that. But two hundred years ago, justice and respect for human dignity was not so strange a concept.

My last big heading is about relationships.

One of my part time jobs is being a spiritual director, which I've been studying for and practising for about 10 years, and naturally, you don't make a living out of this. Originally, operating from Campion Centre of Ignatian Spirituality, as a lay person, I give the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. As a lawyer I try to provide access to justice to my clients and to treat them with the respect that they deserve.

Sometimes the boundaries between the two roles get blurred. And it's not necessarily a bad thing.

What I have found is, that what we are losing through living in major cities, is our rightful pace of existence, with enormous corporations controlling so much of our lives, fuelling our willingness to drive and shop and seek and source, and speed, long travels to distant locations - which is at the foot of it all, a major mistake. We must stop and wonder why.

We need to slow down, be open to listening to and compassionate of our neighbours, those who are likely to be affected by our decisions and choices.

This is what it means to be human, and to continue to be.

I'd like to quote from a friend of mine who has been in correspondence with me from the United States where after an interesting life, including fighting in Vietnam, and being slightly younger than me, he has now set up a small farming property, which he is rehabilitating slowly by taking his time.

He has trained his own team donkeys, instead of machines, to care for the land.

He is restoring its bounty by restoring its quality and the sustainability of its product.

Everything he seeks out and provides for is consciously local, and his aim is to make certain that we can get what we need, within a reasonable walking distance.

To him, if we were properly led by our politicians and intellectual leaders to 'slow down' the pace of our lives, starting with the road traffic limits, immediately, and the 'race' for the

unnecessary in distant mega developments, the current pressure on environmental emissions would, within a short time, cease. It will not be achieved through compromise.

Remember the clear, blue skies that shone over our mega cities worldwide, when Covid19 shut down our polluting emissions within days of the lockdown?

I respect my friend, Jeff McFadden, for documenting his lived experience by just living simply and documenting how it works courageously and I recommend that you follow him on Twitter and Instagram.

Humility is living consciously and kindly. I so salute my friend.

My final remark, if I may, is on the spiritual energy to be found in every part of this collaborative publication.

Our greatest need is for voluntary collaboration as all kinds of diverse people and fellow creatures, in the care of the world and of one another.

If I were still a Presbyterian, I might mutter something along the lines of 'What does the lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your god'.

But I'm not, so I won't. My church abandoned me, but formed me too.

Instead, I echo what my friend Jeff said in his meditation on the future

Slow down.

Don't rush.

Everything you need is or should be within walking distance.

Start right now.

Make way.

Live in the moment.

Be true. Be kind, and be a friend.

And

'Let walking be your ground state', as Freya Mathews says in her poem , Let the Mountain [on page 103 of this book] and ...

'Let your work, your via activa, be tending it,

Attending to it,

Learning its Law, turning its pages, deciphering

Its scriptures.'

As she concludes

'All there is, is this.

This Law.

Follow its course.

Bushes will burn for you.

Manna will fall.

Pillars of cloud will join you, as escort.

Of revelation, beloved, you will never be short.'