TABLE OF CONTENTS

Professor David Isaac

26 November 2020

First Interview

Westmead Hospital

He is Clinical Professor in Paediatric Infectious Diseases at the Children's Hospital at Westmead and the University of Sydney. His research is mainly in neonatal infections, respiratory viral infections and immunisation. In 2001-2, he did a post-graduate diploma in bioethics at Monash University and has been involved in teaching and writing about bioethics ever since. He loves writing and has published over 250 papers and 10 books on paediatric infectious diseases, neonatal infections, immunisations and ethics. He has also published 25 humorous articles. He is Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health.

David Isaac

David Isaac:

The families that I saw were devastated by what was happening to them. And I may say that when we finally got them off … all of the families … the children have been there more than five years. So, for many children, that was more of a well over half their life.

So, the effect on children's mental health was extraordinary. And what we don't yet know is how long lasting that will be.

But I can tell you off the families that come off now, really, that we still see in the Clinic, the children are generally doing better. But how well they do depends on how well the parents do. And almost all the parents are in trouble. They have post-traumatic stress, et cetera.

The children, some of them show extraordinary resilience, but nobody's unscathed by this. So, even the ones that are going to school … they've got friends speak beautiful English.

They're still traumatized by WhatsApp.

Julie Macken:

Number three, doesn't matter that you've gone through it.

Have you thought about whether… actually, before I ask that… just tracking back a bit…

What have you been able to kind of discern or distil? What are the elements that are most devastating?

Is it the complete lack of control?

Is it the never knowing?

Like what, what, what are the particularly devastating attributes that they're experiencing?

David Isaac:

So, one of the Mums would say to me is that “if you've committed a major crime, manslaughter, you might get five years in prison with good behaviour. You'll be out in three … And you know, I'm going to be out in that time.”…

If you're someone seeking asylum, who's done no crime... You're there, I think what “I don't know when I'm going to get out from this detention... So, I'm imprisoned indefinitely…”

It's got a Kafka-esque thing about it.

Do you know Julie? Just imagine you say, I don't know … I, who do I, how do I get my message out to anyone? So, you … you pound and shout to anyone.

There's no one to shout to .. they're in charge of everything. They're in charge of your mobile phone. If you want to use it or not. They're in charge of, they can take your mobile phone away.

David Isaac:

They can, you know, the internet wasn't great there anyway, but you know, families, everything that they would expect in normal life was subject to regulation or somebody else being able to do it.

I saw you look shocked about the mobile phone, [JM: yeah, I didn’t know that] … those, well, they could just do that.

[JM: So, there was a capriciousness?] They would give them an hour a day off the internet only… and they would have to do any communication.

And then there would be fights if people amongst the adult men.

[JM: Yeah.]

And if people didn't get their time when they were due to get it … or the internet wasn't working or something like that … So, I mean, everything that you hold dear about communication about power over your future was up in in the air.

You had no control.

Julie Macken:

Can you imagine, another circumstance where these same elements come into play anywhere else in the world?

David Isaac:

Oh, for refugees or in general?

I mean, if you're in the prison system, you might expect things like that.

Julie Macken:

Except that, as you've said in the prison system, you'd still be able to cross off the days spent there.

David Isaac:

That's Mark's point to me.

And it really kept through to me was this idea of … that's why we say that the “indefinite detention is torture”.

If you knew I'm being detained for short term, while they do my visa and it might take a few weeks and has happened originally. You know, when the median time is 10 weeks when it was introduced by Paul Keating, you know, 10 weeks for you to be processed.

And now it's blown out beyond two years, [JM: Seven years] you know?

Well, they left on the Island, even if it's processed, but you know, they're just left. I mean, all of this.

Julie Macken:

So, it's kind of like waking up every day into free-fall?

David Isaac:

Yeah. And that, and you get that feeling from Behrouz, reading his book as well about that.

Just he doesn't frame it in quite the same terms, but he just talks about it as another life. Another existence.

That is, I mean, he's way of coping with it was termite again.

Julie Macken:

Yes.

Yeah.

And actually the, those that seemed to have psychologically really held onto themselves … are those who have written, painted, done something to find

David Isaac:

Constructive to any of us.

Right. I think, yeah.

Julie Macken:

We've kind of talked about this.

Does the detention of refugees differ from the detention of prisoners and yes. We've said it

David Isaac:

In terms of the duration of the sentence if you like…

Yeah.

And also, the fact that it's not illegal, whatever we say to seek asylum.

So, there's this sense of injustice that just permeates through various talks about it.

This feeling of “but I’ve nothing wrong here. Why are they doing this to me?”

So, there's sense. And there's also that sometimes other families that arrive at the same time went to Australia and they went to Nauru...

So, there was a randomness about it as well as sort of an unfairness from that point of view.

So, this sense of injustice was huge.

Yeah.

This is happening to me. I've not done anything to deserve it. “Why is it happening to me?” It's sort of, it's almost like the worst thing in the world.

Somebody died and nobody's deserved it every day.

Same thing.

Julie Macken:

Yeah. Yeah. I'm thinking on the allegations that Australia's breach UN convention against torture.

How would you describe the treatment of refugees?

David Isaac:

Yeah. I think he's still in jail.

I'm not rich, but that it meets the criteria that it is deliberately damaging.

People's mental health, knowing that what you're doing is going to damage their mental health. They've seen the evidence we've all talked about.

For example, if you look at, they will say, "Oh, it's, what's happened before." It's, you know, all the refugees were already traumatized and so on...

But, and it's the boat journey and so on. ...And the boat journey is very shocking. ... I don't get me wrong.

But if you look at people who did the boat journey and then went into detention in Nauru or compared with coming to Australia, the ones I've met its much worse from a psychological point.

So, there's no doubt that there is it's multifactorial, the trauma and the mental health problems of refugees and people seeking asylum.

But it's certainly compounded by prolonged or indefinite immigration.

I'd say prolonged, I've tended to say, but certainly indefinitely. The most immigration detention in a detention centre, you know, we do people play with words.

We have prolonged immigration detention in Australia, but they're actually in a house or a flat of their own choosing. And that's not that's community detention, but it's not the same as having, but by calling them all the "detention", then people get confused which is I am sure why they do it.

Julie Macken:

I think. ...And I haven't written this....but I'm just wondering…

Do you think the torture is a consequence or an intention?

Do you think it simply arises out of those policy settings or do you think it’s by intention?

David Isaac:

But because they are deliberately not processing people. And so, the idea is that by doing that, that people who are being tortured in that way will submit the message back overseas.

"Don't try and do this".

Cause they're saying if they make it too easy, they'll submit the message back.

"Did you try and do it ? and come"

Julie Macken:

Kind of tracks back to the UN convention on torture.

Exactly.

Yeah.

David Isaac:

So, it's deliberate.

They know that it's going to cause mental health problems.

They ignore them.

They, if they're getting suicides or suicidal attempts and so on, they rubbish them… "Oh, it's the person, you know, it's the underlying problems, et cetera, et cetera,"

They don't take no notice about it.

I mean, nobody would accept any of this.

It was happening to people in Australia unless they were Aboriginal. Perhaps when we do it, ignore it, but know, pay lip service to doing anything about it.

But it's, it is deliberate because no matter how much you tell the people in power, "this is damaging people, don't do this, bring them to Australia and in community detention".

And so, on process to them that way they won't do it.

So that's, I mean, Kevin Rudd was the one who said they'll never come to Australia.

And yeah. So, I mean, there are still, people are Manus, still people on Nauru.

Julie Macken:

So, have you, have you ever considered whether Australia's treatment of refugees since 2000 could have had an impact on the way Australians view themselves in their own country ?

Feel free to say no, I haven't...

David Isaac:

I travel to Europe a lot to go to meetings and the way Australia is perceived in other countries…

If they hear about it, people are horrified. If you go and tell the story about what's happening, Alana did it in New York and then the world conference and people said, even Trump wouldn't behave that badly.

Julie Macken:

Well, Trump said that himself, "you guys are worse than me".

Yeah.

David Isaac:

And so overseas, if people get to know about it and in England, that lot, you know …

England knows much more about Australia than America does, then people are just horrified. And just as you know, we went back to the typical white Australia type idea, which is very sad.

But Australians themselves… I don't think they have to confront it often enough our treatment like that … for it to feel like a national characteristic.

I don't know though, to be honest, Julie, I can't…

Julie Macken:

No, no, no.

That's fine.

David Isaac:

I mean, I think when you hear everyone bubbles up every now …

And then about the black lives matter movement or stuff about refugees…

But less, you've got a new angle on it.

You know, when we cried over the men in the, in MITRE and places like that…

When COVID broke out and said, "they're a sitting duck and one of the guards has got it. "

I really struggled to get anyone interested in that as a Stephan Ambrista did something on SBS.

I tried, we tried to get Craig Foster involved and he was pushing it.

And we just could not get much traction.

People just shut off.

They don't want to hear about the bad things, and they pretend they're not happening ... is my concern.

I think, as you say, what do you feel about the national psyche and a national sort of way we feel about ourselves.

We want to feel good about us.

Everyone wants to feel good about ourselves.

And if we're behaving badly, I think it should be out there. We should be discussing this and saying "this is not right".

But you know, one way has been trying to work… I've worked quite a bit with Get-up!

Trying to push the politicians on this and do stuff, delivering…

Julie Macken:

Petitions and attrition

David Isaac:

And this and that at different times … and going into the press and going along and seeing the individual politicians and individual politicians ... agree with you up to a point.

But until it comes to disagreeing with the policy of the whole party and then they won't take it. [JM:Yep.]

So, you get lots of sympathy, but will anyone actually try?

And they might discreetly try and change policy or influence policy that the treatment that the "Christina Keneally's" and the good thing I'm going to go against the party line, because that is the party line.

That's the way politics works.

Julie Macken:

How do you square?

How do you straddle the two realities of remembering, reflecting, thinking about those 30 kids and their families and what you found there and moving about Australia with all of our abundance of everything?

Like there's a disconnect, isn't it?

David Isaac:

There is Julie. And so in those last five years ... really since then, I've given a lot of talks at meetings and so on in public forums and 14 rallies and still occasionally give talks to medical audiences, paediatric audiences about advocacy and ...

Even talking to you today, it chokes me and it, you know … at times, and I, then…

I think, you know, if that's what it does, do you think what it's to the families that experience that ...

And what you know, you had it for five days and they had it forever and no end of it, you could get on your plane and go home.

And people used to say that Mark …. "Yeah. Yeah. You put sympathy, but in the end, you're going back to your comfy living place" ...

It's true. I mean, it's a fair, a fair challenge. And so…

Julie Macken:

Well, except if you stop crying about it … God help us all, you know, like…

David Isaac:

I still see these patients and follow up. I do my refugee clinic on a Friday still.

And I'm getting to the, you know, I'm down to half time now and I'm thinking, and it's, I don't look forward to it. I don't, I, I think, "Oh, I'm going to have a family That's struggling in some..."

But you try your best to help them.

Yes.

When you can help them, it gives you the reward.

Yeah.

And when you see that they're better than they were in Nauru... You think, Oh, "and cough it up. We got them off Nauru".... At least that's one thing I could be proud of.

So, you hold onto the games, Julie, keep trying to help these families.

