

Don Dale abuse: The NT Royal Commission and maintaining outrage

By Michelle Pini

3 August 2016



'Yard 3' area at Don Dale youth detention centre (image by Nadia Daly via @abc.net.au).

We cannot allow the promise of a Royal Commission into the juvenile detention system to appease our outrage so that a "Don Dale" can be repeated, writes deputy editor [Michelle Pini](#).

BECAUSE I am an editor I need to keep up with the news, but lately I am finding it difficult to digest.

Last week, terrified I would be bombarded with more horrific images of those poor children being tortured in Australia, I ignored the news and Twittersphere for a while and watched [The Bachelor](#) instead. A mind-numbingly silly show that is so bad it is escapism at its finest.

And it dawned on me that I am not alone. We are programmed to tune out when we reach overload. And this is why we have sickening situations such as the Don Dale scandal happening — even in

2016!

As news of the [horrendous acts](#) at [Don Dale Youth Detention Centre](#), captured on film for the world to see, continue to fuel public outrage, this morning I woke to a different, yet scarily familiar tone — the tone of commentators turning the issue around as evidence of “left wing bias”. Here are a couple of headlines:

- ‘Deadbeat parents failed the Don Dale Detention Centre boys’, (Janet Albrechtsen, [The Australian](#)).
- ‘Andrew Bolt: Don Dale and George Pell coverage shows ABC bias is now a menace’, ([Herald Sun](#)).

In what universe do "Deadbeat parents, even if true, mean it's OK to abuse children in our care?! <https://t.co/qeiG851zoQ>

— Michelle Pini (@vmp9) [August 3, 2016](#)

Now, I will admit that my views may be left of the (current) mainstream. However, I fail to see how having “deadbeat parents” (if indeed, this is accurate) justifies torturing the children in our care.

If children are born into unfortunate circumstances, does this mean it is okay for State-sanctioned abuse to be perpetrated upon them? Are we only meant to treat humanely those children lucky enough not to need our “care”? In what universe?

Increasingly, in ours it seems.

Those abused (whatever your political views) children at Don Dale are currently in the news. Most of us are sick to our stomachs. Most of us are outraged. Some of us are deeply ashamed.

Yet, as IA's Indigenous affairs editor [Natalie Cromb told us](#) last week:

Today, yesterday, the day before and every day before that, for the last 228 years, Aboriginal Australia has been speaking loud and clear that incidents of this nature are occurring all the time. ...

This is not unique and White Australia's "shock" and calls for a Royal Commission are, frankly, farcical.

In the 1960s, images of the Vietnam War (nicknamed the [Television War](#)) evoked deep and enduring emotion from the Australian public. Such overwhelming emotion felt by so many, of course, largely contributed to the end of the Vietnam war.

'How didn't you know?': Nigel Scullion confronted by angry NT community over Don Dale abuse <https://t.co/E0ZuMJuQDz> via [@smh](#) [#auspol](#)

— #BankRC Troublemaker (@MinhKular) [August 3, 2016](#)

Today, we are so accustomed to seeing vile, inhuman atrocities – brought to us with monotonous regularity from war-torn countries around the world – we have learnt to tune out. For most of us, it goes something like this: *Can't believe this happened to children in our care — something needs to be*

done! Wait, the PM called a Royal Commission so something is being done. Oh look, new shiny thing!

I believe this has happened consistently all year so far. To date, beyond a few platitudes, we have so far managed to ignore or forget the following lowlights:

- We have forgotten the toxicity created by [Pauline Hanson](#) – the poster girl for racism and hatred – the first time around.
- We were outraged and then forgot about [Duncan Storrar](#).
- We continue to ignore Australia's commitment to the COP21 climate change target — evidenced by the decision to ignore the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef, among others.
- We have not put an end to the indefinite incarceration of asylum seekers.
- We have re-elected the Coalition Government, albeit with a significantly reduced majority, that promised and failed to deliver on much of the above and also a Budget surplus, more jobs, a better health system, better education, gender equality and the list goes on.

The Coalition, of course, spectacularly vilified the previous Labor government for knifing an elected PM in the back but then actually followed suit and ended by calling a double disillusion about something ... wait, what was it again?

The result is that we are creating our

own – very uncomfortable – bed in which we have to lie. A bed that excuses atrocities afflicted on refugees who seek our help. A bed that forgets about the disenfranchised. A bed of our own making that is so covered in our complicity, we suffer collectively from insomnia.

Don Dale Style 'Restraint Chairs' Are Also Used On People With A Disability - <https://t.co/5KbrvpDMs4> and Triggs told to butt out [#brandis](#)

— Henrietta McAlister (@HenriMcAlister) [July 29, 2016](#)

A little while back, I spoke with [Gillian Triggs](#) about, among other things, her resolve and composure during the period of the [Forgotten Children Report](#) and how she handled the attempted character assassination from the Abbott Government:

I knew, as a lawyer, if I lost my cool, if I was as discourteous or disrespectful of the people who were accusing me of bias, I would lose my case. If I became angry, if ... I criticised them for not reading the report or of not responding to it in an intelligent way, or even a fair way, I would lose my case.

I was very, very conscious that there were eyes on me and I had to be as measured and accurate and calm as I could possibly manage — because if I didn't, if I became angry, I would be dismissed as emotional and left wing, and an out and out liar.

Well, if, as [Janet Albrechtsen](#) says in her [article](#), it is considered “concentrated pomposity” to stand up for children being harmed in the name of our judicial system, we need to take a leaf out of Gillian Triggs’ book and do it anyway. The eyes of the world are upon us and we need to act now to hold our governments – all of them – to account.

Politicians of all persuasions are unconcerned about being held accountable because Australia has the collective memory of Dory in *Finding Nemo* — we are essentially caring and compassionate but well, we just forget.

As a result of our anaesthesia, no amount of Royal Commissions, government inquiries or jumping up and down will cut it — all we are doing is maintaining the status quo of stale sheets.

We cannot allow a Royal Commission into the juvenile detention system to deflect our attention span as the [Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#) and the [National](#)

[Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families](#) have done previously.

For our children's sake, we need to maintain our outrage long enough to ensure Don Dale doesn't happen again.

You can follow deputy editor Michelle Pini on Twitter [@vmp9](#) or check out her blog [here](#).

Can Indigenous Australians have confidence in this RC into the Don Dale juvenile detention centre?
[@mattjcan #QandA](#)
<https://t.co/imlCgyY>
[Akm](#)

— ABC Q&A
 (@QandA) [August 1, 2016](#)

Powerful piece by [@NatalieCromb](#). NT child abuse: Be part of the solution
<https://t.co/LLM9bzN5sC>
[@IndependentAus](#)

— Michelle Pini
 (@vmp9)
[July 26,](#)

Nigel Sculli on not interested in child abuse: Does that ring a bell? By Tess Lawrence. [#DonDale](#) [#notpiqued](#) <https://t.co/J5gWfCdrGS>

— In dependent Australia (@independentaus) [July 27, 2016](#)

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