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‘Does this guy ever shut up?’ The discourse of the 2013 Australian election

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Abstract

In this paper, I analyse the campaign communications of three of the four major parties who contested the 2013 Australian federal elections: the Australian Labor Party (Labor), and the conservative Coalition consisting of the Liberal Party of Australia (the Liberals) and the National Party of Australia (The Nationals). I pay special attention to the message and image strategies of the leaders of Labor and the Coalition, Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott. I discuss campaign slogans in four overlapping debates, which, at least for Labor, were critical to the election result: (1) the carbon tax, (2) asylum seekers, (3) party reform, and (4) economic management. I arrive at three major conclusions. First, the 2013 elections narrowed the bipartisan language and thinking in which the differences between the rivals, except perhaps on carbon pricing, were fewer than they wanted the voters to believe. Second, the language of electioneering moved from long-term policies in the plural to short-term politics in the singular. And, third, the increasingly irrational discourse of the election period has not dissolved, but rather hardened following the election of the new Abbott government. Today it is affecting many areas of political life, including those that were not contested subjects in 2013, such as international, regional and interethnic relations.

“ Saturday, 7 September, Brisbane, 5.50 p.m. On arrival at Hawker Pacific Terminal, Brisbane, we have found out that a plane full of asylum seekers is about to land at the same terminal as us at roughly the same time – and we have media with us. Does anything get more complicated? We are also planning to have the last of the live crosses done at the terminal and hope the asylum seekers and the media don’t cross paths. ”

Bruce Hawker, The Rudd rebellion: The campaign to save Labor, pp. 202-203

‘We won the policy but lost the politics’

It was the night of the 2013 elections. Journalist Jonathan Green overheard a Labor luminary making the above remark as the election night unfolded toward a Rudd defeat (2013, p. 179).

Wishful, wistful sigh.

Was Labor strong at policy and the Coalition slick with politics? An opposite theory suggests that voters did not

have a real choice between Labor and the Coalition. During the election, it was often hard to tell Kevin Rudd from Tony Abbott. Were they perhaps politically cosy, 'spooning', as Niki Savva, a former senior correspondent in the Canberra Press Gallery and Peter Costello's press secretary, suggested?

“ Icky as it is to imagine, unlikely as it might have once been to contemplate, these two have become strange bedfellows, cuddling up as close as they can on key issues, making it near impossible for voters to see what separates them, or where one begins and the other ends. Rudd has lurched right on asylum seekers and embraced the surplus imperative, Abbott has caved in on industrial relations and education (Savva, 2013). ”

Abbott accepted Gonski and DisabilityCare. Rudd admitted Labor did not have a mandate on the carbon tax and banned boat people from resettling in Australia (Brisbane, 2013). One could draw further parallels.

During his 'second life' of eleven weeks as party leader and prime minister, Rudd was hastily introducing long-term policies 'on the run' as responses to short-term election concerns. 'To appeal to men – particularly lower educated men', Labor needs to 'block up'. Advertise a strong apprenticeship (Hawker, 2013, p. 175). Rudd has dropped to 48% in his own seat of Griffith? Move the navy from Garden Island to Brisbane (Kelly, 2013).

So where were the differences and where were the likenesses between the party campaigns? Were they, indeed, differences between policies and politics? If yes, how significant were they? If not, why? I need to explain my aim, theory, method and style in this article.

My main aim is to analyse the clash and agreement between party discourses – main stories, frames and messages – during the 2013 election. A discourse is a stable and internally consistent language, through which meanings, although not identical with, relate to the materialities of thinking and action (Gumbrecht, 2004; Wodak, 2009). I find the critical discourse analysis (CDA) model of Norman Fairclough (1992; 2001) most suitable for this purpose. Surprisingly, the book that I had thought to be the closest to my topic, Fairclough's (2000) *New Labour, New Language*, was not much help in analysing the 2013 Australian election. There is a striking distance – not only geographical but also historical – between the British and Australian political contexts. For example, the ALP of Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd was not the 'New Labour' of Tony Blair. It was, and is, a mixture of old and new. On the one side, right-faction dominated Australian Labor was already operating within the discourse of neo-liberalism – 'Thatcherism with a few frills' (Fairclough, 2000, p. viii). On the other, its leaders did not have the communicative skills of Tony Blair – an 'accomplished showmen, an actor' (p. 8). Nor had the communicative capacity of ALP achieved the fusion of governance and performance (presentation), which characterised the policy formation of Britain's 'New Labour' (p. 5).

The CDA tools I use in this analysis are framing, foregrounding, backgrounding, presupposition, generalisation and nominalisation. Within this approach, framing and reframing are especially important to understanding the clash of electoral discourses – or the lack of such (Goffman, 1974; Hallahan, 1999; Iyengar, 2009; Rein & Schoen, 1993). I found George Lakoff's work on framing especially pertinent to my research topic (Lakoff, 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Lakoff, 2010). He defines frames as typically unconscious structures that neurally activate our knowledge. Frame-circuits have direct connection with emotions in the brain. Human rationality is impossible without emotions. The commonplace view of Enlightenment (and replicated mistakenly by progressive, scientific-minded, and 'cerebral' intellectuals), claims that reason is rational, abstract and directly conveyable through facts. Lakoff rejects all of that as false. Reason is mostly unconscious. It requires emotion. It is physical (through brain and body), and uses frames, metaphors and narratives as the 'natural' way of sharing human experience. A secret of the dominance of conservative frames in the US on climate change, for example, is that the Republicans have worked on them for decades and historically 'normalised' their systems of thought in the 'right' simplistic, man-of-the street, anti-establishment (against scientist intelligentsia, not against plutocrat inequality), and 'visceral' mode.

“ There are limited possibilities for changing frames. Introducing new language is not always possible. The new language must make sense in terms of the existing system of frames. It must work emotionally. And it must be introduced in a communication system that allows for sufficient spread over the population, sufficient repetition and sufficient trust in the messengers (Lakoff, 2010, p. 72). ”

Later I will show that Labor's discourse on climate change did not, (and possibly could not), find its system of frames and mostly operated within the Coalition's (and also right-wing Labor's) neo-liberal 'master narrative'. And, lastly, I incorporate elements of the 'New Rhetoric' of Chaim Perelman (1982), especially his concept of 'presence', which is important to grasp the sudden consensus between the election rivals on refugee policy.

My major method is content and discourse analysis of campaign documents, leader speeches (especially the

televised ones), post election academic analysis, and newspaper articles. While I use a large number of newspaper references, I was always anxious not to fall into the trap of media-centrism. Publicity, including media texts, shows output (how the campaign is mediated), but does not reveal the outcome, the real impact of media communication on the voters' behaviour. I was constantly searching for information and clues about the original political sources and the (mostly invisible, even secret) process of campaign message creation. An advantage of CDA is that it explores language to discover patterns of tacit knowledge and implied meanings in campaign texts, which may reveal more about a campaign than its messages are overtly supposed to convey.

A few new books stood out with their profound political and ethical analysis of the elections – especially Mungo MacCallum's (2013) *The mad marathon: The story of the 2013 election* and Jonathan Green's (2013) *The year my politics broke*. Bruce Hawker (2013) has so far written the only first-hand record of what went inside one of the election camps – that of Labor. I use his *The Rudd rebellion: The campaign to save Labor* more often than any other source despite its partisan bias. Hawker's diary produces important inside facts and clues, which assume their own life, independent from their author.

I use campaign phrases for subheadings. I hope this style will appeal to readers and keep them immersed in the campaign narrative. Sometimes, the slogans are central and sometimes marginal to the discourse in question. The text is logically structured in four major themes, which spiral from one to another – economic competence, climate change, Labor reform and boat people. Those themes present four intertwined discursive fields which compose the major discourse of each party and, indeed, of the election as a whole.

'People will make up their mind as to whether, and I haven't reached a conclusion on this, whether the National Broadband Network provision of universal access to affordable and reliable broadband services threatens the Foxtel business model'

This is a study of political communication – election campaign communication (Powell & Cowart, 2003; S. Stockwell, 2005; Young, 2004). My main interest is in the election messages and slogans. I interrogate the political aims, semantic gravity and unintended effects of electioneering. Media management and media influence are important, but not central for this analysis.

Two reasons dictate my research choice – a general and a concrete one. The general one draws from a broad consensus in the literature on political sources – journalistic relations. In a case of professional symbiosis, both sides need each other but chase different objectives (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Gans, 1979; Palmer, 2000). Research recognises the media as political actors (Watson & Hickman, 2012), domains of politics (Fiske, 1987), policy subsystems (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), and public opinion crystallisers (Herbst, 1998). 'Media logic' is transforming governing into a permanent campaign (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Blumenthal, 1982; Meyer, 2002; Newman, 1999; Sparrow & Turner, 2001).