But there are times when you feel quite despairing after a refugee clinic, when you know, the Government have introduced some new measures, there's another lot in at the moment, just taking away all the housing and everything, you know, and you just go walk new ...

And you think one of the families thinking you have families who were going okay.

And then they think they've managed to throw another thing at us. And there's a nastiness. I mean, Dutton is an evil bastard?

[JM: so is Tudge]

Julie Macken:

I was in a half hour meeting with Tudge last week. I work at the Justice and Peace Office three days a week...

And we were basically saying to him, "look, there are hundreds and thousands of Catholic primary schools and parishes who are feeding families that you guys have walked away from." They're really conservative voters. So, they're asking us to "ask you Mr. Tudge, when I'll be able to stop doing that."...

And when the government or start doing that because they're exhausted and he kind of went...

"it was just a bit of a different angle for him to have to deal with really conservative "

David Isaac:

The Jesuit Refugee Service, paying quite a lot of money for the family....I saw it last Friday,

Julie Macken:

Well, 900 families a week ... They're now supporting, and they get no government funding, and they are supported by primary schools and secondary schools and parishes, that's it?

You know? And, and these kids are "saying, when is the government going to step in?"

And Tudge was like," what do you mean? ..."

They're asking when I said, well," Minister, they are feeding these families because the government's not, yeah."

They're happy to keep doing it because they care, but they are exhausted.

We're talking primary school kids. They're exhausted.

And they're wondering when you're going to it, do a lot better.

Yeah. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, mind you.

Then I saw Four Corners and I thought, well, he's probably not long for that job anyway.

Okay.

Last question.

And this might not be something you've thought about or want to, or even agree with.... But if Australia, the State was a patient, how would you treat the patient?

David Isaac:

I think you generally, in treating patients, pharm[families?]

Needs to maintain communication. Also try not to be too judgemental accept that people have different ways of doing things.

And so, if I, and I do a lot of ethics here, so we do run the bioethics.

And so, I would be saying, keep up the conversation, keep talking to lose content.

This is all about trust. Trust is a really important thing here. And you would be having to win the trust of the Australian State while helping the Australian State to reflect on the way they're treating people on.

And so, I would be saying what you're talking about these people as if they're not human, ...but they are, you hear that.

I see them every day and you can make one, et cetera, et cetera. And you need to recognize their absolute, their humanity.

And so, I'm not judging too.

David Isaac:

And I won't be judging the politicians too much.

I mean, I have, I we've just been dissing Dutton and Tudge are terrible people...

But, but that's because politicians, some politicians are pretty terrible, but many of them are expedient people that doing things expedient rather than because they really believe that…

And if you can persuade enough of them, actually, that is not good for our image, our image generally.

I mean, it's interesting just to see the change in, in language and in the US , as Joe Biden starts to talk about, this is not what America is about.

We've got, and that's what we want is to say, this is not what Australia is about.

We need you to reflect on that because it's in danger of damaging our image.

And so, you, you also appeal to their conscience, but their self-interests I did as well. So that's how I would be.

I mean which is what I think what you're trying to do,

Julie Macken:

In a frank fashion, yes.

David Isaac:

No, I know.

I mean, I've been cranky... I've done my bit.

So, standing there shouting at crowds and et cetera, et cetera

But in medical care, shouting at patients or their families … but never works or at least it's, it damages the whole sort of thing.

You're much, much better to try and take them along.

And, and if you disagree, if I disagree with someone so much that I think they're damaging the child, then I may say, look, I feel so strongly about the health of "John".

I know you love your job, but I disagree with you so strongly.

I'm prepared to go to legal things.

You need to know that because we both care about your child, but I think, do you see what I mean?

And so, the way I would be saying politicians or

Julie Macken:

So, what you're describing is at least a twofold thing … a threefold thing …actually you're saying first accept where they're at and understand them as human beings.

Yeah.

So, don't objectify them.

Don't "other" politician for a start .... having accepted that and accept that they're doing the best I can, but they're in the business of expediency and they're inhabiting this same moment. We all are.

Yes.

And understand that we're in a changed moment too.

So, within this very changed environment where it feels like pretty well, you, you can get away with murder and pretty well, you know, all bets are off, and we've slipped the leash on what previously held us in check in terms of our international treaty obligations and things like that.

So, we're all inhabiting this slightly fluid, slightly shaky space. They're just doing the best they can.

And by and large, keep reflecting back to them.

Their humanity keep reflecting back to them. Our shared common interest in being as well as we all can.

But if they move beyond and start being dangerous to themselves or to others put structures in place from doing it…

David Isaac:

That's very nicely put Julie.

That is exactly what I think.

At least that's how we would do it from a health point of view might be more difficult to stop them from a political point of view…

But I mean, to be honest, when we were trying to stop the Medi-vac (?) and I went and spoke to various politicians, including Christina Keneally (?) and Russell Broadband, and what is interesting at one level, I can talk to us or Broadband and I can see his humanity.

I know he's got different views from me about many, many things…

But we could agree on some things I couldn't persuade him to vote against his Government cause he wouldn't …

But I could persuade him to at least consider doing so...

And to be talking about, is this how we really should be behaving?

And so, and I think if we can talk to people on a human level, we can actually they're humans like the rest of us and they can see some of that.

And the ones who are more reflective that might get through it.

Julie Macken:

Hmm.

I've taken up so much of your time actually.

I'll give you online.

Oh, that'd be great.

Now would he mind me reading him and just going your dad says to ring you if you turn him off about her ethics approval for that turn my groovy thing off.

I'm sure he might lie a stunning woman in South Australia who is a professor or identify rather with one nation for year and basically asked to try and find out what is going on.

That one nation is so successful, and she looks at it is using a psychoanalytic frame, but also the frame Australian literature.

Professor Louise Newman

30 November 2020

First Interview

Via Zoom

Professor Louise Newman is the Professor of Developmental Psychiatry and Director of the Monash University Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology.

Louise is a practising infant psychiatrist with expertise in the area of disorders of early parenting and attachment difficulties in infants. Her current research is focussing on the evaluation of infant-parent interventions in high-risk populations, the concept of parental reflective functioning in mothers with borderline personality disorder and the neurobiology of parenting disturbance. She is also involved in advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers and is the Convener of the Alliance of Health Professionals for Asylum Seekers.

Louise is a past chair of the Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, as well as the College's NSW Branch. In 2011, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia 'for service to medicine in the fields of perinatal, child and adolescent mental health, to education, and as an advocate for refugees and asylum seekers.'

Louise Newman

Julie Macken:
Are you okay if I record this?

Louise Newman:
Sure.

Julie Macken:

Okay. So it's recording now.

Louise Newman:

Okay, good.

Julie Macken:

I think it's actually been about 20 years since I last interviewed you.

Louise Newman:

Probably.

It's incredible, isn't it?

You wouldn't think that we'd still be here talking about it at this stage.

Julie Macken:

I know.

Louise Newman:

Amazing, yeah.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Louise Newman:

I'm talking to Chris [Raoule 00:02:12] the other day and this has been going on and on and on…

It's just exhausting.

But we'll keep going, though.

Julie Macken:

It's a funny thing, isn't it though? I

t's going on and on and on, and yet at the same time, it metastasizes.

Every time you go, "Actually, I think we've got something here. I think we can," it'll kind of mutate and come back at it in an even more virulent fashion.

Louise Newman:

Well, it's like Trumpism and Trump.

The whole, "I could do better."

Will Trumpism survive?

Well, of course it will because it's not in a body. It's not him. It's a particular time and a particular sort of politics with and I think what we've seen over this time is just variations of a theme, but the themes are still about scapegoating, how we construct otherness.

The xenophobia obviously, but also fear which has a long history in Australia.

So it's interesting just watching various iterations and changes of form.

But I think the themes are there.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

And maybe I'll just briefly describe how you and I got to be sitting in front of each other…

I don't know if you remember, when I was at the Australian Financial Review, I think it was 2001 or 2002?

I went to one of the first conferences on mental health.

All you, Michael Dudley and a whole lot of people had got together and were presenting your findings.

And at the end of it, I think it was Michael Dudley got up and said, "What we're talking about here is state sanctioned torture."

Julie Macken:

And I went back to the Fin Review shocked and said … "This is just what I've seen. Here are their findings. This is what was said. I'm going to write a story on that…"

I said it to my news editor who was a very orthodox Jewish guy who, you never knew which way he would swing...

Sometimes he'd be real like, "Yes, go for it." Other times he'd be really like, "No. We don't do that."

Anyway, he looked at me for about 30 seconds and he said, "No paper I edit will ever write that story, will ever run that story."

And I said, "Why?"

And he said, "That is not who we are. We do not torture people. That is not who we are."

Louise Newman:

That's right.

Julie Macken:

So it never ran.

Louise Newman:

No.

Julie Macken:

After that, then I worked with Federal Labor for a while … I worked with the Greens for a while … always trying to work out what is going on here.

And in the finish, the reason I'm doing a PhD that is loosely called the "melancholic torturer".

Why Australia tortures refugees … is because it seems to me the missing element of all of this, if you look at it, there are economic reasons that have driven, created the ecology that supports abuse.

…Privatizing them, offshoring them, othering through the use of really critical and very strategic use of propaganda, and removing access to the courts.

All of those tactics work to create the how of abuse.

But I guess the thesis that I'm testing is to find the why of the abuse, we need to look at the psychoanalytic and imagine that Australia, a majority of particularly white Australia, is capable of a ethic, even a collective state.

Julie Macken:

And what I'm positing, is that from Whitlam through to Keating, Australia, using Freud's Mourning and Melancholia, that 1917 paper that he did.

I'm kind of suggesting that '72 through to '96, white Australia was beginning to engage meaningfully in the business of mourning.

Mourning the violence of our colonisation, burying the idea of the "good Australian, the peaceful settler".

And coming to grips with the reality of how we came into possession of this place.

Judith Butler talks about the need for a public performance of mourning.

Louise Newman:

Yes. That's right.

Julie Macken:

And I kind of look at the Redfern speech as the high tide mark in the public performance of mourning.

Then John Howard came along...

A lot of us are doing that work, but also that work is unpleasant, it's disturbing. It's really mucking with our perception of ourselves, and we're getting increasingly uncomfortable with it.

And then John Howard comes along and says, "You don't need to do it. I want a relaxed and comfortable Australia that is contingent on not looking back. And not going for an armband version of history."

Julie Macken:

He presents the melancholic option for us.

He presents us with the opportunity to deny the need for mourning, to disavow the need for mourning, which kind of tumbles to Klein's work. Where if we're going to engage in moving to this more melancholic state of denial and disavow … then we begin to split off parts of ourselves.

Louise Newman:

Well, it's repression if you want to use its thing that 'psychoanalytically'.

It's a repressed state, which still has effects on the collective psyche and individual's mentality.

And have the Howard's view of the world, is that things that are unacceptable according to his values, is just best to repress them, put them elsewhere… Which then increases your chance of it being acted out on the figure of whatever the object of persecution is.

In this case, the figure of the asylum seeker.

They're the bad, because we disavow our own badness, they become bigger and badder, then it will justify the sort of torture that has been enacted upon these people.

Louise Newman:

It's the symbol of the figure of the asylum...

