

Going online

EDITORIAL

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Our tagline 'discerning humanity' refers to the 'discernment of spirits', which is one of the key elements in the Jesuit way of looking at the world. The best known early Jesuits included Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier and Peter Faber. They perfected a way of recognising underlying good and evil as an aid towards working through the ethical dilemmas of the day. Their day was 500 years ago (we are celebrating their Jubilee in 2006).

In the 20th century, Mother Teresa devoted her energies to providing urgent care for those who appear poor. The Jesuits also use tools of social analysis to work out who is actually poor and why, with a view to promoting long-term social change. For all is not as it seems. This month, the English-speaking Jesuit world's best known social analysis practitioner - Fr Peter Henriot - is visiting Australia. He is conducting public seminars alongside Fr Frank Brennan, one of our writers in this relaunched Eureka Street. His article is based on the Ninian Stephen lecture he delivered last week at the University of Newcastle. Brennan uses his legal expertise, and Jesuit intuition for social analysis, to suggest that native title is not all it seems. He concludes that the chief beneficiaries are lawyers, not indigenous Australians, and it's time for a new system of recognising native title.

Social analysis, and the discernment that goes with it, require a particular disposition of the mind and heart. The Jesuits cultivated - and continue to cultivate - this state, through rigorous spiritual practice that includes the 30 day silent retreat. As Eureka Street embraces the rapid-fire online medium after being a print publication for 15 years, it might seem that we are turning our back on the state of thoughtfulness with which we believe our articles must be read. One of our continuing editors - Andrew Hamilton - says Eureka Street is about 'slow reading' - an activity akin to 'slow cooking'. It appeals to the discerning palate. Our challenge will be to find a space for this vibrant, still point, as we shift into the fast-moving online world.

Simple pleasures in the concrete heart of Melbourne

COMMUNITY

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The suburb of Abbotsford is in the concrete heart of Melbourne. Its streets feature poky terrace houses, fallen leaves and busy souvlaki shops. Its most prominent landmark is Victoria Park, the former home of the Collingwood Football Club, an inner-city icon. So it comes as a surprise to find a patch of land in Abbotsford that is tilled by vegetable gardeners.

From 1865, when land in Abbotsford was taken up by the nuns of the Order of the Good Shepherd, it has been the site of a convent and a female reformatory. Those in the reformatory worked in vegetable gardens and orchards that thrived on the rich soil of the land's flood plain on the Yarra River.

In 1979, the Collingwood Children's Farm took over the convent's farmland, part of which was maintained as a vegetable garden. Since then, the small plots in the garden have provided a rare connection to the earth for inner Melburnians.

Jo Searle, a 36-year-old social worker, has been riding her bike along the Yarra River to reach her plot at the children's farm for five years. A drugs and alcohol counsellor in Footscray, she says the bike journey, and tending to her vegetables, gives her a chance to clear her head.

'I like the physical nature of it,' she says, 'I like the digging. I like feeling exhausted when I get home.' Home for Searle is a flat in Clifton Hill that she shares with her eight-year-old daughter Meg. During Searle's childhood in Surrey Hills, in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, her parents had owned a small farm at Balnarring on the Mornington Peninsula. When her parents sold that farm, she took up the plot.

'It's for people who don't have back yards,' she says. 'You can come here and it feels like you're miles and miles from anywhere.'

For some, the attraction of tending a plot has less to do with the view of towering gums on the opposite bank and the sense of quiet by the river than it has to do with reconnecting with a former life. A good proportion of the vegetable gardeners are immigrants from southern Europe; Greeks and Italians whose forebears worked the soil in their rural homelands for centuries. Tending plots enables former immigrants to maintain a sense of continuity and connectedness with their forebears' culture.

Others vegetable gardeners at the children's farm are from the housing commission flats in Collingwood. Tilling the earth is an antidote to looking over the smoggy inner suburbs from several storeys high.

Searle says she enjoys the community at the plots, where advice is frequent on what to grow and when. She likes broadening her knowledge of plants and the conditions they need. She takes great pleasure in growing so many cherry tomatoes that she can boil up a big load to make chutney and still have enough to take to colleagues at work.

The tomatoes taste sweet and fresh. 'I give away heaps,' she says.