Researchers, however, broadly agree that more often than not, political sources achieve the upper hand. The downsizing of the media is cutting their resources and journalists are increasingly overworked. One journalist has to produce content to cover more media time and space. Political institutional actors are becoming more resourceful. They are already supplying most of the information and stories in the media (Bennett, 2003; Sigal, 1973). A research project of the University of Technology in Sydney (UTS), found that public relations workers and departments supply more than 55 percent of stories for the daily newspapers in Australia (Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, 2011; Crikey, 2011). Public relations, including by government and political parties, has become major *information subsidiary* of journalism (Gandy, 1982).

In the same way, the media have grown dependent on sources that provide new research and news value for free (Deacon & Golding, 1994; Ward, 2003). There is also the 'bureaucratic affinity' between political institutions and media (Davis, 2000; Fishman, 1980; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Tiffen, 1989). For journalists, the ability to access government information is invaluable – governments have information that no one else has. Their legitimacy is higher than of any other institution because they are democratically elected (McNair, 1999, 2002). From the other side of relationship, politicians have at their disposal various means to pressure journalists, means to which journalists do not have access (Curran, 2000; Franklin, 1994; Mills, 1986; Moloney, 2002; S. Young, 2004, 2007). In Stuart Hall's terms, politicians more often than not assume the role of 'primary definers' and the media assume the role of 'secondary definers' (Davis, 2009; S. Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978).

Therefore it is possible, and reasonable, to analyse the discourse of the 2013 election by concentrating on the primary definers such as politicians, parties and campaigns without, of course, ignoring the impact of secondary definers, including media proprietors, editors and journalists. For those reasons, I will not delve much into (unequal) media access and journalistic representation. Instead, I will focus on frame development and message management.

My second and concrete reason is the popular exaggeration of the role of Rupert Murdoch in the 2013 election.

Bruce Hawker, Rudd's political adviser, even identified Murdoch as Labor's 'main adversary': 'New Corp is easily the most powerful political force in Australia – bigger than the major parties or the combined weight of the unions', he said (Hartcher, 2013b). Hawker explains Rudd's election predicament as a 'pincer movement', caught between the pounding he has taken at the hand of News Corp and that which he has suffered from Abbott's campaign. In his diary, Hawker laments: 'Meanwhile Abbott can stay positive, as he lets his negative advertisements and News Corp do his dirty work for him' (2013, p. 152).

I find this claim part of the politics of, rather than a reflection on, the election. Of course, News Corp's attack on Labor and character assassination of Rudd was extraordinary by any measure (Davidson, 2013; McNair & Holmes, 2013; Waller, 2013). Murdoch is not only an astute businessperson; he is also a staunch ideologue who is ready to endure corporate losses in order to set a political agenda (McKnight, 2012). However, while Murdoch undoubtedly influenced, he did but not determine the election outcome. His media were neither the most decisive nor one of the most decisive factors. Murdoch is too opportunistic and pragmatic for that – Rudd was going to lose anyway, and that defined the vector and vengeance of Murdoch's intervention. Rodney Tiffen reminds us of the historical pattern:

“ Occasionally the Murdoch press gives qualified and tepid support to Labor, but only when it's likely that Labor [is] going to win. When they give support to the conservative side of politics, it's all out and wholehearted (Belot, 2013). ”

Murdoch's assault reveals little about Rudd's loss or Abbott's win. In Brisbane and Western Sydney, for example, Murdoch's attack possibly helped rather than hurt Labor and shielded it from the expected loss of a huge number of seats (Hartcher, 2013c). More likely, good local campaigning is still a better explanation.

Murdoch's election blitzkrieg, starting with *The Daily Telegraph's* headline 'Kick This Mob Out', shattered Rudd (Wright, 2013). He spent the first week of the campaign fixated on Murdoch. He was eager to explain Murdoch's betrayal in terms of the (fictitious) claim that Murdoch was defending his Foxtel interests against the National Broadband Network (NBN). Rudd claimed that the *New York Post* editor, Col Allan, had brought a memo from Murdoch to his Australian editors: 'Go hard on Rudd. Start from Sunday and don't back off' (Maher, 2013).

The citation that opens this section typifies Rudd's wasteful enterprise. He used all his rhetorical effort – and *apophasis*, in this case, that is, the raising of an issue by claiming not to mention it (Henderson, 2003) – to provide a retort to Murdoch – not Abbott. This self-imposed distraction hit Rudd's campaign possibly harder than the bucket of stories from the rogue publisher (Hartcher, 2013c).

'It's a Con-ski'

The school funding reform was an example of how powerful, and independent of politics, a discourse can become. The review panel chaired by David Gonski had received more than 7,000 submissions, visited 39 schools and consulted 71 education groups. It presented its findings to the government of Julia Gillard in November 2011. It released the report in February 2012. The suggested reform rested on research evidence, but it also contained a simple, yet sticky, message. It spelt out and touted its advantage well – an 'aspirational' equal funding standard for each student everywhere in Australia had to replace the Howard's socio-economic status model (Australian Government, 2011). It struck a chord not only with experts and bureaucrats, but also with parents and educators (Keane, 2012).

The Coalition in opposition first attacked the model with a range of rhetorical strategies. The federal shadow education minister, Christopher Pyne, jibed, 'It's a Con-ski' (ABC, 2013). The NSW Liberal Premier, Barry O'Farrell, was more equivocal. He hedged, 'I am more Gonski than Gonski'¹. Supporters of the reform set up a campaign website, IGiveAGonski, which had attracted 127,839 signatories by March 2014. Gonski evolved from a personal name into a generic brand.

'Hardworking Australian families'

Gradually, the Gillard government saw the merit in Gonski. Since Howard defeated Keating in 1996, Labor had lost its narrative. No one knew what it stood for. It was no longer the party of reform. Hawke was a reformer. He deregulated and globalised the economy. Keating was a reformer. He opened Australia to Asia and championed Mabo. Howard was likewise a reformer. He introduced GST and WorkChoices. Labor's 'Your Rights at Work' campaign was a success, but it was an anti-reform.

A stark contradiction haunted the government of Julia Gillard. Despite its minority status, it was an over-achiever. In its first year (2010-2011), it passed 185 bills in the House of Representatives and had none rejected. The previous government of John Howard, in contrast, passed 108 in the comparable 12 months (Hartcher, 2011). Gillard, however, struggled to find her firm and, at the same time, genuine voice. She employed as her director of communications, John 'No-Brainer' McTernan, touted as a 'media magician', direct from Tony

Blair's team. (Kevin Rudd would later turn to other wizards, this time from the Obama team, with the same success.) McTernan used hard-hitting, character-assassination tactics internally (Kevin Rudd) and externally (Tony Abbott, Gina Rinehart, Clive Palmer). The government, however, continued to linger without a positive message. Imported 'palace politics' changed little. 'We moved from unqualified disaster to just disaster', an insider commented (Bryant, 2012). As Simon Crean later quipped, McTernan was a magician all right – he had made his employer disappear (MacCallum, 2013, p. 238).

Since winning the 2007 election, Labor had used the catchphrase 'hardworking Australian families', which either alluded backwards to WorkChoices or, worse, copied Hillary Clinton. In her clash with Barack Obama during the primaries, Clinton repeatedly addressed 'Hard-working Americans, white Americans' to sway the white male beer-drinking blue-collar voters (Philips, 2008).

The Hawke-Keating-Howard reforms had irreversibly moved Australia to the political and ideological Right. Any further reform now appeared logical only farther to the Right – that is, as unceasing 'catch up' with the 'imperatives' of globalisation perceived both as structure already realised and process still slipping away. From this ideological standpoint, there has been no alternative to further privatisation and deregulation, including of that of the workforce. According to the ABS (2013), trade union membership had shrunk with only 18 percent of Australians now being members. Manufacturing workers were disappearing and re-emerging as small-business owners and self-employed contractors – John Howard's suburban 'battlers' or Mark Latham's 'aspirational poor' (Mendes, 2004). This shift also meant a shift in their thinking. They were watching politics as *employers* rather than as *employees*. They were now voting conservative. They wanted lower taxes, not working rights. They were intent on shielding the outskirts from the 'aliens'. Labor offered them nothing but slogans such as 'tough but humane' on asylum seekers. Reform, however, is an act, not an ideology (Aly, 2013).