It's like Trump has done exactly the same thing with the child asylum seekers, the pictures, the visuals widely spread by his crowd, not just other people getting pictures. Children in cages. Two-year old's, babies, young children separated from their parents, in the cages.

That's got a huge bearing.

And the message is, "These might look innocent, but they're evil."

Evil is everywhere.

It's all about inducing that state and amplifying that state of paranoia and fear.

Meaning we need a strong man, and it's always a man, that's the strong man sort of demagogue type figure.

Louise Newman:

And fascism breeds somewhere. It's very interesting. But it is collective, so …

It's not just about some individual... some individuals of course feel guilty about how colonial Australia has become and so absolutely.

But in terms of social change, and the whole bigger picture questions about why did we end up here?

I absolutely agree with you, I think taking a bigger picture… more sophisticated is a depth view of what's the function in Australia of having outpost colonies, of people colonies.

Why do we always have people colonies here?

Because we are a Nation of invaders in some ways.

And we took, from Britain initially the dispossessed, the people no one wanted.

Louise Newman:

This whole country is founded on that. It's happened quite easily for us, which is sort of remarkable. We've done it with surprising ease.

Remote desert facilities designed in ways that will induce mental breakdown, just the architecture of those places, and Foucault's idea of the panopticon.

Fascinating if you went into … in those days.

Quite well thought out , of someone out that may be unconscious, but it was there.

Because these are timeless methods of authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

And yet, the question is what is it about Australian culture and history that led us to the point where we have come to this uneasy … maybe slightly queasy sort of relationship with what we've done to these people?

What we continue to do to these people, what we're doing now in the Mantra Hotel, this sort of stuff, it is remarkable.

I'm very interested in, there's the terrible ease with which this has occurred.

Julie Macken:

Yes. It is like falling off a log, isn't it?

Louise Newman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Julie Macken:

Particularly given, maybe this explains partly the ease…

That we fancied ourselves as being a humane culture imbued with human rights values.

We're forever dragging up that poor …

And a handful of others who have gone, "We should do better than this." But it was done terribly easily. And it's been impossible-

Louise Newman:

Yes, it was. And we've now exported the model. We've become a role model for Trump in his dealing with the issues, parts of Europe, it's not surprising.

And that needs to be owned.

That we are the ones who have taken up this, "We will decide who comes here and under what circumstances," as if that's a God-given right.

And it is for Howard, a God-given right about boarders.

Trump has echoed it.

People in the UK bringing in these very harsh restricting policies, as if they can be justified. And the links to Christianity I think's an interesting issue as well. There's a certain... I don't know what Michael-

Julie Macken:

I think, can you talk a bit more about that.

Louise Newman:

... because Michael was a very religious man, I don't know what he would say about it, I'm not a Christian, but not saying it in a disparaging way… But it's very interesting they've used that to justify. And Howard and Scott Morrison, they all have a particular version of Christianity which somehow either disavows the fact that they do bad things, which is easy enough to do.

Or attempts more subtly to justify what they're doing on the basis of values where the refugee becomes just like collateral damage in a war. Which is fascinating if you look at the residents with the Afghan, the atrocities that have gone over there with our troops.

Louise Newman:

And ScoMo, all he can say is, "We have to respect our troops."

Well, no one wants them to suffer more than they already have, but that's facile.

What's interesting about that, is that it's somehow, well the rogue element…

And we still have the core values.

This sort of naïve beliefs that somehow there are easily identifiable core values that are not humanitarian values.

Fascinating.

Julie Macken:

Do you know Linda Briskman?

Louise Newman:

Yes.

Julie Macken:

She's my primary supervisor.

And her and I are at the moment trying to craft a paper linking the SAS culture with Abbott's 2015 announcement when the UN found us in breach of the Convention of Torture…

Remember, it was Tony Abbott that said, "We're sick of hearing from the UN."

There's been 20 years of the culture that says you can slit a child's throat, has been normalized by our prime ministers.

Louise Newman:

That's right.

There are numerous examples where … and that's the whole frustrating situation.

I mean you ask in your questions that, the medical evidence.

The medical evidence is there.

It's been there for years.

Government is aware of the evidence of harm.

It's not really even an issue.

Maybe if they knew that all those people are sick, largely with mental health issues and stress or trauma related conditions, some had physical conditions.

They brought them here and haven't treated them.

What do you do in that situation?

Some of the advocates of course get very frustrated and say, "Well, the doctors must speak out."

The doctors have spoken out over-

Julie Macken:

Forever.

Louise Newman:

... numerous occasions.

But what they are underestimating is the politics of this.

And the politics is the politics where values don't matter.

And I think on a national level, that's what's so confronting to us.

The people who do speak out about this are usually, "All right, they might say that we're snowflakes and all the rest of it," but they tend to be people on the left with... or people of faith, but whatever with clear values, who want a value-driven system as opposed to whatever they think they're doing.

Louise Newman:

It is incredibly frustrating for everyone.

But it's not about the argument over the evidence.

Like a lot of young people just starting to get into the issues, so people like just at university, undergraduates wanting to talk about it all saying, "There must be some evidence of this bad." I said, "Yeah, you could look that up."

Julie Macken:

There's yards of it, yeah.

Louise Newman:

There is a fair …

Julie Macken:

Yeah, shedloads of it.

Louise Newman:

I don't want to have to go through all of it again with them.

But , A) they don't know of them.
And B, they get this terrible shock.

And there's a real personal sense of dislocation, "Well surely if that's the case, this will happen. That there will be action on that. And that government can't sanction that."

Our government sanctions that.

And that's very difficult.

Julie Macken:

To be honest, that's why I left journalism.

In the end, the last story I did was the story about the Dehsabzi translators. T

he Pashtuns who were sending the Hazaras back, and the role Asia was playing in supporting... like it was an extraordinary breach of national security.

We got “legalled” within an inch of its life, because it was saying that Asia is working with Hekmatyar's henchmen.

Hekmatyar was then working with Osama Bin Laden.

There's a clear line, even if you didn't give a toss.

And the story was published.

There was not a word said.

And at that point, you hang onto this idea that if people know what's going on, it will stop.

And I resigned shortly after that, because I realized it actually doesn't matter.

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

And I think in the current climate, that that's really where we're at with this... and this is populism or Trumpism, however you want to see it, some people get upset if you call it fascism.

I think it is fascism, regardless of what we call it, the question being … there is all reality can be questioned, there's endless relative, there's endless denial, distortion, conspiracy theory…

And I think can end up being single flowed through.

And with politicians they get so much caught up in that. They have to be protective of their own positions and so on.

Trump is the best example because he's so obvious about it.

He doesn't even bother to hide it, if Australia's a bit more subtle, but it's still there.

The denial. I mean Dutton's very good at it, I see.

Julie Macken:

Dutton is very-

Louise Newman:

Distortion, I mean he's smart in an evil way, but he is smart.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

I think this is where melancholia as a frame works, because Freud talks about the narcissism at the centre of the melancholic.

The really shallow lifelessness and the superficiality of the melancholic, that means they're abhorrent of all things symbolic.

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

I think melancholia is also about anger, and the inability to express anger and ambivalence.

And I think collectively that's a really important issue.

What we do now with our anger against the political classes, our anger about what government is doing, our powerlessness?

Even in the face of having some ambivalent love and connection to the notion of Australia … and multi-culturalism and the positive things that are here, I think we're tortured by that at the moment.

Louise Newman:

I think that's where this sort of depressive … comes from partly.

But we don't know what to do about that.

You get people who then can go either way. Some of them become conspiracy theorists.

And sort of become a bit mad.

Julie Macken:

Crazy.

Louise Newman:

The ones with their flat-earthism, they're tin foil hat wearers, and all these people, they're enraged.

They're absolutely enraged.

The notion of, "I'm a sovereign citizen, no rule applies to me."

Julie Macken:

That's right.

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

I mean, what does that mean?

I don't even know what it means when we have to live collectively, or we will die as a species. They are enraged about it.

They act out their anger.

They punch the police forces and stuff like that.

Others become highly angry, anti-political.

I don't know if you follow any of this on the Facebook stuff, but there are people in that anti-politics space, who essentially are Trump supporters, but they will deny it's got anything to right and left.

Julie Macken:

Yes. Yes.

Louise Newman:

I find them absolute...

I find then they make me angry.

Because I'm identified by them as being of the old school left.

And years ago, yes.

I was very much into that old school left. But I think most of us have moved through that. And yes, I'm still very left.

But they would say that by definition you're more supporting the political class who are conservative by definition.

And Trump's better because he's an anarchist.

I think he's an anarcho-terrorist, which is a bit different, because he brings fear and loathing.

I think it's a lot of it's more to do with the modern era, the post-modern era, about lack of reality, lack of truth, lack of personal efficacy.

And we end up with these collective states of depression.

Julie Macken:

Yeah. And this is where... but a dead body is a dead body.

The reason I'm looking at the question of torture particularly, is because that is at the very end of our humanity. Beyond that point there'd be dragons...

And also because it's so, in a sense, non-negotiable, because everything is fluid, everything's fake, who knows?

There's a kind of corporeal reality to what we are doing there that is not non-negotiable.

Louise Newman:

Oh yes.

I think that, I mean distraction, fear mongering, et cetera is one level.

When you act out as the State and use the state on the body of someone...

Women of course have been victims of sexual assault, rape, murder in all wars.

I think the Nazis did it nicely.

I mean I have a personal investment in this, because I have relatives who were tortured by Mengele, one of whom survived remarkably and so bore witness to that sort of thing.

Those sort of experiments in the name of science as they distorted it, that's taking it, it is to a different level.

Louise Newman:

The use of solitary confinement in Australian's detention centres, I mean the things that Cornelia Rau experienced. Which some of which, are known and spoken about, were spoken about, some were not so much because it was difficult to prove in any sense, but obviously isolation, being treated with contempt, being potentially sexually assaulted by the guards, these sorts of things.

There's a long and glorious tradition that's acting out on the body of the enemy, in ancient times as well.

And it's not the modern era, but to think that we... and there's a gradation of course, but we're on that path. But what we fail to do in the modern era, is maybe decide psychological torture.

If you think of most of the genocide type situations, or like there's been mass slaughter, we haven't mass-slaughtered the refugees.

We've allowed them to die by neglect, which is different.

Julie Macken:

Neglect or suicide.

Louise Newman:

But we've been good at driving people to suicide, which again-

Julie Macken:

This is where, a number of people that I've spoken to about this, good and decent people, will go … "Psychological torture. I mean, really? Can you be psychologically tortured?"

And I say, "Oh, mother of God."

Where do you think-

Louise Newman:

Of course you can.

Julie Macken:

... things like sleep deprivation, being bombarded with sound, being bombarded with white noise, being told all your family are dead, they hate you, you're not wanted.

And then-

Louise Newman:

Being told that you will be imprisoned forever and have no hope.

That's a fairly common sort of tactic.

When you look at it in totality, they're all things that destroy people's sense of psychological safety and security and identity.

Who can I be in the face of this what I'm told? And I've come to accept that I am nothing.

That I am powerless. That I'm a number. And I don't have any buddies here. I don't have a name.

What we can unpack, I guess, are the building blocks of that. But the net result is destruction of hope and of any sense of being safe in the world.