The cost of tending a plot is \$100 a year for those with employment and less for those on concession. All of those who lease a plot are expected to attend four working bees a year and make an effort to keep the weeds down.

Searle says one way of limiting the spread of weeds is to avoid growing vegetables in rows. Such rows would give weeds unimpeded turf in which to flourish. Just as importantly, they would fail to reflect Searle's idea of a garden.

'I'm not into rows,' she admits. 'It's not me.'

At the beginning of the interview for this article, Searle was delighted to find four eggplants, about 10 cm in length, which she put in her bag. She also looked over the artichoke plants and a silver beet in the plot's back corner.

The front of the plot, which is about four by five metres, was taken up by borage, a purple herb that spreads quickly throughout gardens and gives salads a lift. Searle's understated comments suggested pleasure in the herb's aesthetic qualities.

In recent months, Searle's interest in growing vegetables and herbs has rubbed off on Meg, who has grown sunflowers and taken great pride in their rapid progress. During the summer just gone, Meg took to bringing school friends with her to check out the plot.

In the weeks to come, Jo must decide whether to keep the plot. The demands of work, home and a Master's degree in public health leave little time to attend it.

Searle says it would be a sad day if she were forced to give it up; besides the loss of a link to the earth, it would mean the loss of a growing bond between mother and daughter.

'We've got quite a connection here,' Searle says.

*Paul Daffey is a Melbourne freelance journalist, whose book *Local Rites: A year in grass roots football in Victoria and beyond* was published in 2001.*

First give West Papuans a human welcome

AUSTRALIA

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The reception of the West Papuan refugees has brought together a number of related questions. It has also demonstrated how important it is to keep these issues distinct, and to address them in the right order.

The first question concerns the West Papuan asylum seekers themselves. How should Australians treat West Papuans who flee their country and appeal for asylum on the grounds that they have been persecuted?

The second question concerns conditions in West Papua. Any judgment that someone is a refugee implies a judgment that they have faced at least local persecution in their homeland. Does that reflect a wider oppression?

The third question concerns the relationship between Indonesia and West Papua, of which it is now a province. Should that status be considered as unalterable, or ought the possibility of independence be considered?

These are questions which Australian citizens should consider. They are also questions to which the Australian Government ought respond in a principled way.

The proper, and indeed only moral, order of asking these questions must begin with the humanity of the people affected. The people who most directly concern Australia are the West Papuans who seek asylum. The fact of a shared humanity demands that Australia offer refuge to West Papuans who make a justified claim on its protection. Furthermore, the dignity of those who apply for asylum must be respected. We do this by adjudicating promptly and fairly the truth of their claims.

This is how Australia did respond to the West Papuans who recently landed in Australia. It was a credit to the reformed Immigration Department.

Only after attending to the needs of persons, should we look at wider issues. The enquiry, too, should focus on what is happening to human beings. About the situation of West Papua as a whole, it is difficult to gather conclusive evidence. . But what is known about the management and policies of the Freeport mine, the practises of the Indonesian army in other times and places, and the fears of local inhabitants, suggest serious grounds for concern. Respect for the West Papuan people requires that the Government express this concern.

The third question concerns the political status of West Papua. Both the issue of independence itself and discussion of it raise complex questions. But when they are addressed, discussion should also begin by considering the dignity of the persons affected. In this case the people include those from West Papua and from other parts of Indonesia. People's dignity embraces their relationships, their groups and a measure of autonomy in controlling the direction of their individual and communal lives. This consideration, of course, touches both local groups and the larger entities to which they belong. Decisions about national autonomy need to be made for the good of all and of each person. In judging what is good, we need also to consider the likely consequences of dissolving an existing union.

These questions are inherently difficult, but they are not resolved by insisting that we preserve the status quo. In the case of West Papua, the question of autonomy is made inescapable by its modern history. Rule passed from the Netherlands to Indonesia without the free consent of the people. Worse, the plebiscite approved by the United Nations was a cynical farce that discredited the takeover. It has been followed by extensive transmigration, and exploitation of West Papuan resources.



MEDIA RELEASE

11 am Thursday, 13th April, 2006.

West Papuan Refugee Community Welcomed At Good Friday Service in Richmond

Herman Wainggai and his community of forty West Papuan asylum seekers will play a central role in the Good Friday celebrations at St Ignatius Church, Richmond tomorrow.