The carbon tax was the reform. And that was the problem. It felt more real than the problem it was designed to address: climate change. It was poorly sold by the government and ruthlessly attacked by the opposition. The more successful the policy actually turned to be – the electricity sector emissions, for example, were evidently falling (Hannam, 2014) – the more toxic the politics became for the government.

Gonski's new (and expensive) school funding model was giving Labor a chance to reclaim the great Labor 'reform tradition' (Packham, 2010). Another huge advantage was Gillard's ownership of the reform. As the former Minister for Education, she was undoubtedly passionate about equal funding for each student. She could have carried that issue to the elections, making it personal. Gonski gave her that chance to fuse authority and authenticity.

Equally, her Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, Bill Shorten, escaped Canberra to mingle with the grassroots and secure the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – in short, DisabilityCare. Shorten reframed disability from the problem of a few to a social issue that impacted on a large number. It was no longer a charity issue – it was a rights issue. Many disabled lived in a state of apartheid: separated, invisible and forgotten by the majority. Removing these boundaries and raising awareness of their plight was 'the last frontier of practical civil rights'. Not everyone is disabled. But everyone could become so (Hartcher, 2013a). By introducing an extension to the Medicare levy, DisabilityCare even managed to dodge the stigma of a 'Big Tax'. A levy is merely another word for a tax, but this case shows again how both sides perform politics through 'weasel words'. Why should a levy be more acceptable than a tax? Only because it looks less like a tax? It is pure politicking: it is self-referential and void to justify (or compromise) a levy through defining it (or not) as a tax.

'As far as school funding is concerned, Kevin Rudd and I are on a unity ticket'

On Gonski, Abbott and Pyne resisted to the last moment. Both sides played politics. Gillard used the carrot and stick approach. She bullied the states into deadlines, which she (and then Rudd) was generous enough to reschedule. The sheer sum and share of suggested federal funding to the states – two to one – was an offer they could not refuse. When the Coalition-held state of NSW signed up, Abbott and Pyne backflipped. They willy-nilly announced a 'unity ticket' with Rudd. 'There is no difference between Kevin Rudd and myself when it comes to school funding', announced Abbott a week before the election day (Griffiths, 2013a). Victoria then agreed to the deal. The Catholic schools followed.

Earlier, Gillard had secured bipartisan support for DisabilityCare with the same stick and carrot approach. In March 2013, Abbott was still uncomfortable with the idea of a levy. The government could have legislated the NDIS without him with the support of the Greens and the independents. In fairness, Abbott believed in the disability scheme and he had the support of many Liberals and the Nationals. Gillard, embattled on other fronts – the 2013 budget being only her most recent headache – wanted a clear victory. She put an ultimatum to Abbott to commit to the half-a-percent increase in the Medicare levy so that she could bring the legislation into parliament immediately, otherwise, she would take it to the Australian people in September (Willingham, Swan, & Harrison, 2013). She was tempted to make Abbott look bad if he did not agree on an issue that enjoyed broad

community support.

It was a brilliant game of brinkmanship. Abbott read Gillard's message correctly. At that moment (five months before the election), it would be about *policy*. In September, it would be about *politics* ... which was politics. He wisely decided to back the policy ... which also was politics.

In *The Year My Politics Broke*, Jonathan Green analyses those canny choices in politics over the 'speedy, uncomplicated enacting of policy':

“ It's probably the clumsiness of the Gillard government's execution that makes its attempts at political positioning so grindingly obvious, but beyond those gauche fumbles there is a deeper truth: that political survival is always the primary objective; that there is no issue so pure, so noble, that it cannot be manipulated. (Green, 2013, p. 105) ”

However, these two worthy policies, Better Schools and DisabilityCare, did not help Labor in the politics of the election. Three reasons spring to mind. The first chimes with the quotation above. Those policies were well conceived but poorly crafted, bogged down in politics. Politics works best when it is invisible – when it makes policy more visible. The second reason was the ability of Abbott to 'do a Clinton'. He successfully 'triangulated' both Labor spearhead reforms. He effortlessly positioned himself within their frames. Then, he also claimed the superiority of the better side. With Gonski, for example, he declared that the Coalition, in contrast to Labor, was concerned with the quality, not just quantity of school funding – as if Labor had not come up to it. The third reason was Rudd. Better Schools and DisabilityCare were not among its priorities because they were legacy of Gillard. He could not find the strength and grace to embrace the reforms of his deposed predecessor as equally his, Labor's and Australia's. He left Abbott the bragging rights of someone who was closer to those reforms – who had signed up to them. Incredibly, Abbott, not Rudd, filled the gap left by Gillard.

'A Great Big New Tax on everything'

Rudd's campaign plan was defensive. Positive stories such as Better Schools, DisabilityCare, the Murray-Darling Basin Agreements, and even real progress in carbon emissions reduction, were not in his priority list. More important were four issues seen as the toxic legacy of the Gillard government. Bruce Hawker, his chief adviser, lists these:

“ Replace Carbon Tax with Emission Trading Scheme.
Find solution to asylum seekers.
Reform Labor party.
Demonstrate you can manage economy, debt and deficit (2013, p. 64). ”

In *Don't Think of an Elephant!* George Lakoff (2004) cautioned the US Democrats not to fall into the discourse of the Republicans. His advice was stick to your frame. Do not even waste time in refuting what you are not. Nixon had learned this lesson the hard way. He stood before the nation and said, 'I am not a crook.' And everybody thought of him as a crook. The basic principle of framing when you are arguing against the other side is: 'Do not use their language. Their language picks out a frame – and it won't be the frame you want' (2004, p. 3).

Unfortunately for both Gillard and Rudd, neither had an adviser like Lakoff on the 'carbon tax'. When the Gillard government introduced the Clean Energy Bill (aka 'the carbon tax') in 2011, it got up against a double negative frame. Abbott accused Gillard of two sins. She had added a 'Great Big New Tax on Everything!' (a slogan practised since 2009), and she had broken her election promise not to introduce it (ABC, 2011). Indeed, while she had promised no carbon tax, in the same breath (same compound sentence), she vowed to put a price on carbon. Her documented promise in full was:

“ There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead, but let me be clear: I will be putting a price on carbon and I will move to an emissions trading scheme. (Walsh, 2013, p. 8). ”

Labor got the carbon message awry because of the 'blundering inability of Gillard and her advisers to tell a simple story in an honest and straightforward manner' (MacCallum, 2013, p. 92). Labor had a good policy with a capable Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency in Greg Combet. It bundled the package with tax cuts and welfare benefits (Carbon Tax Facts, 2011). The policy, however, lacked the adequate language. The government was eager to neutralise Abbott's predictions of a disaster – that the tax would raise the costs of living and hurt the competitiveness of the Australian businesses. But it fell in the trap of Abbott's frame. Loud

denial amounted to tacit affirmation. No, the tax was not so big. And, besides, it was only temporary. Labor's language did not problematise Abbott's presupposition that 'tax is bad'. It did not fight the neo-liberal frame of tax as a burden. Good government, within this frame, gives tax *relief*. This was Abbott's, (and right-wing Labor's), language. And it was not the language of carbon pricing as Labor tried to sell it.

Symbolically powerless to withstand the ideological depletion of language – the reduction of diverse terms to trivial equations (pricing = taxing = cost raising²) – Labor allowed the Coalition to elevate Direct Action as a 'positive' alternative to carbon pricing. For the same end, the latter takes money from the polluters and the former gives money to polluters. Which policy was better – less punitive and more pedagogical?

The opposite of carbon pricing, its external alternative, was of course, not Direct Action, but carbon emissions regulation. Regulation, for example, helped many cities to clean up their air pollution in the 80s and 90s. It works well in the Chinese administrative-command system – and not only there. Regulation is also very efficient where strong and democratic political will is possible. The internal choices of carbon pricing are both carbon tax and emissions trade.

Taxing carbon is perhaps more painful for businesses than trading carbon, but regulating carbon (the politically forced choice for Obama), is even more so. In order to preserve the frame of carbon pricing, Gillard, and later Rudd, could have asked Australian businesses a simple question: Show me your economic pain threshold and we will organise an acceptable policy to cut carbon emissions.

'It's Our Ruddy Future!'