Louise Newman:

There was one, I must find it … I read about some Moroccan prisoners who got buried underground for years on end. Buried in underground caskets. And they were every now and then given some food and water. … And one of them wrote an account of being buried like a corpse, a living corpse.

That's unbelievable.

Now if that doesn't constitute... that's an extreme example, but being locked in a small cell. So pain in a sense transcends that.

And torture survivors often speak about that, the pain in a way is a bit of a relief, because it proves to you that your body was still alive.

Being totally nothing, having no identity is probably worse in some ways.

And death becomes the only thing to do.

Julie Macken:

Do you think...

I'm trying to work out if I should...

I'll go through the questions that I've put here so that I cover them eventually, but before I go there…

Do you think that potentially the forms of self-harm, I know the symbolic value of lip sewing, of carving into oneself, but is it also a way of earthing one?

You know how young kids these days are cutting themselves, and it seems to work?

Louise Newman:

Oh, I see a lot of that. A lot of it. And people describe that.

It's better to feel something rather than nothing. It also makes them feel better after they've done it.

And that might be a chemical reaction, but there's a strange sense of relief.

A lot of these young, they're often young women who repeatedly self-harm. And they wear it like badges of honour. Honor up their arms.

It's not that they hide them under T-shirts of whatever.

They're wearing them out there like saying, "This is me. I suffer. Look at it and be shocked." It's a form of communication on one level, but it also, it has a very powerful hold over people, because to not respond when you're feeling dreadful, and to have nothing that you can do, means that you may as well just be dead.

It's sort of a survival in a strange way, yeah.

That's pretty common.

Julie Macken:

Yeah. And just before I go to the questions, recently or over the last few years we saw, particularly on these little kids developing that resignation syndrome where they appear to just give up on everything.

Is that them saying, "Okay, I'm not even going to hurt myself anymore. I give up."

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

We've just published, because I was seeing some of them.

I know a group of this... had published a paper just recently in Australasian Psychiatry, some data about the ones that we saw.

But it is very, and now you think about it, it is very much a syndrome, obviously it's a severe response to trauma where the children virtually go into a state of hibernation, which is the only place of safety left for them.

Julie Macken:

Like little bears.

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

And it's better than feeling pain, and it's better than trying to die.

And a lot of them have tried to die. But then they just sort of, it's a giving up.

And it's a really profound, they're sort of semi-dead, some of the ones that we saw.

And I mean the had it, we've had it. It's usually a severe trauma.

You can see it among refugee populations, usually bad things are going on in families, where children are just not able to survive and become the symbol, if you like, of utter resignation.

It's really quite powerful.

Julie Macken:

Okay.

Isn't it interesting, Louise, that one of the things that I'm looking at, is starting from Howard onwards, his ongoing hatred of anything symbolic, there would be no sorry.

There will be no symbolic acts of this. Everything will be pragmatic or practical. And again, Freud talks to that.

But isn't it amazing, that as our collective capacity, as we shun the metaphoric and the symbolic, these poor bastards are not only wearing all of our disavowed material, they're also desperately symbolizing what is going on.

Terrible.

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

And in one way, and now on a political level maybe in the minds of the right, they offer tangible evidence that there are boundaries that the state can determine.

And that to bridge boundaries, and this is sort of a ‘Howardism’, there will be, there's a price to be paid, hence the definition of the journey as illegal, whatever that means in his view, not that it is. This is again to encourage compliance in the population, the masses.

The state is strong. We have to... And that's an age-old tactic.

I think it operates in that way.

Louise Newman:

In a psychological way, which I think is more interesting in a way, it shows us that for the state, and of a culture, it's a question of life and... it really is existence versus non-existence.

And what deceit means. And the peril on a personal level to be paid by being a political dissenter. Hence some of the admiration for strong man tactics, whether it's Trump or Bolsonaro or any of these, these... Putin.

Louise Newman:

What is the mass, pretty much, consistent adoration that these sort of fascist leaders have, which we've seen before in other times in history, but it's absolutely fascinating to think about, what do they actually represent?

And one thing that they do very nicely, is they define self and they define others. This is who we are. These are our values.

Others, whoever they are, and you can have numerous out-groups, depending on your politics, like Putin hates homosexuality. Yeah, he's got a big list. Trump's probably got a similar list.

Trump's a bit more fluid, I guess he just hates everything except Trump.

It's slightly different, but he's defining others, who is the enemy?

So they said there has to be an enemy. It's taking us back to a really primitive level which Klein spoke about, of splitting. It's really at that level. A paranoid-schizoid position from my perspective where there's self and others, but others can be bad others-

Julie Macken:

Or good others.

Louise Newman:

Yeah, sorry.

Julie Macken:

We also have ‘good’ refugees who queue up in the middle of Africa and-

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

Wait to die-

Julie Macken:

They wait patiently.

Louise Newman:

... but a few get rescued.

Julie Macken:

That's right.

Louise Newman:

There's nothing clever about that.

I mean, it's appalling.

Julie Macken:

Yeah. This is-

Louise Newman:

Yeah, the ‘good refugee’.

That we define people that we think are ‘good’ and ‘worthy’ refugees.

Julie Macken:

Who don't presume innocence.

Louise Newman:

And we take a handful of those.

Julie Macken:

And one of the media woman did an analysis of the media coverage of the good and the ‘bad refugee’, and also looked at what makes up the good refugee, they don't presume upon the hospitality of Australia.

And they come as supplicants, right?

Louise Newman:

That's right.

Julie Macken:

The ‘bad’ refugee rolls up bold as brass, and says, "I want protection."

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

So, the Iranians are pretty much universally seen as ‘bad, unworthy refugees’.

Hence we try ,now, with many of the Iranians are in the 30,000 of the dispossessed who get nothing and are tormented and Stateless and left to mentally deteriorate, that's a form of psychological torture.

Interestingly, they've been, a lot of them have been political dissidents, if not willingly are imprisoned and gang raped by soldiers who are part of the university academic women, and pretty marginalized there and tormented here.

For what? I

t's a mixture of... I think gender issues are quite important here. You've got the young men who are wanting to have a better life and opportunity. And also remain politically active.

But they're seen as aggressive and bad.

And they're angry.

It's fascinating.

Those are at the... I don't know we like.

We tend to like quietly well-behaved, some Afghans maybe, but not all.

Julie Macken:

Not all.

Louise Newman:

And maybe some Africans who get in, and then we persecute them when they're here anyway, because they're “other “because they're black.

Julie Macken:

Well, they're “gangs”.

Louise Newman:

Because we …

Julie Macken:

That's right.

Louise Newman:

But there is a hierarchy in the mind of the department.

And children, I think are being singled out as a group, where it's seen as acceptable to have unaccompanied minors, not to release people into the community, children into the community into more normal care arrangements very easily.

And that's going to be an interesting issue as well, to enact this stuff around children and their welfare is remarkable.

Trump said it quite clearly, "I'm doing this because we have to send a message." He just said it. But our lot don't bother to say it.

They just do it.

Julie Macken:

All right. I'm going to ask you this, we've covered it, but just so-

Louise Newman:

Yeah. Sure.

Julie Macken:

How would you describe the conditions in Australia's offshore and onshore detention facilities? And I guess now really we're talking about Mantra as well.

Louise Newman:

Yeah, the onshore, we've sort of emptied out a lot of them.

For some reasons there's still many people around between... there's been a lot of them have actually closed.

But the hotels, and Mantra and the ones in … they're quite specifically concerning, because of overcrowding, these are people with mental health and medical conditions who've got minimal access to any care, who are punished by being in very small rooms, obviously no air, no exercise, complaints about the quality of food and so on.

Even the detention facilities with open areas would be preferable, because at least people can move physically.

Louise Newman:

We've maintained that, the ghetto sort of notion of the camps.

During the COVID pandemic things have worsened considerably, because advocates and visitors have not been able to see people. I've assessed a couple of people but only on video conferencing. And we still had children detained, even though kept saying, "We don't want our children in detention." The two-year old, the little toddler was one I was involved in, she has been in Melbourne.

We finally got her out.

That's been, she's a child born in detention, who is a life-long prisoner.

Julie Macken:

Born in

Louise Newman:

Remarkable Vietnamese mother with a father in the community, who wasn't allowed to be a carer.

Remarkable situation.

For reasons that in the end, even working with a human rights lawyer, we had never fathomed why certain people are made an example of.

And this got plastered all over the... quite a lot of media about it.

Beautiful little child, an endearing child. From a psychiatric perspective, really troubled child as you would imagine. Some of the guards were devastated by this. I think it's fascinating when you think about the system. I had guards saying to me, "This is wrong. This sweet little girl should not be here."

And I said, "Well, that's my view too."

But they were struggling. And she would go up to them. She was very close to them. Her mother had terrible depression, understandably.

Louise Newman:

We set up places like that, and we've kept them going.

The family, I mean they're a good example as well.

I mean, what is the point of it? I still don't know.

And despite all this been going on for so long, a lot of people active in the case, "Why are we doing this?" And so there's a whole lot of questions that you never get answers.

The department won't do that.

All that intensifies.

Louise Newman:

And plus COVID has meant that well, no one can have any access, so we don't get to talk to people.

The attempts to, which failed, to stop people having mobile phones and any social connection, as a good example of a tactic to make people feel even further isolated, abandoned.

A lot of them have said that the worse fear is about being forgotten.

Whether you're forgotten in the desert, or you're forgotten in a locked facility, having no one think about you, is appalling.

Julie Macken:

So, not held in the minds of anyone.

Louise Newman:

Yeah. And that's what the function that all the visitors and advocates over the years have readily done, and bearing witness to what we know is going on there.

Outside of the Mantra every afternoon, there are protests

Julie Macken:

Yes. And at the Kangaroo.

Louise Newman:

... saying, "This must stop." And these are young, some of the young activists, refugee action people who are great.

And they drag us off once every now and then to say a few stirring words, but what can be said? I

really struggle with that, because I'm not sure that being there is going to make much difference, but they value just having someone to talk to, who's seen it.

And that's fine, happy to help them.

Bearing witness, all these functions have become important.

Louise Newman:

But the conditions offshore, look they have been horrendous. I've been to all the offshore centres in the past, not recently.

But from what I understand, they've just continued when the overcrowding is massive, to deteriorate.

The same issues about poor facilities, poor health care, completed suicides, outbreaks of self-harm. None of that's changed since I first went in there, which was about 2000.

None of that has changed.

Julie Macken:

Louise, do you think the camps offshore, do you think they were constructed with demolishing the people in mind?

What was guiding the construction of all of those, apart from a desperate necessity to get thousands of people-

Louise Newman:

Deterrence.

I think that's, it was a politics of deterrence with the human price minimized. I'm not sure if they would've consciously said... although if you speak to someone like Peter Young, Peter's got very strong views that it probably was conscious.

I'm a bit unclear, because I still find it so monstrous, but that's my issue. But yes, I think they were well aware that deterrence meant that people suffer, particularly after they... No, when we were going in there to [Baxter 00:40:46], [Woomera 00:40:46], where people were just sitting there slashing themselves. People are burying, I saw people bury themselves in the sand, to try and die.

We saw people on the roofs. We saw people attempting to strangle themselves and hang themselves on a mass scale. Nothing prepares you for that.