Nine members of the group have already been housed in support housing in Richmond by St Ignatius Parish, and a further group of four will take up residence in a third house after Easter.

Herman Wainggai will speak to the crowded Good Friday congregation about the story of their journey from West Papua and the trauma which they escaped from in order to seek asylum in Australia.

The West Papuan community will be welcomed at the commencement of the service and following the short address by Herman Wainggai later in the service they will sing a traditional song from the Highlands

WEST PAPUANS IN MONTSEERRAT WITH FR PETER NORDEN



Some of the West Papuans who recently visited the Jesuit Social Services house at Alexandra with Fr Peter Norden.

Difficult questions imply the need for argument. That is why it is important to encourage a reasoned public conversation that begins with and returns to the dignity of the human beings involved.

Judged by these standards, the Australian response has been mixed and muddled. The treatment of the first West Papuan asylum seekers was exemplary in its focus and execution. But subsequent decisions to hold one of the asylum seekers on Christmas Island, to assist the Indonesian navy in patrolling the West Papuan coast, and to apply the Pacific solution for all on-shore applicants for asylum, however, made the dignity of asylum seekers subservient to a compliant relationship with Indonesia. As it had done in devising the Pacific Solution, the Government chose expediency over morality.

The Government has been silent about conditions in West Papua. But its cooperation in navy patrols that deter asylum seekers, could be morally justified only if it were convinced that West Papuans do not face persecution. There is little evidence to support that conviction.

The Government has asserted unequivocally that West Papua is Indonesian territory. It has coupled this statement with its desire for friendship with Indonesia. This position may be justified, but it is weakened by its failure to address, or even consider relevant to discussion, the dignity of the people of West Papua. It separates moral from strategic issues. The consequences of doing so are patent in the history of Australian engagement with East Timor.

It appears that the Government has privileged pragmatic interests over moral considerations. This will be expedient in the short term, contribute to much human suffering in the intermediate term, and come back to haunt Australia in the longer term.

Andrew Hamilton has written on refugee issues since the 1980s.

Confessions of a land rights advocate

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The dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples from their lands was a great wrong. But it is becoming increasingly clear to me that redress cannot be achieved by a system that depends on evaluating the competing legal rights of landholders and native-title holders. The deck is stacked against the native-title holders whose fragile rights must give way to the superior rights of the landholders whenever the two classes of rights conflict. And it is a system that is costly and time-consuming.

At present, the chief beneficiaries of the system are the legal representatives of the parties. It may be that the time has come to think of abandoning the present system, a system that simply seeks to declare and enforce the legal rights of the parties, irrespective of their merits.

A better system may be an arbitral system that declares what the rights of the parties ought to be according to the justice and circumstances of the individual case.

The issue now is not the legitimacy of land rights but determining the cut-off point for recognising native title rights when other parties also have rights over the same land, and matching the remaining native title rights with the real, rather than imagined, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations.

Noel Pearson, says that 'native title is all about what is left over. And land rights have never been about the dispossession of the colonisers and their descendents. Whether it be statutory land rights or common law land rights - these land rights have always been focused on remnant lands.'

16% of the Australian continent is now owned or controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And yet Graeme Neate, the President of the Native Title Tribunal, says too great a weight of expectation has been put on native title 'to deliver what it was not capable of delivering'. He says there are areas of Australia where native title will deliver little or nothing.

A country's system of land law and governance is undoubtedly more complex once indigenous land rights are recognised. The cost of this complexity is high when a country like Australia has long delayed the recognition. The benefits to indigenous people are less and patchy when many of the dispossessed have had no option except to live away from their lands for generations. The complexity and patchiness provide no warrant for returning to the terra nullius mindset.

While Australia's indigenous leaders are seeking a way forward for their people in the short and long terms, the academic historians have been at war interpreting and re-interpreting the conflict and meeting between Aborigines and the colonisers.

Following the publication of Keith Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Stuart McIntyre published *The History Wars* and has now edited a collection entitled *The Historian's Conscience: Australian Historians on the Ethics of History*.

Greg Denning writes an essay in the latest collection entitled 'Living with and in deep time'. He recalls the celebration at the National Library in Canberra when two items of Australian heritage were placed on the Memory of the World Register. Those items, joining documents from other countries such as the Magna Carta and the US Declaration of Independence, were not the Australian Constitution or even the batting records of Donald Bradman, but rather Captain James Cook's journal from the Endeavour voyage of 1768-1771 culminating in his hoisting the flag on Possession Island, and the papers relating to Eddie Mabo's case in the High Court.