The 'party reform' idea consisted of a single measure taken up to heal the wounds of the Rudd/Gillard power struggle and to suggest that Labor was able to change its ways. According to Bruce Hawker:

“ The issue we need to be very careful with, though, is the argument that Rudd will just be dumped after the election – if we win. I mentioned this to Penny Wong today and said I wasn't sure why this line was coming back so strongly. 'Well, we have been doing just that to each other for several years in several jurisdictions!' was her reply. Sometimes you just can't see the wood for the trees (Hawker, 2013, p. 73). ”

The 2013 campaign could not be a rerun of the presidential Kevin '07. Labor had spent its political capital. The campaign workers were at pains to tone down both the Labor and Rudd brands. They reverted to referring to the party as the 'ALP' rather than 'Labor' – as Paul Keating did in 1993 in an attempt to reconnect with its base. They tried to clamp down on the personality cult of Rudd (of sorts) and muffle chants such as 'It's Our Ruddy Future'. Some local members were loudly using that slogan to cheer themselves up – not without a little tongue-in-cheek (Hawker, 2013, pp. 85, 172).

Labor had to reassure the fickle voters that the person they elected for PM would be the person who served as PM. In July 2013, an ALP national conference adopted Rudd's suggestion about the way a Labor leader is elected – from 100 party room to 50 percent caucus and 50 percent party members, and 75 to 25 percent when in opposition (Ireland, 2013b). This measure, however, only reminded the public of Labor's internal dissent. It indelibly linked the party's future with Rudd's past.” Had Gillard enforced the same rule months earlier, Rudd could not have deposed her.

“ Buried away in the Nielsen poll was a statistic that while Rudd was the most popular leader across the board, among Labor voters Gillard was still ahead. In other words, a lot of Rudd's support was coming from those who were not likely to vote Labor again (MacCallum, 2013, p. 83). ”

It is uncertain if this election-motivated change amounts to a real, long-term party reform. The 50:50 ratio may delegate power to party members, but it does not secure parity by any measure. One caucus vote is still worth 354 membership votes. In October 2013, Labor applied the rule for the first time. The newly elected leader, Bill Shorten, got almost 13,000 votes – markedly fewer than the 18,000 member votes won by his only opponent, Anthony Albanese (Attard, 2013). The percentage share, not the number of votes, determined the result. A caucus vote of 63.95 per cent and a membership vote of 40.08 per cent, which totals 52.02 per cent, produced the leadership for Bill Shorten (Crowe, 2013). In other words, applied for the first time, the new party rule did not make a difference. In October 2013, Labor elected the leader it would have chosen without that change.

'It's a so-called market in the non-delivery of an invisible substance to no one'

In July 2013, Rudd announced that a re-elected Labor government would move from a fixed carbon price (at

\$24.15 a ton) to the floating European trading price (then at \$6 a ton) a year sooner than had been originally planned (Ireland, 2013a). The quote above is the first comment Abbott gave about Rudd's move. It was a stunningly positivist retort by a pious politician. Abbott had replaced veracity with visibility. It prompted Mungo MacCallum to ask:

“ Abbott could equally have been dismissing the world's financial system, in particular the futures market and patent law. Or, for that matter, religion; had Abbott discussed his contempt for things he could not see with Cardinal Pell? (2013, p. 215). ”

Even more telling than the dismissal of emissions as 'invisible', were the low modalities of the 'so-called market' and 'non-delivery'. Abbott implied there was no market. Rudd had only changed the name of a tax. An ETS was still a tax. A tax is not part of a market – therefore an Emissions Trading Scheme is not part of a trade. The Opposition's climate action spokesman, Greg Hunt, came out in support of Abbott, 'Of course, it is a tax ... You pay to emit carbon' (Ireland, 2013a).

Back in 2009, Rudd as a prime minister had pitched the idea of an ETS for the first time. And the then leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, was listening. At the same time, Abbott, months before the Liberal leadership spill, blogged:

“ I am wary of a system, which creates new vested interests – which an ETS will do. I suspect that a straight carbon tax or charge could be more transparent and easier to change if conditions change or our understanding of science changes (Abbott, 2009, p. 5). ”

Was Abbott merely an opportunist, always opposing what Rudd said – shifting his opposition between an ETS and a carbon tax based on the perceived political advantage? Or did he perhaps have a more fundamental reason? In his blog, Abbott stated, 'if ... our understanding of science changes'. The emphasis here is not on what science finds, but on how we find science. This is ideology. Abbott frets that an ETS would craft 'new vested interests'. Indeed, low-emissions investors and renewable energy agents were likely to become new players in the energy market. They could diminish the influence of the polluting industries such as coal and mining, which were throwing their support behind the Coalition. Growing new markets is good. But it is not, if the new ventures think progressively, Silicon-Valley-style, and replace the conservative power base of the old polluters. This is ideology. If only Rudd had listened to Abbott.

'High taxing, high regulating'

The 'Great Big Tax' frame aimed to thwart Labor's attempt at aligning environmental and economic priorities. It pitted the taxpayer against the citizen. It used the traditional 'rule-of-thumb' of political public relations: when in doubt, voters will opt for short-term self-interest ('toxic tax', 'will be passed to customers') to long-term symbolic politics ('non-delivery', 'invisible substance'). Self-interest trumps the rest (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). The discourse of 'tax relief' is the lowest common denominator of neoliberal individualism. It may help in the election but then becomes a major (promise-introspective) impediment to any government, including a conservative one.

While direct taxation – including the progressive income, carbon and mining taxes – may have many redistributive virtues and well serve the ideal of social justice, it is psychologically painful – thus electorally difficult. Politicians increasingly market to voters as advertisers market to consumers (Newman, 1999; Sparrow & Turner, 2001). The imposition of a direct tax cannot be hidden: it is obvious, almost physical. Political marketing targets the voters by reminding them of the individual pain they felt from the tax sting. Come Election Day, voters will have their little revenge.³

Since the 2013 elections, Abbott's mantra has not changed. In government, Labor was repeatedly framed as 'high taxing, high regulating'. In contrast, the Coalition was pitching itself as 'low taxing, low regulating' (Hutchens & Massola, 2014). The slogan, whilst untrue, was effective. Under Labor, Australia was among the lowest taxing and least regulated economies (Pascoe, 2014). The real difference between Labor and the Coalition had been not between high and low levels of taxation, but between the use of direct and indirect taxes. The Coalition argued that Labor was 'higher taxing', although, in fact, its taxes traditionally have been more direct and easily identifiable – in an ideal democracy, tax transparency and awareness is a virtue. Conflating 'more visible' as 'visibly more' is a textbook example of clever political communication.

The GST, for example, is an indirect tax. Why did John Howard introduce it? Out of pragmatism, not ideology. It comes with an anaesthetic. The client – usually – does not sense its presence as a fraction of the total price. The tax is easy collectible. In opposition, Labor was against a GST for both politics and policy reasons. The

politics were clear – in opposition you cannot lose when you are against new taxes. The essential policy reason was that an indirect tax is regressive – the poor pay for the rich.

The previous Labor governments, however, also showed increased interest in the less toxic – and less just – indirect tax.⁴ In the future, the proportion between direct and indirect tax may help to measure the shift from policies in the plural, to politics in the singular.

'To begin with, we didn't have a mandate for it'

When Rudd made this stunning 'admission' about the carbon tax two weeks before Election Day, he plainly surrendered his campaign and the whole effort to cut emissions by the previous Labor government (Peating, 2013). The declaration enraged the Greens and progressive Labor voters.

What was his message? That the carbon tax was illegitimate? That he believed in the 'broken promise' hypocrisy? That carbon trade was the 'right thing' because carbon tax was the 'left thing'? What did he want to do – to lure the voter or, even worse, to appease the challenger? Besides, a carbon tax and carbon trade elude 'left' and 'right'. They are fiscal, not political tools.

Abbott, however, knew what Rudd was doing. The carbon tax was a direct tax. The ETS was an indirect tax. By switching early from tax to trade, the Rudd government, wanted to move from administrative intervention to self-regulation of the emerging market. This would centralise the government's freedoms and decentralise its responsibilities. It also would be more palatable for businesses. Public scrutiny also would shift from government command to unruly business practices. This pays off in elections... and Abbott did not want to give Rudd that comfort.

'This election will be a referendum on the carbon tax'

Rudd said, past 'Labor governments [sic] ... had got a number of things wrong...For example, I don't think our actions on the carbon tax were right, that's why I changed it to move towards a floating price' (AAP, 2013b).

Note how 'we' changes to 'I' here. 'We', the past two Labor governments, are those led by Gillard. 'I' is the current government led by Rudd. Gillard lacked the mandate after she won in 2010. Rudd will have the mandate, would he win in 2013. The distinction was more important than the continuity. Rudd was the self-proclaimed proxy for Labor's mea culpa. He was disavowing the party mistakes in order to correct them. Personal politics would heal party policy.