But a remarkable thing to witness, but a remarkable sort of mass breakdown of the human will to live or cope.

Louise Newman:

Now, were they aware of it? Yes.

The guys were there witnessing it.

Were some of them complicit in saying, "Well, you may as well kill yourself. Nothing is going to safe you." Absolutely. Absolutely. That's being complicit with what was going on. There was not even, among some there was no pretence denying it.

When we have those Woomera breakouts, that was a good thing to witness, and that the nuns were there smuggling people, some of those kids out, fantastic. And then some of us ended up having them sheltered in our homes.

I think that was a very important social movement to be part of. But were the authorities aware of what they were doing?

On some level, of course.

Louise Newman:

It's like if you're a collaborator or a bystander, you are complicit. I use that sort of notion.

It's no different. If you were living next door to a concentration camp and you saw the smokestack, you knew on some level, even if it wasn't fully conscious, what was happening.

You knew.

So I think the notion of the bystander is an interesting one to think about in these.

Louise Newman:

Some of the guards, on an individual level, I've met people who became whistle-blowers who were good people, who have suffered immensely for what they lived through, was still very opposed to what they saw, and are still active. So it's not a uniform... But, it is a corrupt system that corrupts individuals. It's like the prison experiments, where people pretending to be guards, become the guards. And they took it on with great gusto. Yeah. So there was awareness.

Julie Macken:

There is something, isn't there about, over all of this time we act as if we can get away with murder, and it doesn't count. That it's not real somehow.

I'm really fascinated by our capacity, collectively, to have things like the Nauru papers, big tranches of revelation about really horrific abuse, for us to know that and-

Louise Newman:

Well, the rape of the women on Nauru.

Julie Macken:

On Nauru.

Louise Newman:

Yeah, it's a war crime.

Why I haven't met a woman who's not been sexually assaulted on Nauru.

They were all the ones I've seen.

It's remarkable.

Julie Macken:

They... Me, Carmen Lawrence, Pamela Curr, Wendy Bacon, Claire O'Connor, the report we wrote about that got enormous pick-up internationally, like everywhere.

Louise Newman:

Yeah, internationally.

Not here.

Julie Macken:

Not here.

It was really extraordinary.

I'm fielding calls from Russia, Canada, Germany, America….

Louise Newman:

Ah, of course. Absolutely. As it should have been, but no.

I work with George Newhouse, so I'm doing, we're still doing cases of raped women of Nauru. And trying to get justice for all of them. And retribution for them. And they are still suffering all these years after those events.

Women have no access to reproductive health, to abortion, they're doing S99, again.

It's tragic.

It is tragic. But no, there was no acknowledgement for this... I mean fleetingly, and it was a very important report, I thought it was excellent.

But it didn't get what it should have here, because we are into denial on a mass scale.

And when you say, can we get away with it?

And we have.

Julie Macken:

We have got away with murder.

Louise Newman:

We have.

It's happened.

That's a hard thing as well, that the worst has happened.

What Australia has to come to terms with in many ways, is that we have failed. We have morally failed.

And we are culpable in the same way as the indigenous Australia.

And then you get these terrible arguments, "Oh, but I didn't know about it. Therefor I'm not guilty."

Julie Macken:

Yeah. And the same people-

Louise Newman:

It's not about individual guilt. They don't have either.

Julie Macken:

There's also, the same people will bang on about the importance of ANZAC Day as if they were there.

And of course they weren't there.

But they're going to take all the glory for it.

Louise Newman:

Well and lacking that capacity to turn it into something else, which is a day to think about the horror and atrocity of war. And that we shouldn't be in Afghanistan, whatever. But whichever war it was.

So when I grew up and seeing the Vietnam protests, which my mother was very active in. Those were my first exposure to these sorts of things when I was very young. But I think that shapes you if you have that sort of notion that it is not acceptable what we're doing. And it's not inevitable.

There's a sort of, Australia has a sad passivity. We were passive throughout the '40s and '50s. It's like collective denial that badness exist.

I find that very frustrating myself.

I'm someone more, and I think most people on the left are more, "Well, yes. You have to expose badness."

Julie Macken:

So, what do we do about it?

Louise Newman:

You do try and do something about it. You don't put your head in the sand and say, "It's not there."

Whereas middle-class Australia, particularly, and the aspirational class is supported by the Liberal Party, as if that's a notion that we should aspire to.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Aspirational.

Julie Macken:

I want to be middle-class.

Louise Newman:

And they don't know what it is.

But it's fascinating.

I think there's something about Australian culture, or dominant culture, is about, "We are the charmed people.

We live in a part of the world that we can just ignore the rest of it around us. Say that it's not ours. And we make ourselves wealthy and prosperous."

A sort of naivety.

Julie Macken:

That's right.

But part of what I'm trying to do too is suggest that, if this is true, if we have got this kind of affective state of melancholia, then it's not just about what we're doing to others, it's also reflected in our own inability to protect each other, to deal with climate change, to actually create safe communities, to stop killing women. It actually plays out.

We don't get away with murder in the sense that we are far more impoverished today than we were 20 years ago.

Louise Newman:

Well, the irony is that we sow the seeds of our own destruction, which is exactly what we're doing. We're in this state of denial, we can't acknowledge things, climate change is a very good example. We are sowing the seeds of global destruction, but certainly destruction of really valuable things here.

And yet, we pretend it doesn't happen.

Like the fires, like the fact that there's heatwaves, which you're probably experiencing.

I don't know how hot it is there now, but it's terrifying.

Julie Macken:

It was 43 here yesterday.

And I spend all of last summer, I'm in the RFS and-

Louise Newman:

Shocking that this is actually allowed to go on.

Julie Macken:

The fires?

Louise Newman:

Yeah.

Julie Macken:

The fires that we were fighting, you can't fight them.

You just can't get everyone out of the way.

Louise Newman:

You can't.

Julie Macken:

Which is kind of-

Louise Newman:

And it's like the fire is denial in the States. It's a similar sort of thing.

If we say it's not real, it doesn't really matter.

On an individual level, but on a collective level. For that, not only for democracy and lives, but for the actual survival of the population, this is literal life and death.

We're in the major stage of not wanting to acknowledge.

There are many examples of that, but I think that's right. I think that's a good point to emphasize. There is a price to be paid for denial and trying to live the happy…

Julie Macken:

Relaxed and comfortable life.

Yeah.

We are not relaxed and comfortable.

We are frightened, we are distrustful-

Louise Newman:

Yeah, people are trying to be calm and like, "Oh, everything will be all right." But underneath that, there's huge social anxiety. And that gets acted out in various ways. There's escapism as a tendency.

What do we try and do? What do we watch? What movies to we watch? What's considered entertainment?

With this reality TV, and exposing celebrities to nasty animals, and bad things to eat.

If we find this mind-numbing, but incredibly popular.

Louise Newman:

And I think that the issue is why? What was the lure of that?

Because it's a not thinking and seeing other people suffer in a funny way. And that dehumanizes everyone. It's not funny to have people screaming because some hideous spiders are on them. And this sort of stuff. I don't find that funny at all. I find it gross.

And yet, that's escapist.

So we can see others who are worse than us. Now the asylum seeker is the most disavowed, unwanted person in the world, dispossessed of the earth, and we can look at them and say, "Oh, aren't we lucky? We have a stable society at home. We're all the same here. And we need to keep it like that, because it's safe."

Julie Macken:

Which kind of brings me to the last question.

If the Australian state was a patient, was your patient, how would you treat it?

Louise Newman:

I think it's a combination of first working out how much people can start the process of coming to terms with what reality is.

And that's a very harsh thing to say on one level, but as long as people who've suffered any form of abuse... I treat a lot of women who've experienced sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse.

On one level they have very clear memories and the impacts of that.

On some other level, they might not want to think about it at all. It's always that very difficult issue of helping people come to terms with the fact that, "My parents," usually parents, "my father, whoever, my mother who is meant to care for me, who I love, did this bad thing to me." I've treated survivors of institutional abuse.

The Catholic Church people. Many of those people are struggling with that their whole lives. The church which symbolized-

Julie Macken:

God.

Louise Newman:

... faith, connection, blah, blah, blah, was the place that [e abusers and harmed them right up to, depending on your views on. The process though is not to assume things say, "No, you just have to come to terms with it." I don't think that psychiatrists have used and psychologists use that, "Oh, you just have to come to terms with what happened to you."

I think it's a much more subtle process of, on the one level yes, there's acceptance. But there's also the moral discussion we have to have.

And collectively I think our national psyche needs to have a moral discussion.

Louise Newman:

I'm not that person with any particular religion, but I talk a lot to Barney Schwarz, and I always talk to him and he's writing his religious pieces.

He's a marvellous no, he's a good journalist and he's done a lot over the years obviously, but just the fundamentals of a humanitarian, and I'm a humanist, we can have discussions about morals and values.

Louise Newman:

We're in the midst of the collapse of collective values. Or the basics as you were pointing out to me about the fact that we can kill people, the fact that we are psychologically torturing people. The fact that we locked children up from birth until they're two and a half years of age and they're damaged for life.

This is a form of collective madness.

I think we need to be able to name that. But to help people survive it. A lot of people can kill themselves and the fact that, in the face of acknowledging how bad things are, happened well after the holocaust, like Primo Levi.

He had to die. He told his story, he wrote his memoir, and he killed himself. That's when he jumped from the staircase. The horror of what he had come to terms with, was too much to bear as a human.

We don't want that.

Louise Newman:

Therapeutically, it's a national healing.

The same applies and overcoming the sins of our creation. I don't think it's easy, but that's what I'd engage in.

A moral discussion.

A reconstruction of core values. And maybe as we face calamity, climate whatever, a virus running around, it is actually something we're much more likely to go and have discussions about.

I think there's been some positive signs that people are actually having those re-evaluation processes, whether they maintain it or, when they think we're safe, they start running around again and doing exact same mass consumerism as they were doing previously, but maybe not. That's how I think about it.

Julie Macken:

I've often thought that Keating and Howard represented two different styles of parenting.

That Keating said to the nation, "Look. Time you left home. Time you grew up. Get to know your neighbours. We're going to get rid of all the tariffs, all the protections, all of that bullshit. We're actually going to start telling the truth about who we are. We're fabulous. You're fabulous. But we're going to do that. And actually, life is tough. But it's going to be okay."

Julie Macken:

Howard came along and said, "You can live with me and Janette in Wollstonecraft, in the suburbs. You don't need to leave home. Forget your Asian neighbours, let's reattach ourselves to the motherland. Reattach ourselves to all of that shit."

Julie Macken:

In a sense, this is the price we're paying for having never left home.

There is something quite creepy about that. And that's where I think Klein's work about the paranoid-schizoid state, when you look at that and you go, "How does the infant move on from the bad and good?"

Well, through the recognition of her capacity to hurt her mother.

Louise Newman:

That's right. And dealing with that anger, and those impulses.

Julie Macken:

That's right.

Louise Newman:

I don't know if you've read, I thought, I was very much …

And forget what year it was written, but Christopher Lasch wrote The Culture of Narcissism?

Julie Macken:

No.

Louise Newman:

… is the age. I thought it was particularly, no it's populist in a way, but he talks about the price that, particularly he's talking about America, but the price that's paid, and it came out in about the '70s or early '80s, but about mass narcissism and the impacts of narcissistic culture on self-development.