Denning describes the reverence with which he donned the cotton gloves to peruse these documents in the Manuscript Reading Room of the library. He takes up Eddie Mabo's drawings of his land and his people. This file 'needs a slow, slow read'. Denning says this file is Mabo's 'expression of how deep time has left its mark on the present.' Here is Denning's evocative description of his reading of these papers:

'He (Eddie Mabo) taps a truth the way we all tap truths from living, but in ways which need to be tolerated by those whose notion of law and evidence is blinkered by legal tradition and constitution and who need to find some entry into Eddie Mabo's otherness. The other papers in the Mabo Papers - of judges, lawyers, anthropologists, historians, witnesses of first people telling their stories - belong to the Memory of the World because the whole world faces the issue of how it lives with the Deep Time of all its first peoples, overrun and dispossessed as they are. It belongs to World Memory because the papers [reflect] the Australian people struggling to do justice and to live with the Deep Time all around us.'

We Australians have belatedly come to the right starting point on an endless search for justice between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens. Land rights and self-determination are necessary but insufficient antidotes for indigenous minorities wanting to belong in post-colonial societies coming to terms with their history.

Frank Brennan SJ AO is an adjunct fellow in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the ANU, professor of law in the Institute of Legal Studies at the Australian Catholic University, and professor of human rights and social justice at the University of Notre Dame. This article is taken from the 14th Ninian Stephen Lecture which he delivered at the University of Newcastle on 9 May.

Costs and benefits of protest camp

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Depending on who you talk to, Black GST has either successfully thrust the issue of indigenous rights back onto the political agenda – just in time for this month's Reconciliation Week – or has inadvertently undone many years of hard work.

Camp Sovereignty was set up in Melbourne's Kings Domain by members of Black GST (Genocide to end, Sovereignty to be acknowledged, Treaty to be made) as a protest against the Commonwealth Games.



After almost two months, its fire was finally extinguished by authorities in the early hours of last Thursday morning.

Camp organisers dubbed it the 'StolenWealth Games', and the protest dominated the mainstream media for several weeks as the Melbourne City Council and even the State Government attempted to remove them from the camp. John Howard criticized the protesters in the national press. Despite its currency with the newspapers, the question of how effective this protest has been cannot be avoided.

Reconciliation Australia, an independent organisation dedicated to building respectful relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, has commented diplomatically that this protest was an exercise in democratic liberties. Other protest groups have congratulated the organisers of the camp on their success, and on their levels of exposure.

But respected elders of the Wurundjeri tribe – the traditional owners of most of the land that encompasses Melbourne – have denounced the protest as disrespectful and disingenuous. They argue that the action was taken without consideration of their rights as elders of the land, and that their requests for a 'culturally appropriate' action were ignored.

Camp Sovereignty is the first campaign for Black GST - and ending the genocide of the indigenous population is just one of their goals. The definition of genocide employed by some of these groups is admittedly somewhat more all-encompassing than is usually defined.

As State Convenor of Socialist Alliance Jody Betzien contends, 'There's been a destruction of culture, of community. You've got indigenous people dying twenty years earlier than non-indigenous people.' The CEO of Reconciliation Australia, Barbara Livesey, is of similar opinion. 'Our vision is of a country where everyone enjoys equal life chances, and that hasn't happened yet. A goal for our organisation is to close the gap in life expectancy between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.'

Yet protests are a process, she says – not an end in itself. 'Protests serve a valuable purpose, and we have good relationships with a diverse range of organisations. But the purpose of Reconciliation Australia, when it was set up, was to work with all stakeholders involved in the process of reconciliation.'

Despite the mostly supportive reactions from other social justice groups, elders of the Wurundjeri tribe are frustrated that their land is being used in a 'culturally inappropriate' protest, and are angry at what they see as an abuse of the cultural heritage laws that have been used to keep Camp's 'sacred fire' burning. Sovereignty Elder Ian Hunter told The Australian that the camp was a 'bloody disgrace', and had actually damaged the Aboriginal people's cause. 'It's a load of crap,' he said. 'The smoking ceremonies they are conducting are offensive. As far as traditional Wurundjeri people are concerned we want them out of there.'