Abbott took his cue from Rudd. He quickly seized this once-in-an-election opportunity. Only few days later, he declared at the National Press Club, 'This election will be a referendum on carbon tax' (Griffiths, 2013b). From that moment on boredom gripped the electors. Labor did not have a mandate on carbon tax, Rudd was saying. I will have a mandate to repeal carbon tax, Abbott was saying. Where was the drama?

Rudd threw the 'baby' of carbon pricing out with the bathwater of the carbon tax. The opposition, in contrast, had not accepted any 'mandate' of the elected government of Gillard. In parliament, Abbott had read aloud the Oxford dictionary the definition of 'illegitimate' – 'not authorised by law; improper; not recognised as lawful offspring; bastard; wrongly inferred; naturally abnormal' (Hartcher, 2010). Rudd was just more educated; he did not need a dictionary. 'Clear mandate' is a rhetorical tool as flexible as the need to legitimise the authority of a policy that is not so clear.

After the 'admission', the campaign was over. Two critical groups of undecided voters finally decided to walk out on Rudd – those between Labor and the Coalition and those between the Greens and Labor. Voters on the right got the message – Abbott has won. Those on the left correctly assumed that Rudd was doing to the carbon tax what Gillard did to the mining tax. To paraphrase an old Labor gun, he was trying to settle a political score – he was not trying to win.⁵

'Does this guy ever shut up?'

On 21 August 2013, during his second debate with Rudd at the Broncos Leagues Club in Brisbane, Abbott cracked up in light-hearted frustration with his talkative rival. It was the most entertaining – and revealing – moment of the evening. 'Does this guy ever shut up?' he begged. Catchphrases are often accidental, unprepared – 'unscripted', as Abbott would put it. He could not have planned what he told a Melbourne gathering of Liberal party faithful, 'No one ... is the suppository of all wisdom' (Swan, 2013). The 'shut up' outburst was reactive, not reflective.

Indeed, Rudd was talking a big deal. During the debate, he spoke 5,320 words to the Opposition leader's 3,910 (Peckham & Walker, 2013). In prime time, this did not bode well. His minders were worried about his overexposure, especially on television. At least, they had dissuaded him from using notes. In the first debate,

notes bogged him down in too much detail (Hawker, 2013, p. 148).

The same evening, the Broncos Leagues Club was having its regular Mexican Night that was very popular with its members. Backers and protesters with placards, T-shirts and megaphones were obstructing the way. Patrons 'tried to run the gauntlet between the supporters to get to the dining room for dinner... Locals are obviously not used to having to tussle for they tacos' (A. Stockwell, 2013). There were giant TV screens in the rooms, but the hombres swiftly switched them from the channel sending live the political quarrel just a wall away to one with sports. Those were the voters who Abbott felt were like him, and he was like them. In his 'shut up' moment, his body language could be read as if he were saying, if it were up to him, Abbott would leave the debate and rather join them in the next room.

A few months later, David Koch, on Channel 7 Sunrise, teased the already elected Tony Abbott with a proposition – was fixing the Wallabies a task much bigger than 'all this other economic and political claptrap'? Abbott replied:

“ Well, if I may so, happy the country which is more interested in sport than in politics because it shows that there is a fundamental unity, it shows the business of the nation is normally under reasonably good management if we can be as excited as we usually are about sport (Abbott, 2013b). ”

'Dave, we think you are a good bloke, we just think you are on the wrong side'

Abbott was not rude to Rudd. His retort bared something artlessly human – ire, disbelief, even pity. Does this guy not understand? Words no longer matter. Why is he wasting my time, his time – our time? If he, right now, suspended his campaign, I would cancel mine too. It is over. What remains is the long wait until the the vote is cast.

Abbott used silence as strategy. Let Rudd stay front and centre. Let him talk and further tighten Labor's undoable knot. He does not need my backing for that. Labor has soured and bastardised itself. Let that sight be his backdrop. Rudd is seeking attention? Let him have all of it.

While Abbott was nowhere to be seen, the public watched Rudd with increasing disbelief. In his diaries, Hawker complained about the lack of 'meaty announcements' in Rudd's presence:

“ To some extent this is exacerbated by the fact that Abbott is almost completely absent from the picture. By that I mean he [Rudd] is just not really making any impression. He does appear on the screen, but no one seems to be listening. It's a bit like the Gillard's problem (Hawker, 2013, pp. 131-132). ”

To paraphrase an anti-war slogan, suppose they gave an election and nobody came? A challenger usually seeks to increase their visibility against that of the better-known incumbent. The Opposition was promising the 'end of entitlement' if elected. In places like Western Sydney, however, its candidates acted, (or did not act), as if they were entitled to the seats they were not holding. They were too busy to show up, to talk to journalists, to debate the sitting member. This time, 'It's time' was their time – time not to be there. Labor, as an overripe fruit, would fall under its own weight.

When a video of the Liberal candidate for Greenway, Jaymes Diaz, unable to explain the Coalition's six-point plan to stem the flow of asylum seekers went viral ('The boats are also a big issue out here'). Abbott threw him (too late, it turned out) a lifesaving muzzle (McKenny, 2013). Rudd was not the first or the last one told to 'shut up'. Abbott was already practising this strategy on his own candidates.

In 2010, David Bradbury, then Member for Lindsay – also later Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation in the Gillard government – while campaigning for his second turn, approached the University of Western Sydney⁶. He asked the University, which has campuses within his electorate, whether it could host a pre-election debate between himself and his then first-time Liberal challenger, Fiona Scott. It was odd to see a locally respected incumbent so badly needing to debate a widely unknown candidate – normally, it is the other way round. Scott's campaign office did not initially respond to email and phone call requests. Only when one of the UWS Deputy Vice-Chancellors became actively involved, did Scott's office abruptly reject the request. Bradbury was then lucky. He won the 2010 election by a whisker.

Fast-forward three years. In 2013, Bradbury found himself in the same situation. This time, Abbott came to Penrith to personally introduce Fiona Scott to the voters of Lindsay by linking her with someone they already knew: Bradbury's predecessor, the former Liberal member Jacky Kelly. In the 2007 federal elections, Kelly's husband (together with the husband of the new Liberal candidate, Karen Chijoff) had been caught out in the still

of the night distributing fake leaflets carrying the ALP logo thanking the Labor Party for supporting terrorists. They were written in Arabic and purporting to be from an Islamic group (which did not exist). Abbott compared Kelly and Scott, 'They're young, feisty, I think I can probably say have a bit of sex appeal and they're just very connected with the local area' (Bourke, 2013). Fiona smiled and said nothing.

Later in the campaign she ventured a rare appearance. Scott gave the ABC's Four Corners an interview. 'Asylum seekers', she said, 'are a hot topic here because our traffic is overcrowded'. When asked to explain, she went on, 'Go sit on the M4, people see 50,000 people come in by boat – that's more than twice the population of [Western Sydney suburb] Glenmore Park'. The Refugee Action Coalition spokesperson, Ian Rintoul, called her comments 'shockingly ignorant'. There were only a few thousand refugees in the area (B. Hall & Robertson, 2013).

Bradbury, however, knew that polling in Lindsay showed that voters were expressing similar sentiments. He had earlier become a source of Cabinet anxiety, pushing Gillard, and later Rudd, to do something about the carbon tax and asylum seekers. And this time he was not so lucky. With a swing of 4.1 percent towards Scott, he lost the seat of Lindsay. He became the most prominent Labor MP defeated in the 2013 election. Later, he said the Labor brand had hurt him. Many people had told him he was a good bloke but on the wrong side (McClymont & Setefano, 2013). Sitting Labor members in other Western Sydney seats, however, managed to hold on. For the Coalition, silence was not golden after all.

'We will stop the boats'

After the carbon tax reversal, Rudd made the asylum seeker issue the most urgent of his campaign. Mandatory detention had been a bipartisan policy since Paul Keating. After Pauline Hanson was elected as federal Member for Oxley in 1996 – mobilising votes to the right of Prime Minister John Howard – the need to deter boat people became a major, even pivotal, election issue. The 2013 election was no different.

“ Why? Because dealing with asylum seekers itself is not a vote-swinging issue. It is proxy for other issues that are – like the economy, housing and employment security (Green, 2013, p. 136). ”

The refugee discourse had a solid ideological frame, supported by a wealth of bipartisan propaganda. Abbott boasted special ownership and heredity. In 2011, criticising Gillard's failed Malaysian version of Howard's 'Pacific Solution', he succinctly summed up the policy continuity within the Coalition:

“ Our position for at least a decade has been – to use the memorable words of the Prime Minister [John Howard] – 'we will determine who comes to our country and the circumstances under which they come.' My position ever since becoming the Leader of the Opposition is that we will stop the boats but there is a right way and a wrong way to try to stop the boats. The right way to stop the boats is Nauru, temporary protection visas and turning boats around where it is safe to do so (Abbott, 2011). ”

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Abbott's slogan 'we will stop the boats' was irresistible and unstoppable. Yet he still was in opposition. Rudd saw no other choice but to fulfil Abbott's election promise *before* the election – to stop the boats before Abbott stopped him.