And I've thought about that quite a lot over the years, about just the lack of capacity to deal with over affect, and our lack of core sense of values, our absolute lack of true connection with others. And he writes about that from a sociological perspective.

I think that's quite nice, because it's a nice-

Julie Macken:

I'll have a look at it.

For moments of hope, I look at 2019 election, federal election, was the first one since 1999, where refugee bashing didn't feature.

And it didn't feature, because the Christchurch massacre happened just as the very start of it. And what we had in Jacinda Ardern and in the New Zealand people, is an example of mourning.

Louise Newman:

Yes. And she is a person of values.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Louise Newman:

She suits my way of thinking, because she actually just exhibited it in a human way. It didn't matter whatever policy she had on X, Y and Z.

There are some things that collectively we need to acknowledge and she expressed her feelings about it.

And she could comfort others who we were different from her.

Julie Macken:

That's right.

Louise Newman:

She could hold that Muslim woman and bear with her.

Julie Macken:

And wear the hajib out of respect.

Louise Newman:

And she'd wear that. Yeah. It was real.

That's something that people resonated with.

So New Zealand's certainly risen to that.

Julie Macken:

Well, I think-

Louise Newman:

ScoMo doesn't quite do it, despite all his empathy training and everything they paid money for. The man's just-

Julie Macken:

He's so facile.

Julie Macken:

That experience of him during the fires where he went up to that young woman, grabbed her hand.

Louise Newman:

Oh, grabbing her.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Louise Newman:

Yeah, no. He was appalling. He was utterly, utterly appalling.

Julie Macken:

But I guess I looked at that 2019 election and go, there was a brief moment where feeling ashamed of what an Australian had done, was sufficient to stop us doing our normal refugee-hating.

Louise Newman:

Yeah. Sure.

Julie Macken:

And I think, then I'm looking to, who are invariably the women that can actually bring Australia back to mourning.

Louise Newman:

Yeah. I think so. I agree with that.

Louise Newman:

I may have to dash off [crosstalk 00:58:40].

Julie Macken:

Yeah, yeah. Look, thank you so much for your time.

Professor Michael Dudley

4 December 20200

First Interview

UNSW

Dr Michael Dudley AM is a Senior Staff Specialist in Psychiatry with Sydney's Prince of Wales Hospital Adolescent Service and Conjoint Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry, University of New South Wales. He primarily works as a clinician to young people, families and parents in an adolescent mental health service. As a conjoint academic, he is involved in teaching suicide prevention and youth mental health to medical students at UNSW, and serves on various boards and committees. He maintains interests in rural and Indigenous suicide and mental health issues, ethics, and the role of religion/spirituality and mental health in contemporary culture. In 2011 Michael became a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for work in child and adolescent mental health and a range of professional associations and has been acknowledged by the NSW Health Department's Better Health Awards, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry and ReachOut.com.

Michael Dudley

Julie Macken:
Great, okay.

Michael Dudley:
Yeah.

Julie Macken:
Yeah, so … and that entailed reading a lot of the SAS report.

Michael Dudley:
Oh, my goodness, yeah.
You ended up reading the report?
Yeah.

Julie Macken:
Yeah,
And I'll tell you what, Michael, I can't imagine what was redacted,
Because what wasn't redacted was-

Michael Dudley:
It was horrific.

Julie Macken:
... the most shocking stuff I've ever read.

Michael Dudley:
It was terrifying stuff, anyway.

Julie Macken:
It was just ... Yeah.

Michael Dudley:
I read that sociologist's ... I haven't read the report…I have to say that at the outset, unlike you.
But I remember ... Was its Samantha Crompvoets who said, "Look, what's all this backpedalling about?" about not withdrawing the citation for the whole regiment or whatever?
Given that anyone saying that presumably hasn't read the report, everyone was complicit in this.

Julie Macken:

Either complicit or so incompetent they shouldn't have been in the job.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, so incompetent they shouldn't have been in the job.

Clearly, at a certain level, everyone knew.

Julie Macken:

Everyone knew. Also, you get ...

By the end of the report, it's really clear, it is so common, it is so repeated, the abuses are in a very well-established pattern, that you couldn't ...

It's not a random one-off.

Michael Dudley:

No, no. Sure.

Julie Macken:

It is years of… "This is how we do it."

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, yeah.

Absolutely right.

Julie Macken:

You're almost the last one, although I'm still trying to find Peter Young.

I'll email him.

Michael Dudley:

Have you got Peter's emails and stuff?

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

I interviewed Jon Juridini yesterday and Louise Newman the day before, and David Isaac the week before that.

I guess what I'm trying to do ... I'll go through the seven questions, but what I'm trying to do is not just ... I didn't want to interview anyone who had been tortured themselves or abused themselves, because I don't have the skill for that.

I guess what I'm looking for with you guys is kind of ...

You are in the mediating space, so to pick up what you think about that, and then, of course, the last question, which I'll get to.

Just to start off, I'm sure it was in ... Was it 2000 or 2001 that you had formed the Mental Health Alliance for Refugees?

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, it was in 2001.

Julie Macken:

That was the first time I heard you guys.

Michael Dudley:

There was a conference down at UNSW at the later part of that year, December.

I think Louise and I, that's-

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

That's the story they wouldn't run for me at the Financial Review when I was trying to cover it.

Michael Dudley:

Okay.

Already, the censorship was happening?

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

The editor was very clear.

He said, "I'll never run a story that suggests Australia uses torture, because we don't."

I said, "These guys are saying that we do, and they've got all this research."

He said, "They're wrong. We don't. It won't happen,"

So that was that.

Michael Dudley:

That was that?

Wow.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Michael Dudley:

It's interesting how it's turned, isn't it?

It's interesting, because we had Ruddock saying in 2002 detention is humane and that people are well-served by it.

He's on the record as saying that.

We had to fight this battle about the fact that it was actually injurious to people.

The whole thing about the harms had to be fought at the outset.

Julie Macken:

I guess what you guys did is, first of all, research it, get the evidence to say this is harmful.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah.

Julie Macken:

I'll just go through the questions, and then hopefully, we can pick up stuff more broadly.

How would you describe the conditions in Australia's detention facilities?

I'm not sure if you've been to any of the offshore facilities or not, so you can decide whether you restrict remarks to onshore ...or all of them.

Michael Dudley:

I'm going to cross-reference my paper that's just come out, which I haven't seen yet, but it's about to come out this week.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, okay. I haven't been to the offshore facilities.

I've applied to, but I've been refused.

They're diabolical.

Basically, the situation is that people are kept indefinitely, and that means that no one has a future. They live in that uncertainty, which comprises frequent pandemonium, abrupt change, and endless waiting with no end in sight.

There's a kind of terror interspersed with extreme boredom and extreme conditions, of course.

The climatic conditions are frequently dire.

Michael Dudley:

What people are exposed to, of course, is awful, as you know, I'm sure, from talking to everyone having been in this space for so long.

People basically witness violent acts, they see a lot of self-harm, they are brutalized, they basically are stigmatized and racially vilified often, and that still happens.

They basically are dehumanized in a range of ways.

Julie Macken:

When I mention to various folk around the place of what I'm writing about when I use the term torture, a common response is, they go, "Look, it's unpleasant, and probably, the conditions aren't great, but they're not actually being tortured. No one's electrocuting them, waterboarding them, hurting them."

I then go, "What do you consider to be psychological torture?"

They go, "Oh, that's not torture."

Could you speak a bit about how human beings ... how we construct our sense of self?

How vulnerable is our sense of self, our sense of identity, and what role does being safe play in the construction of mental health?

Michael Dudley:

It's totally fundamental.

You can't divide the psychological and the physical in torture.

Pain is pain.

It's a complete experience.

Safety is absolutely fundamental.

Security of attachment is fundamental.

Justice is fundamental.

Having a meaningful sense of what you're doing is fundamental.

Derrick Silove outlines this in his amazing article he wrote about 20 years ago, which I can find for you if you're interested. It's a thing on the desiderata of successful refugee work, but also its broader about the human project, really. People need that, and they are deprived of it.

Michael Dudley:

It is torture, because respectable, or thoughtful commentary within the medical profession has called it that.

That's not trivial.

Regardless of what the law thinks ...

Leave that aside for a minute. Regardless of what the law thinks, the medical people who are upfront against this at the coalface observing it know that people are being basically misused.

Michael Dudley:

If you trace the argument ... What would cause this argument is health professionals confronting intentional harms of indefinite immigration detention.

You've got to work from the harms backwards. The harms are proven now.

They were debatable in 2002, when Philip Ruddock said that detention was humane, but a lot of research went into proving those harms. The harms are absolutely crystal clear.

The government actually knows of them.

They are absolutely clear.

They have absolute knowledge about this.

They've done research that confirms this, and they're on the record. I've cited places where Morrison's on the record as acknowledging the harms that they are creating.

He's actually acknowledged it himself, in person.

We have successive governments being aware of the harms and yet doing nothing.

Michael Dudley:

You'd have to say, at an absolute minimum, this is the medical argument, there's a case for neglect, a case for neglect of injuries. They do nothing to remediate the injuries, but also, the abuse, because they essentially persecute people when they want them to repatriate.

The whole thing about deterrence is that that prevails.

In fact, the passage where Morrison is quoted as knowing what's going on with the harms, which I've cited in the 2014 Forgotten Children hearings ... It's very clear that the end justifies the means.

You can do what you like in the service of policy, and the policy is that people will be deterred, and if they don't take notice, this is what will happen to them.

This has been Morrison's refrain.

It was his refrain before the Reza Barati riots that he set off.

That was what caused the riots.

Michael Dudley:

Basically, there's no question that they not only neglect the injuries of people, which they're fully aware of, fully apprised of, but they also abuse people.

The abuse is that they make people suffer in order to repatriate.

That's Peter Young's argument.

I thought Peter, in that wonderful interview with David Marr and Oliver Laughland, it was, back in 2014 in the Guardian-

Julie Macken:

Oh, okay, the Guardian.

Michael Dudley:

... 5th of August 2014. Look it up.

You probably have it on the system, but that's one of my favourite references. Peter was just breathtaking.

I rang him that day, and I said, "Peter, you have absolutely nailed it." The whole quote of that interview, the whole way that he lays it out, is just perfect.

There's no question that that is what they intend.

Michael Dudley:

The medical people have been talking about this for a long time. The legal people have been unclear, but it's very clear, despite the recent judgment early this year by the OTP, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, that they engage in cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in respect of arbitrary detention.

They confirm that we do that.

That's clear, and we ought to be taking that really seriously.

The folks from the Stanford Legal Centre have made a very clear argument that we definitely torture people. They said the OTP went really light on the government.

These are 17 international war experts who've systematically examined the documents and make a very convincing case about why that is the case.

Julie Macken:

I've got some memory-

Michael Dudley:

They say that they've got a prior plan, they basically ... I've read the whole report. I've read the GLAN report. It's really extensive.

Basically, the OTP says that they don't persecute because it's got to be deliberate, and torture's not sufficiently severe, and that's what you just said a moment ago, and criminal deportation is ruled out because asylum seekers weren't lawfully present in the deportation zone, but the OTP argued

that basically, the deterrence is central to the whole thing, and government officials and corporate actors demonstrably known control conditions as direct or co-perpetrators in a complex common plan.

They convincingly understand and unarguably accept indefinite detention's harms as part of systematically attacking the civilian population.

Michael Dudley:

There's inside witnesses they've got.

They've got Greg Lake on record, and they've got a whole lot of people saying, "Let's get these young children out there, let's get the young children looking like they're being really brutalized and beaten up so that we can send messages back to their folks back in Southeast Asia," … or wherever they're coming from.

Clearly, it's designed to cause intense suffering to people.

Julie Macken:

A group I started with, Carmen Lawrence, Wendy Bacon, and Pamela Curr, looking at the conditions of women in Nauru ...

Out of that, one of those women was a Somali woman who had been raped in a very violent fashion. She had, of course, been sent from Somalia. Her family gave everything they had to get her out of Somalia, because of course, rape is a weapon of war there, and they knew that.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, of course it is.

Julie Macken:

She did not want them to know what had happened to her, because she knew it would kind of kill them, and then the Mercer Public Relations, which is Nauru's Public Relations arm, released her name and all of the medical details of the attack internationally.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, I think I heard that.

Julie Macken:

We worked with George Newhouse and the OECD to try and get some redress for her and stuff.

In the end, what we got was forcing them to apologize and not do that, but the most sinister part of that is that was part of the government's deterrence.

They knew, the Australian government knows, that this'll get back to her country, that it all goes to say, "If you're thinking of trying to save your daughters there, don't send them here."

It was so sick.

Michael Dudley:

That's an amazing example.

Michael Dudley:

I read the case. I didn't connect the dots.

That makes a lot of sense that they actually conspired to deliberately release it.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

I guess there are two questions in particular that I'd really like to hear your thinking on, because in a sense, you've answered two, three, and four just then.

Just in that short period of time, we have talked about publicly available information that shows that Australia is using torture as a policy position to deter people from coming. It's a way of controlling our borders.

Have you had any time to reflect on how this would make Australians feel about Australians? Can you see any relationship?

Is there a relationship between this kind of state abuse through the political class and a corrosion of moral values in the community, or security in the community, or trust, or safety?

Michael Dudley:

I think it's certainly got a major potential for that if people don't shout out about it.

Unless there's an outcry, then everyone knows. It's like the Leonard Cohen song. Everybody knows.

We all knew in 2014. I think by about that time, everybody knows that there's a stink to high heaven.

In 2004, I might make this point, but the 2004 stuff was debatable whether the harms actually were occurring.

The 2014 response from government was not to question the harms, it was to go for the messenger.

Michael Dudley:

It's really cynical.

I think the populous knew from that interaction, which was incredibly public, that there was something really significant at stake, and there was a lot of debate around that, there was the Nauru Files, and these repeated-

Julie Macken:

Revelations.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, revelations, and what flowed from that in 2016, '17, and '18 … those successive movements, “Bring Them Here”… and all of that stuff which attained quite a degree of public prominence with the children and so on, but generally, the Medevac stuff ...

People know that our government is set on a certain policy which they're not going to vary on.

Some people see that as justified, and I'm talking about community opinion, but I think that the government also keeps stuff out of sight, so people aren't forced to look at this and they have opinions when they're not forced to look at stuff.

Julie Macken:

You got into a lot of trouble when you said what you saw what a lot of the government of the day was doing as grooming the nation in the same way Germany and Germans had been groomed.

Can you talk a bit about ...

What did you mean by that?

Michael Dudley:

Well, my critics didn't read the article, which was very, very carefully worded.

I wasn't saying that what we've got here is akin to the Holocaust or to extermination camps. I wasn't saying that.

I was very, very clear of what I said.

I said in terms of where these things can go, there was a whole process that leads to that final outcome. I'm not saying that's where we're going here.

We're a different society, different conditions.

However, the price of democracy is eternal vigilance.

Michael Dudley:

I meant that in Nazi Germany, clearly, people like Jews and other groups were basically placed in situations where they were actually systematically and serially marginalized…

Firstly, their stuff was taken away, they were prevented from working, they were prevented from earning a living in certain professions, they had to move locations to certain central locations. There's a whole series of things. There was the series of ... There's the 1935 marriage laws and the other laws that went with that ... I can't remember, there's two lots of laws that went together in that bill.

There was a series of actions, and the rest of Germany was going on just fine. Hitler was building autobahns, he was getting the nation going, he was doing all the right things.

He was the love of Europe.

He was making a big success of this newly risen country that was really thriving and showing the way.

So many British people, for one, came on board at that time.

Michael Dudley:

What argument am I making here? I'm saying that the majority being comfortable ...

It's like the Watership Down stuff again.

You take a rabbit here, a rabbit there, and provided the rest are unaware or-

Julie Macken:

Relaxed and comfortable.

Michael Dudley:

... relaxed and comfortable, correct, exactly right, Howard's words, we're not going to worry too much.

I just think that that reduces, and it compromises all of us to be in that position.

It's that famous quote, Martin Niemöller's quote, isn't it, where they came for the Jews, and they came for the Communists, and they came for-

Julie Macken:

... the Unions, yeah.

Michael Dudley:

Exactly.

They came for the unions, and I didn't stand up for any of those, and then they finally came for me, etc.

Julie Macken:

Now there's no one left.

Michael Dudley:

There's no one left, exactly.

Julie Macken:

Grooming's a really particular word, though, isn't it?

Michael Dudley:

I didn't use the word grooming.

Julie Macken:

Oh, didn't you?

Michael Dudley:

No.

Did someone report this?

Julie Macken:

Yes.

Totally.

That was the quote.

Michael Dudley:

Well, that's interesting.

That's a misquote.

I didn't say grooming.

I guess in a sense, that's reasonable.

It's got echoes of something else, doesn't it?

Julie Macken:

It does.

That's really interesting that you didn't use it.

Michael Dudley:

No, I didn't use that, but that's got an echo of something else to it.

Julie Macken:

Which is what Peter Dutton always goes on about-

Michael Dudley:

That's really interesting-

Julie Macken:

His attacks on-

Michael Dudley:

Perhaps I should have used the word grooming.

I'm sorry, I'm really stepping out on a limb, here, but that's very interesting that someone did it for me.

Julie Macken:

Yes. If you Google you and grooming-

Michael Dudley:

I fancy that. I'll do that.

Julie Macken:

It also got me thinking ... Peter Dutton often attacks asylum seekers and refugees under the guise that they're paedophiles.

Even that riot kicked off when all of that was happening, and he said, "Well, there was six refugees walking into camp with a child. You tell me what was going on."

Of course, the guards said, "No, mate. That wasn't going on. A lot of the kids come over and grab some food."

Michael Dudley:

... and grab some food, exactly.

Julie Macken:

"No, that wasn't happening." Dutton kept saying it.

He kept saying, "I'm not going to have paedophiles-"

Michael Dudley:

Yeah

Julie Macken:

Yeah. If you Google Peter Dutton and the word paedophiles, you will see a lot of hits. I thought, "Actually-"

Michael Dudley:

Thanks Julie, I'll check that one out.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Michael Dudley:

I didn't realize that. I had a meeting with the AJN, the Australian Jewish News, about it.

The Jewish lobby, if I can use that term advisedly, and I didn't use that term ...

There are halls of power … and what I wrote about ...

They said the Holocaust is unique, and they don't want it in any way used to apply to other situations.

Julie Macken:

Yeah, meaning a Rwanda, or-

Michael Dudley:

Exactly. People disagree with them about that, of course.

There are people all around the world who are genocide experts who'd say-

Julie Macken:

Yeah, and there are plenty of people ... Palestinians who would also say-

Michael Dudley:

Exactly.

It's time that we actually looked at the lessons from the point of view of extrapolation.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Well, do have a look at that.

I read that term, you quoted as using that term, in a number of different media-

Michael Dudley:

Okay. That's very interesting. I think that it reduces all of us morally, and I think the only thing that we can do, in a way, or what we have to keep doing is speaking out about it.

We have to keep proclaiming what's going on, and that requires freedom of the press, to some extent-

Julie Macken:

But also curiosity of the press.

Michael Dudley:

Curiosity of the press, correct.

The press is not a uniform thing, is it?

Julie Macken:

No.

I can't tell you how hard it was to get every single story-

Michael Dudley:

I'm sure.

You know would know better than I would.

Julie Macken:

I know colleagues at the ABC-

Michael Dudley:

Wouldn't have touched it-

Julie Macken:

... were told, "We are not going to do any more of those bloody refugee stories because they're really depressing,"

Which kind of gets me to the last question, which is, if the Australian state was a patient of yours, how would you treat it?

Michael Dudley:

I was listening to Jenny Hocking last night on the dismissal and the government ... the response of the palace letters, and the ... yeah, this Martin Charteris and the involvement of the Queen and so on, about Prince Charles and the … actually talked to … Kerr talked to Whitlam about actually what happened and what he was intending.

The key words that they used in that context was that Kerr at no point did what the Governor General is meant to do for the Prime Minister.

They're meant to have a collegiate relationship, almost, but the duties of the Governor General are to advise, to counsel, and to warn.

I thought, "That's pretty good."

Michael Dudley:

That almost fits here in a way, too. It's sort of like having that job where you actually ... almost like you're a mentor, you're an elder to the person who's got the top job.

You are the advisor and counsellor.

You have to have wise counsel, and you have to warn, I think, if they're going off the rails. You have to also have a prophetic voice. That's what we don't have here, except in certain quarters.

It's been very hard to ... It has happened, or it has been that way at times.

People have spoken out about it, but it's been very hard. It's like a prophecy not being acknowledged-

Julie Macken:

Welcome in their own term, yeah.

Michael Dudley:

Correct. The people are … correct.

Julie Macken:

I'm using the frame of mourning and melancholia to understand this, and part of looking at the melancholic, as described by Freud and then further elaborated on, really, by Kline in her paranoid schizoid state and moving to the depressive state.

I guess I would look at the paranoid schizoid state as reflecting the melancholic, the splitting, the narcissism, the sadism in the tale, the compulsive repetition that goes on there, and the fear of the symbolic, the fear of the metaphoric, and the lifelessness.

Freud talks about, how can you be anything but lifeless if you're bearing the reality of death so deeply?

It actually ... You choke off your own life.

I'm looking at The Australian today and over the last years and saying, "Where are we showing this compulsive repetition? Where are we showing this inability to move forward? Where are we strangling off life? Where are we caught in a narcissistic twist, and of course, where are the signs-
"

Julie Macken:

No, that's all right. That's just a reminder that that's the frame I'm using-

Michael Dudley:

It's great. It's a fascinating frame, and it's really important, what you're-

Julie Macken:

It gets down to ... I guess the question is, is it fair to try and read Australia in a psychoanalytic way?

Is that fair?

Then I think, hang on, nations are imagined communities. That's all we are.

We're a group of people who have agreed to a common imagination about how we'll, democratically or otherwise ...

We build up our stories about who we are, we give ourselves flags and anthems and systems of law ... It's all imagined.

It's actually kind of not real.

Michael Dudley:

Have you read Ross Poole?

Julie Macken:

No.

Michael Dudley:

P-O-O-L-E. Australian, now New York, has published several wonderful books on nationalism with a particular reference to Australia.