'Breaking the people smugglers' business model'

Between Labour and the Coalition, there had been only tactical differences on boat people – whether to detain asylum seekers on land or offshore, for example. But the strategy – deterrence by making them an example for others – had been the same. Exclusion zones provided for the materialities of the national discourse that put refugees out of sight, out of mind. Not only physically, but also semantically, they were made invisible (Dimitrov, 2007, 2008a). Language removed their presence.

“ A Chinese tale, told by Mencius, illustrates the effect of presence: 'A king sees an ox on its way to sacrifice. He is moved to pity for it and orders that a sheep is used in its place. He confesses he did so because he could see the ox, but not the sheep' (Perelman, 1982, p. 35). ”

Gillard and Rudd tried to hide asylum seekers behind the 'the people smugglers' business model' (Baker, 2013). They used the classic discursive tool of 'agent/patient relations' (Huckin, 2002). They foregrounded 'people smugglers' as hyperactive and solely responsible (guilty in this case). At the same time they backgrounded

refugees as oddly passive and devoid of human agency. Refugees in that model are rather ‘sediments of other people’s actions’; they are not ‘*auctori*’ – the ‘authors of their life trajectories’ (Bauman, 2002, pp. 343-344). It presupposes a one-sided and asymmetric relationship between massive pull and no push, full supply and lack of demand – an impossible relation, actually, in marketing terms.⁷

‘Breaking the business model of people smugglers’ is a code phrase (Fish, 1994) that demonises the smugglers and victimises the smuggled. Smuggling refugees becomes akin to smuggling drugs or other forms of contraband. ‘People smugglers’ is the ideologically preferred term because it conceals any political agency. In the context of bi-partisan dominance, ‘refugee smugglers’, a more accurate phrase, would be a political oxymoron. It grates the ear – apples and oranges, human rights and black market.

The term ‘people smugglers’ has historical antecedents. Traditionally they do not smuggle ‘people’, they traffic narcotics, slaves and sex workers. The ‘business model’ code puts refugees behind two semiotic locks. The first is one of (ripped off) ‘clients’ and the second of (enslaved) ‘goods’.

When in February 2014 detainees rioted on the Manus Island detention centre, an anonymous employee ventured to describe what was going on inside.

“ The police fired warning shots and that scared the *clients* and they went into their rooms, so that’s when the G4S went in. And when the G4S get into the camp, they belt, they fight with the *clients* [italics by this author] and belt them very badly and some are wounded, blood run over their face (Cohrane, 2014). ”

In the face of this calamity during which one detainee, the Iranian Reza Berati, was killed, the word ‘client’ had changed its meaning. The use by detention centre staff of the descriptor ‘client’ to refer to detained refugees, deliberately aims to depoliticize the nature of their detention and to frame it as a marketing transaction, serviced by a private facility. In this case, however, the employee was referring to the detainees as ‘clients’ to remind the company that refugees are not commodities but humans to whom they have a duty of care. In the marketplace, you do not beat your clients.

‘People smugglers’ has a pre-Vietnamese-boat people, criminal, Interpol-type connotation. From 500 to 1000 sex workers and slaves, real ‘economic refugees’, are trafficked to Australia yearly. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) lists Australia as one the countries in the high destination trafficking category (UNOSC, 2006). Yet, viewed as criminals, illegal workers and those involved in smuggling, escape political attention. They do not get the harsh treatment doled out to asylum seekers coming by boat. They stay onshore. They have lawyers. They go before court. They are duly sentenced or freed. They are not detained indefinitely. They are not an election issue.

‘Absolute scum of the earth’

Rudd always claimed to have been tough on ‘people smugglers’. After a boat blast with casualties during his first period as a prime minister, he said they were the ‘absolute scum of the earth’ and should ‘rot in hell’ (Rogers, 2009).

An alternative narrative opposed Rudd’s stance. According to this view, people smugglers were heroes. Some refugees named a people smuggler, Ali Al Jenabi, ‘the Schindler of Asia’ (Haigh, 2012). A refugee who knew him said, ‘I think he is the best smuggler. He had a good heart. He was not hard, not a greedy person’ (De Crespigny, 2012).

In 2005, iconic Australian football commentator, Les Murray, a political refugee from Hungary, returned to his birthplace to find his hero, Julius, who had smuggled his parents out of Hungary after the 1956 Soviet occupation (Koziol, 2013). It turned out, Julius had passed away but Murray was able to speak to his son. On the issue of the morality of people smuggling, he takes a different view from that of Rudd.

“ We demonise people who don’t deserve it. My smuggler was no demon. ‘People smugglers’ do what the governments refuse to do and ‘get at-risk people to safety’. And ‘we create them – because if we didn’t make it so difficult for [refugees] to come here, there would be no ‘business model’ to break’ (Fletcher, 2012). ”

During the Second World War, thousands of Jews and potential victims of Hitler were rescued over the Alps and Pyrenees from certain death by people smugglers. Nevertheless, many did not make it. Nations in Western Europe and the US feared an influx with the number of Jewish applicants, for example, at times higher than the available visas.⁸ During the war, western governments claimed they did know about Hitler’s ‘final solution’ and remained silent. No Holocaust = no ‘genuine refugees’.

Whether people smugglers and passport forgers were Schindlers or swindlers is beside the point. Important is that, for whatever reasons, nations happen to lose their moral compass, markets become the last – subversive, illegal, criminal – refuge for humanity. Unlike politics, the arts have given those unlikely heroes of history their due. Writers such as Erich Maria Remarque and Anna Seghers, and movies like ‘Casablanca’ and ‘Hotel Rwanda’ paid homage to the ‘absolute scum of the earth’.

‘The rules have changed. If you come by boat you won’t be resettled in Australia’

In July 2013, Rudd struck his biggest election coup. He visited PNG and convinced Prime Minister Peter O’Neill sign a Regional Resettlement Agreement on asylum seekers. They quickly renamed the document an ‘Arrangement’ for fear it would be interpreted as a departure from treaty obligations (Hawker, 2013, 103). Rudd later officially announced:

“ From this point forward, asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat will be sent to PNG for processing and resettlement...People who come by boat now have no prospect of being resettled to Australia. The rules have changed. If you come by boat you will never permanently live in Australia (Rudd, 2013). ”

Customs had tested the new slogan. It showed better results – with the Australian public that is. The change caught the Opposition off guard. The sudden move was not ‘back to Howard’, as Abbott and Morrison were promising, it went far beyond Howard – it was without precedent. ‘No processing’ in Australia was not new, but ‘no resettling’? No country has ever tried that. Rudd’s reason was to discredit Abbott’s slogans of ‘stopping’ and ‘turning’ the boats as dangerous policy. In contrast, ‘no resettlement in Australia’ presented a more sophisticated form of psychological warfare. Instead of risky maritime altercations, the unsinkable carrier of Manus Island was a smarter – self-torturing and self-traumatising – deterrent.

There was no limit to what Martin Amis has called ‘refinements of wickedness’ (Amis, 2014). ‘It’s not the perfect answer’, admitted Rudd half a year later, now as a private speaker at Oxford University. And he revealed what motivated him.

“ The lesson that sent out to people smugglers was ‘You come by boat, we we’ll get there quickly [but] if you stay in a camp somewhere around the world, in *some hellhole* [Italics by this author], you’re never going to get anywhere’ (Safi, 2014). ”

The mindless inertia here is remarkable. Rudd totally confuses people smugglers and refugees. He is no longer aware of their differences. He utterly believes in his own semantic forgery. Australia does not send smuggler crews and organisers to Manus Island and Nauru. They do not get processed there. They do not wait for resettlement. The hellhole is for refugees only.