He's a terrific writer.

Julie Macken:

From that ... We are a-

Michael Dudley:

An imagined community.

Julie Macken:

Yeah. That's what we are, and we are driven by affect. I'm looking back, and I'm thinking, from Whitlam through to the Redfern speech of Paul Keating's, that being a period of really clearly calling out our violent past, really trying to lay to rest the truth of white Australia and its implications of violence and the need for redress, the need to make amends, and both of those men, and Hawke, and Fraser, all of those men particularly talked about the need for the imagination, because it leads us to empathy.

Without an imagination, we actually can't empathize with another human being.

We can't imagine what they're going through.

Again, that mourning and imagination was two very powerful points Freud made in the process of that, and it was the very thing that the melancholic rejects utterly, which is why there's so much superficiality around the melancholic.

Julie Macken:

Part of what I'm looking at is, where is there signs of hope? Where are we returning to the very life-affirming work of mourning?

Where are we moving from the paranoid schizoid stage into the depressive stage, where we understand our capacity to harm the other and are sad about it and don't glory in it?

I guess through all of that, what I've been wondering recently, too, because of the bushfires and because of the pandemic, I'm also wondering about the restorative healing role that comes from a recognition of interdependence on each other. I'm wondering what you think of that, Michael.

I'm kind of trying to ... These are the kind of structures that I'm-

Michael Dudley:

Look, it's true.

This is absolutely right about our interdependence and our need for each other to bring things together.

I totally agree.

Now I'm thinking of Rabbi Sacks, who recently died, his two books, To Heal a Fractured World and The Dignity of Difference.

He's written lots of books, but those books were just outstanding on this thematic territory.

Michael Dudley:

Look, I think we've historically ... We are still in dire straits about our position on Aboriginal people, and I think we still are not taking it seriously, despite them moving very quickly now on

these, and I think the public also is ... There's a groundswell, to some extent, publicly about recognition of Aboriginal people at a deeper level, which is not translating in the Canberra bubble at this point.

The ridiculous recent thing about ... the latest in many insults about whether they'll fly the Aboriginal flag or whatever.

Julie Macken:

Oh, that's right, yeah.

Michael Dudley:

How ridiculous.

Yes, of course it matters, but they missed the whole point of the exchange that was happening.

There was a recent series on at UNSW called Voice, Treaty, Truth, which is ... I don't know whether you heard about it.

Julie Macken:

Yeah.

Michael Dudley:

It was breathtaking.

I thought that was absolutely breathtaking.

Julie Macken:

Was it Stan Grant?

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, Stan Grant. He was there, and so was Noel Pearson. Stan Grant gave a recent talk for the Colin Tatz Memorial Lecture, and that was also really good, at Government House, which I had the good fortune to attend.

Julie Macken:

I think that 1997, the Reconciliation Conference, there's John Howard getting ready to project all our stuff onto them again, which is what we do.

They stood up and turned their backs, which, metaphorically, is them saying, "We're not wearing your projection anymore."

Michael Dudley:

"We're not wearing it any longer."

Julie Macken:

From there, that's where the refugees played such a critical role-

Michael Dudley:

They did.

I totally agree about the connection. I think you're right.

It was the whole time of the History Wars. This was the thing where the History Wars kicked off and the black armband theory and Keith Windschuttle and Robert Mann had all those wonderful responses to that in the Quarterly and so on.

It was an astonishing period. That's still being fought out in some places.

That's still going on.

Julie Macken:

In a lot of ways, the pressure cooker that that was building up between white Australia feeling incredibly uncomfortable with being dragged back to this realization that we bought the grog, we smashed the culture ... There was a growing, "No, we didn't," and Black Australia saying, "Yeah, you did, and we're not going to help you with this anymore."

Michael Dudley:

"We can't help you with it anymore."

Julie Macken:

All of that psychic disturbance is actually resolved in vilifying the refugees.

Michael Dudley:

Well, it is, and other kind of marginal groups, as well. We treat welfare people … again, I was traveling to work this morning listening to the radio, and the discussions about the cashless debit card-

Julie Macken:

Yes, I heard that.

Michael Dudley:

Where did it start?

It started in East Kimberley, which is a heavily welfare-affected area, but it's also the place where the History Wars started.

Julie Macken:

Was it really?

Michael Dudley:

Yeah. The Forrest River Massacre is the origin for the History Wars.

I've just written-

Julie Macken:

Was that to do with Jandamarra up there?

Michael Dudley:

It was 30 years after Jandamarra. Jandamarra was in ...

Yeah, he was across the but yeah, this was in 1926.

This is a heavily disputed massacre.

This is what kicked off the whole History Wars thing with Windschuttle and others. It was a keen-

Julie Macken:

Isn't it amazing how sites ...

If I wasn't in Sydney, I would live full-time in Broome, near Kimberley.

It's the most extraordinary country in the world.

Michael Dudley:

It's an amazing country. Yeah, it is.

Julie Macken:

It doesn't surprise me, either, that it generates-

Michael Dudley:

This is frontier violence, yeah.

Julie Macken:

Yes.

Michael Dudley:

This is our heavy history of frontier violence which was kind of written down, and the events that took place ... There was a mission superintendent who blew the whistle on the police and got up a Royal Commission in Western Australia, which finding that the two constables had been involved in the burning of Aboriginal bodies and so on, and they went to trial, and of course, there wasn't enough evidence, because they'd systematically done such a good job.

Yes, exactly.

This was a pattern that happened in that area. It's a very important signal event. I don't think we'll ever come to terms with this, really, this kind of ... our legacy with Aboriginal people.

I totally agree with your comments about refugees and other groups, the way we still play this out with them. I think we still talk down to people, and we still need scapegoats, and we still need to basically be in control.

Julie Macken:

What do you do, Michael, as a psychiatrist, if you've got someone sitting in front of you, adult or child, who is doing that themselves, who is doing huge harm to people around them, is completely denying it, is pretending someone else is doing it or it's not being done at all, and you're thinking to yourself, "This person will go on to do enormous harm if they don't come to grips with what they're actually doing?"

How do you treat that person, this imagined person?

Michael Dudley:

No, of course.

Look, it's, I think, a really good question. In the clinical context ... I'm not sure if it translates to the government context, so the bigger context.

The clinical context, I think, with someone doing that ... You wouldn't have a patient. You wouldn't have therapy.

It wouldn't be therapy, per se, it'd be management, what we call ... We'd actually be taking some control of the situation. If they were committing illegal-

Julie Macken:

Or violence against people.

Michael Dudley:

Precisely. We'd be warning people about this. We'd be telling the police or warning next of kin or stuff like that.

We're basically taking executive action, because we'd have those powers and, in fact, those obligations to do that.

Julie Macken:

Your first port of call would be boundaries?

You'd actually contain this?

Michael Dudley:

Right, you'd contain it. You'd kind of give them feedback ...

Like I said a moment ago, if you thought they were going really off the rails, you'd basically warn them.

You'd have to say, "There's no way that I think we can agree on this."

I suppose the question arises about how you actually try to create empathy with people who don't seem to have any.

I suppose with criminals, you're trying to read it from the inside the way they would do it, like serious violent criminals.

We're talking about forensic psychiatry.

You're trying to understand the violence from the inside, to some extent, without condoning or excusing it, and you then try and say, "Well, this is your experience, but why are you doing this to X or Y?"

Julie Macken:

The chances are they would say back, "Actually, I'm the one who's being hurt here."

Michael Dudley:

Yes, indeed. They might well say that. I guess I've just ... Sorry, I'm spinning off my recent TV watching, which is ... I've just finished watching The Alienist, which is a-

Julie Macken:

The what?

Michael Dudley:

The Alienist, which is a series on early psychiatry. You know what alienists were-

Julie Macken:

Yeah, they were the early psychiatrists-

Michael Dudley:

Early psychiatrists, yeah. It's set in New York in 1890s. It's New York, and it's building a profile of a serial killer. It's not unlike what we do today, in the way, in forensic psychiatry, we're actually trying to understand what's going on with the person.

The point is that life is what life is.

Horrific things happen to people, and somehow, they have to own them, and we have to give whatever support we can to each other to help people get through and to not violate and to not pass along-

Julie Macken:

Pass it on.

What is really curious about the way white Australia in the embodiment of the federal government is doing at the moment, they are behaving as the victim to the refugee.

Every interview, Peter Dutton, the most powerful person in Australia positions himself as the victim. The absurd idea of trying to pass an amendment through the Senate to say it's okay to be white, as if being white is somehow imperilled and under threat ...

I'm just wondering how, just from a psychological point of view, the most brutal people invariably talk about themselves ... Donald Trump sees himself as a complete victim and persecuted by people.

Is there any capacity to turn that around in the state, to say, "No, you're very powerful, Peter, you're not a victim, and whites are safe?"

Michael Dudley:

I think that's entirely appropriate.

At a state level, I think you kind of ... You're basically presenting that ... You're unframing the reframe. They put it in these terms.

Dare I say it again, but the example of Hitler was also a really good example. The thing about the stab in the back, the fact that they did us down, and they weren't ... It all started back at the Versailles Treaty and played out with this myth that we had nothing to do with losing the war or even creating the war, we had no contribution to any of it, and we were basically ... etc.

It's creating a myth for people that's false about the fact that we're persecuted and-

Julie Macken:

We love myths, don't we?

Michael Dudley:

Yeah.

These are myths.

Yeah, we do love myths, ANZAC not being the least of them.

Julie Macken:

Yeah, well, even all our families have our own myths, we have our own personal myths about ourselves, and I think we pretend they're not powerful, but I think they are extraordinarily powerful.

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, indeed.

The Forrest River Massacre was committed by two or three ANZACs.

Julie Macken:

Oh, really?

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, I kid you not.

Read an article …. If you want a good article to read, the two things I'd recommend on this are Neville Green's The Forrest River Massacres, and there's also an article by Kate Auty, A-U-T-Y, which is a wonderful article called Patrick Bernard O'Leary and The Forrest River Massacres.

She's a lawyer who has now ... was in Canberra, I think, doing ... She's had an amazing and varied career, this woman. She's originally West Australian, and she researched this. It's really powerful on the ANZAC linkages.

Julie Macken:

Like the SAS linkages-

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, correct.

You want a link to the SAS?

Have a look at the Forrest River story.

Julie Macken:

Yeah. I've got to finish this to stop thinking about this stuff. Michael, thank you-

Michael Dudley:

Yeah, you wouldn't want to have to keep living with it.

Dr. Jon Juredini

1 December 2020

First Interview

Via Zoom

Jon Jureidini is a child psychiatrist at the Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide where he works with ill and disabled children and their families. He has also trained in philosophy (PhD, Flinders University), critical appraisal (University of British Columbia) and psychotherapy (Tavistock Clinic). He heads the University of Adelaide's:

- *Critical and Ethical Mental Health (CEMH) research group within the Robinson Research Institute, carrying out critical appraisal, meta-research, teaching, and advocacy in order to promote safer, more effective and more ethical research and practice in mental health*
- *Paediatric Mental Health Training Unit (PMHTU, adelaide.edu.au/pmhtu), providing training and support to GPs, allied health professionals, teachers and counsellors in non-pathologising approaches to primary care mental health.*