‘A blank sheet of paper’

The Arrangement came about under the dictate of the moment. It served an election purpose. Rudd wanted the impact to become apparent before the election. It was a joint bluff that both Rudd and O’Neill hoped would scare off boat people. A photo of a young female Iranian refugee in modern clothes, sitting on the deck and crushed by the news of this new policy, found its way to the Australian media. A wordless cartoon (but with the slogan in selected languages on the cover page) conveying the futility of trying to come by boat to Australia, hit the Internet. Oddly, it targeted people who could surf, but not read, the web (MacFarlane, 2014).⁹

In February 2014, the tragic events on Manus Island were the outcome of that bluff. Detainees had realised the Australian government was ‘lying to them’. They had given the authority a two-week deadline to come clear about processing and resettlement (Wroe, Whyte, & Gordon, 2014). Then they revolted. The Coalition government neither wanted to give them the assurance, nor were they able to. Those policies and procedures did not exist. The Immigration Minister, Scott Morrison, who had eagerly embraced the ‘no resettlement’ doctrine, placed the blame – this time rightly – on the Labor government. At his first press conference about the Manus Island riots, he said, ‘[The Rudd government] left us a blank sheet of paper on this issue ...an absolute blank sheet of paper, so this government has had to salvage what the previous government didn’t do’ (Morrison, 2014). Abbott and Morrison were silent, however, on what they knew. O’Neill would not be ready with a processing policy before May-June 2014. And, more alarmingly, he was – and had always been – determined not to resettle all refugees in PNG (Gordon, 2014).

The Arrangement policy (or lack of such) was the perfect deterrent, not only because it was cruel but also because it was impossible to carry out. The stroke of Rudd’s genius was in its duplicity. A claim assistance provider on Manus Island, Liz Thompson, told SBS Dateline that she was instructed to tell asylum seekers they

were going to be resettled in PNG although there were no real plans in place.

“ We knew this was ridiculous. But we were lying to people and we were told to keep that message going, to keep it clear...[Manus Island] was designed as an experiment in the active creation of horror to secure the deterrence...That’s why I say again that Reza Barati’s death is not a crisis for the department. It’s actually an *opportunity* [Italics by this author] – it’s an opportunity to extend that logic one step further (Farrell, 2014). ”

When an ‘angry’ Morrison told the asylum seekers on Manus, ‘Even in your dreams, you are not going to make it to Australia’, it was not personal. His ridicule logically resulted from the refinements of wickedness, programmed in the ‘no resettlement’ limbo. Abbott stood by him, ‘You don’t want a wimp running border protection’ (Wroe & Swan, 2014).

The 2013 election turn on refugees worsened the common political discourse in Australia. Today, its momentum seems unstoppable. The double whammy of ‘no resettlement’ and ‘turning back the boats’ is affecting the way the nation sees the world, and the world sees the nation. Australia has become more condescending and aloof to its neighbours. It has politicised its military. It has revived its neo-colonial habits of scorning the UN and international refugee agencies. Rudd also reframed, and Abbott reaffirmed, the foreign aid discourse as expenses to cut instead of investment to build (B. Hall, 2014).

In 2010 East Timor rejected Gillard’s request to host another detention centre (Westmore, 2010). Although one of the world’s poorest countries, East Timor had freed itself from the yoke of colonialism. Until the last moment, Australia had backed its foreign oppressor. Gillard underestimated the revolutionary dignity and human rights creed of its legacy government. PNG, on the other hand, was too dependent on its former ‘administrator’ to reject being a ‘friend’. The new foreign minister, Julie Bishop, asked Cambodia – a country with a poor human rights record – to resettle some of the ‘genuine refugees’ (Carmichael, 2014). This was another refinement of wickedness: those found to have their rights violated should be sent to where human rights continue to be violated.

There are other effects too. Australia wants to send back Sri Lankans as ‘economic refugees’. In order to enable and justify this, it has conveniently cleaned the slate of torture, rape and genocide of the Sri Lankan government. In November 2013, Abbott defended his attendance at the Commonwealth meeting in Colombo, arguing that the country was ‘much more free and prosperous’ (Hodge, 2013). Again, in March 2014 Australia, in contrast to Britain, for example, was the only developed Western nation that opposed the UN resolution to conduct a war crimes inquiry into Sri Lanka (Cox, 2014).

Such are the effects of the 2013 election. The general catches up with the particular, and the future catches up with the past. Language perpetuates itself, creates its own needs. Twisted lines need a twisted order to look straight. East Timor is unthankful; Cambodia is friendly; Sri Lanka is ‘free and prosperous’; the UN and David Cameron are ‘inadequate’ and presumptuous.

‘If you have any doubt, don’t vote for Tony Abbott’

In his election diaries, Bruce Hawker describes a campaign in disarray. ‘Worming’ exercises with Rudd had showed how sensitive people were to anything approaching negativity. Whenever he made positive comments he got a good response. Anything negative said about Abbott pushed the worm down. The challenge was to figure how he says something negative in a positive way (Hawker, 2013, p. 85). Unfortunately, Rudd’s campaign did not develop a striking positive message but the dull and meaningless ‘A new way’ slogan.¹⁰

As the campaign unfolded, it became clear that Rudd did not have many options. He could not build on his economic record from the previous three years. Labor’s image was in tatters. It was not only the internal disunity – it was a complex combination of State and Federal government issues exacerbated by the current campaign lacks and leaks. Tensions emerged between the Rudd’s team and Labor election headquarters (CHQ) in Melbourne. Communications between the Rudd travelling party and the CHQ were dysfunctional. Both sides leaked to the press. Melbourne was unhappy that Rudd was constantly late and not adhering to the strategy. A small circle of confidantes took snap decisions instead. The Prime Minister was failing to cut through in the daily media cycle. His press conferences were running overtime. He had wasted a week and so criticising Murdoch and News Corp. Rudd’s campaign, on the other side, lamented the fact that Melbourne ignored them. Headquarters staff, including campaign director George Wright, was out of the loop on decisions taken by the Rudd ‘brains trust’ (Massola & Heath, 2013).

Changing messages on the run in the thick of the campaign bared indecision and panic. Hawker noted:

“ Chris Bowen had gone on *Lateline* last night and run the ‘who do you trust?’ line (on instruction of the CHQ) and I realised how ridiculous it sounded. After the last three years we would be lucky to be trusted to walk the dog around the block. So at 6.30 a.m. I insisted we change back to ‘doubt’. (Hawker, 2013, p. 199) ”

The campaign reversed back to the negative – the fear of the uncertainty Abbott would bring. Reframe the election as ‘safe hands’ versus ‘risky option’. Abbott has a lot to hide; he has secret plans to ‘cut, cut, and cut’. Point at his \$70 billion black hole – a move that turned into a disaster (ABC FactCheck, 2013). Rebalance the advertisements: ‘75% negative to 25% positive’ (Hawker, 2013, p. 175). At the last moment, Labor resurrected the old ‘if in doubt, don’t vote for Abbott’ slogan from the 2010 election (AAP, 2013a). It may have worked in 2010, but it did not cut across in 2013.

‘Repent!’

The first post-election slogan of the newly elected prime minister was the most extraordinary – and the shortest. Never in Australian history had a government head asked the Opposition to repent. Introducing the bill to repeal Labor’s carbon tax, Abbott felt he needed something stronger than usual – something supernatural – for a tectonic shift in the Senate. He pushed all the registers – from politeness (Labor ‘being pragmatic, political survivors’) to coercion (‘the pressure in the end not to oppose this bill will be irresistible’). But then came his invention, the argument of sanctity – the ‘repent or perish’ moment.

“ Now, we are giving the Labor Party a chance to repent of its support for the carbon tax. We are giving the Labor Party a chance to repent of its massive breach of faith with the Australian people in the last Parliament. (Abbott, 2013a) ”

‘We are giving the chance’, ‘repent’, ‘breach of faith’. Were those words meant or were they merely ‘figures of speech’ by the Jesuit disciple from the St. Ignatius College in Riverview?

Abbott had previously framed the election as a ‘referendum on the carbon tax’. He won; he had the ‘mandate’. Yet it was not merely a mandate – it was a sacred mandate. It was a mission, and a mystery – the Mystery of Confession and Absolution. Like Jesus, he was giving Labor the chance to be absolved for fear of the hell of eternal opposition. ‘Repent (and repeal) or perish’. The mandate from below was a mission from above. This was an astounding – and literal – interpretation of ‘Vox populi, vox Dei’.

Abbott was referring to the place in the Bible, St Luke’s Gospel, where Jesus gives a stern warning to his followers (not prosecutors), ‘Unless you repent, you will all perish as they did’ (Lk. 13:3,5). With ‘they’ Christ meant the sudden massacre of the Galilee pilgrims at the Temple of Jerusalem (Pontius Pilate, smelling political disturbance, sent troops to wipe them out), and the accidental death of eighteen people when a tower of the old city’s wall collapsed over them.

Jesus’ message was not that his disciples had to repent because they had sinned. ‘I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come’ (Jn. 8:21). Everyone was a sinner, but he wanted to remind his followers that, although they were going to die anyway, death might be sudden and closer than they expected. God will punish the sinners who have not asked for forgiveness and their children for generations – ‘for the iniquity of parents’ (Ex. 20:5-6). He urged them to find time to repent and make their peace with God while they were alive (Mahoney, 2010).

Telling the Opposition to ‘repent’, Abbott imbued the word with a concrete political context – away from its theological interpretation. As a party leader and ideologue, he was utilising religious vocabulary for political purposes. As Australia had Christmas in July, so he introduced Lent in October. In this, he was not the first, but continued a long-standing political strategy – from modern terrorists today back to Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century. His Society of Jesus became the most efficient order during the Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits invented their own idea of penance, best serving their historical mission.

Within the Church, there were ‘contritionists’ – the Saint-Cyran and Jansenists, for example. They believed that in contrition, in ‘perfect repentance’, the sinner deplores and regrets his wrongdoing not for personal gain but from love of God. And there were ‘attritionists’ – notably the Jesuits. They suggested a shortcut. To forgive, attrition, ‘imperfect repentance’, the fear of punishment alone was a sufficient motivation. It had been an unsolved dilemma in the Church: the disinterested, focused on love of God penitence against the selfish sorrow rooted in fear of damnation and hell. The still controversial issue of absolution has been whether it had a ‘declarative’ (Jansenists) or ‘operative’ value (Jesuits) (Kolakowski, 1995, pp. 73-75). Familiar with the Jesuit school of thought, Abbott also knew well the operative value of repentance. Just replace Luther with Labor.

‘Cut, cut and cut’

Through policies, politicians represent the others. Through politics, they represent (preserve) themselves (including from the others). Policy and politics do not exclude each other. Real-politics mixes both. Policy is the 'what'. The stronger the representations of others, the more diverse policies are. Politics is the 'how'. The stronger the self-representation of the politicians, (that is the more politics becomes an end in itself), the more common and predictable politics becomes. Politics then serves as the lowest common denominator of policies. Policies are in plural; politics is in singular. The language of 2013 elections has markedly moved the political conversation from policies to politics. Thus I talk of *the* discourse of the 2013 elections.

To conclude, in all four critical points, Labor was not only unable to produce its own language, but it also succumbed to the neo-liberal and neo-colonial discourse of 'old Australia'. In relation to climate change, where potentially the biggest policy difference rested, it fought the 'new big tax' frame from inside instead from an alternative point of view. At the last moment, Rudd pitched the internal variation of carbon trade against carbon tax, and effectively weakened the external frame of carbon pricing.

Similarly, Labor only reinforced the ideological stigma the Coalition had attached to it while in government: that is, Labor as 'higher taxing, higher regulating' and having not 'a revenue problem, [but a] spending problem'¹¹ (Robb, 2013). Rudd's negative campaign, while attempting to fan the fear that the Coalition would ruthlessly 'Cut, cut, and cut' (although heavily cutting the budget itself), did nothing to dispel that false proposition (Kenny, 2013).

The so-called 'party reform' was not a real reform but only an election-driven step to reassure the voters that the elected PM will remain the governing PM. It only recalled Labor's disunity from the unfinished past, of which Rudd featured as a reminder in persona.

In the 2013 elections, domestic politics determined international policies to the extreme. Rudd's double-whammy of 'no processing' and 'no resettling in Australia', supplemented by Abbott's and Morrison's 'turning back the boats', extended and radicalised the bipartisan consensus in anti-human-rights and post-colonial ('outsourcing' liabilities to developing and depending nations) terms. The politisation of customs and military and increased secrecy of public service has promoted the discourse of silence and made politics less accountable – not only in the realm of 'border protection'. In the new dominating frame, it suffices for a good government to perform effectively – even if it is humanly and morally wrong. It just does for the people what the people detest to do.

In all four critical points short-term politics and not long-term policies formed – and festered for times after – the 2013 election discourse.

'Geez, I thought we'd lost!'

It was the night of his concession speech.

A beaming and markedly relieved Rudd faced up the cannonade of ovations. 'Geez, I thought we'd lost!' he quipped. Supporters burst out laughing and into tears. His valedictory and oddly triumphant speech dragged for 24 long agonising minutes. For the first time one could feel the whole weight of Labor's defeat – political and moral. I watched him on TV and caught myself absently repeating, 'Does this guy ever shut up?'

Notes

1 David Gonski, dubbed 'Mr Network' and considered 'one of the country's best connected businessmen' (Marr, 2011), was also the Chancellor of UNSW. On 6 November 2012, he met with academics at the Law Theatre in the Kensington Campus. The topic was the state of the school funding reform. He told the audience the following story. His mother was watching on TV Barry O'Farrell shrugging, 'I am more Gonski than Gonski'. Somewhat perplexed, she turned toward her son and asked, 'David, is he a relative?'

2 Kevin Rudd would later reinforce the neo-liberal frame, pitching emissions trade against carbon tax, and thus demolishing from inside the unity and superiority of the carbon pricing frame. See for more later in this text.

3 This is the blind spot of Abbott's Paid Parental Leave plan. Like Labor's carbon and mining taxes, it is both a *direct* and a *selective tax* imposed on big business. It would be labelled a "socialist grab" if it was coming from the other end of politics.

4 Labor had also learned from Howard's success with the GST. In 2008, the then PM, Kevin Rudd, slapped a 70 percent tax increase on the premixed drinks, dubbed 'alcopops'. The Coalition, although in opposition, agreed. By 2013, the indirect tax had raised \$4.5 billion, but did not curb teenage binge drinking (news.com.au, 2013). In the 2013 election campaign, Rudd, announced a gradual 12.5 percent increase of the tobacco excise, starting on 1 December 2014. He wanted to raise \$5 billion over the next four years and make up the federal budget shortfall (Murphy, 2013). The Opposition remained strangely silent. It did not attack it, as Labor did with GST in

the past. This did not help Rudd, but reinforced the trend in bipartisan politics: stick to indirect tax and use the purse of the single payer.

5 Martin Ferguson, like Bob Hawke, was a past president of the ACTU. When asked if he would be as great a conciliator as Hawke had been, he replied: 'I don't try to settle disputes. I try to win them' (cited in MacCallum, 2013, p. 63).

6 I was working there then and witnessed this first-hand.

7 In 2013, the Gillard government applied the agent/patient technique again in its crackdown on 457 visas for skilled foreign workers. It foregrounded foreigners as the push factor, active scammers and invaders of jobs to which locals should be entitled first. Backgrounded was the pull factor, Australian businesses that were eager to attract such workers. To add to the absurdity of the situation, Abbott denounced the Gillard measures as 'false patriotism' reminiscent of Pauline Hanson (Hurst, 2013). Boat people and skilled foreign workers swapped places as 'agents' and 'patients'. Refugees played the passive part, hidden behind 'people smugglers'; the foreign workers had to play the active part, obstructing the role of the Australian businesses. Victimising can take place through assigning both passive and active roles. Both cases also demonstrate that, to shore up votes, Labor did not shy away from nationalist if not racist sentiments.

8 Highly publicised was the case of *St. Louis*, which with 900 Jews had sailed from Hamburg, Germany in 1939. The US denied it permission to land. On its return, a few European countries accepted some passengers as refugees. Of the 908 who returned to Europe, 254 (nearly 28 percent) have died in the Holocaust. There were many less known rejections (Holocaust Encyclopedia, 2014).

9 The cartoon with no text targeted the wrong group. The humble Afghan Hazara peasants who were unable to read usually turned out to be 'genuine refugees' and with whom the immigration authorities did not have a problem. Immigration, however, developed a dislike for the Iranian refugees who had overtaken the Afghans as the biggest group of asylum seekers. Many Iranians were well-read, middle-class 'entitlement whingers' and assertive 'troublemakers'. They were constantly critiquing the conditions and were disrespectful to the authority. They were, in return, suspected of being economic refugees (Needham, 2011). It would be an intriguing topic to discuss the reason for the perception within the Australian Immigration that 'genuine refugees' should look like illiterate doves rather than educated hawks.

10 At the halfway point of the campaign, Penny Wong suggested changing 'A new way' to 'Building the Future', which then became the de facto campaign slogan. The problem was no one noticed the change. Because the campaign material was already printed, 'A new way' remained. Today, no election analyst, let alone voter, remembers 'Building the Future', except Rudd's chief advisor in one of his diary notes (Hawker, 2013, p. 147).

11 This, however, did not prevent the current Abbott government from quickly 'discovering' a deteriorating revenue flow after the election (Masola & Hutchens, 2014).

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