Professor Joy Murphy Wandin, a respected Wurundjeri elder, was equally outspoken. 'I had two conversations with the organizers [of Black GST], and I made it clear that I wanted them to go about it in the right way,' she says. 'I asked them to have respect for the traditional owners of the land, but they then did none of their planning in conjunction with us.'

Not only was Professor Murphy Wandin disappointed in the manner of the group's protest, she argues they did not have any tangible outcomes in mind, 'There doesn't appear to be anything written down, no statements with clear targets in mind,' she says. 'The only way to get policy through is to have it on paper... they didn't do that. Professor Murphy Wandin dismisses suggestions that the protest was effective. 'I don't believe that's true for one minute – it may be that there were people coming together in recognition of a goal, but they went about it entirely the wrong way,' she says.

Barbara Livesey believes that despite these controversial protests, Australia is developing a better idea of what reconciliation means, and how it works. 'The environment now is infinitely different to what it was five years ago,' she says.

'Then, we were having bridge walks – and now we have reconciliation occurring all over the country, in schools, workplaces, in communities.'

The tenth anniversary of Reconciliation week falls at the end this month, and with the issue of Indigenous rights back in the public sphere, it remains to be seen whether Black GST's protest can produce a change in policy or government attitude.

Marisa Pintado is a freelance journalist based in Melbourne.

Refugee Legislation proves Government's reform desire a sham

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The optimism that many Australians felt following significant reforms to asylum and refugee policy in 2005 has been cruelly dashed by the government's wretched response to Indonesia's displeasure at the granting of protection visas to 42 West Papuans in March.

At its core, the Government's proposal seeks to introduce new laws which would mean that all people who arrive informally (so-called 'unauthorised') by boat in Australia will be automatically transferred to 'offshore' processing centres to have their claims for refugee status assessed.



Offshore processing, most likely in Nauru, would apply to all boat arrivals regardless of where they land in Australia. In practice, all of Australian territory would become excised, and all claims by such people for refugee status would have to be made outside of the Australian legal system.

During 2005, the shocking and tragic circumstances of the Cornelia Rau and Vivian Solon cases awakened in Australians a recognition of the scandalous abuse and cruel indifference which the Immigration system was perpetuating on innocent and vulnerable people, including asylum seekers.

A number of significant developments flowed from this. The Government rejected calls for a Royal Commission and instead, established the Palmer Inquiry, which ultimately made findings constituting one of the most devastating indictments of a major government department in Australia's history. The Palmer Report shaped much of the promised process of 'wide-ranging, systemic reform' of the Immigration Department, which commenced in the first half of 2005. Fair and reasonable treatment of those confronting the Immigration system has been part of the new mantra and intended practice.

Another development was the drafting by Liberal MP, Petro Georgiou, of Private Members Bills which sought a serious curtailment of the mandatory, indefinite detention system, and the abolition of temporary protection visas. The compromise deal subsequently struck with the Prime Minister represented a significant, albeit seriously inadequate, set of reforms which had the real potential to limit or end the suffering of many still subjected to the system, if implemented quickly and in good faith. They included provisions for release of children and their families, as well as others from detention centres, quicker processing of refugee applications, and oversight of cases involving over two years of detention by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, and oversight of the reform process by an Inter-Departmental Committee chaired by the head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Although none of the reforms announced included reform of the so-called Pacific Solution and the situation on Nauru, the Government finally relinquished and tried to clean the slate by reassessing, approving and resettling to Australia all but two of the remaining Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers on Nauru. The atmosphere was now different, and this shift from the previous position of deadlock and hostility to such a resolution appeared to be part, at least, of the spirit (if not the letter) of the new reform period. It seemed to represent a mixture of pragmatism, and even, perhaps humanity.

However, the shape and trajectory of the reforms was always very fragile; very tenuous at its core. Why? Because they had always depended on the external environment; on the external environment remaining substantially unchanged and benign. In other words, it was a situation in which if there was one significant change in the external environment, the fragile reform process would be thrown into a state of crisis and collapse.

This is because there was never a true change of heart by the Government in 2005. By the end of 2005, the fact remains that most of the key aspects of one of the toughest and most comprehensive anti-asylum seeker systems in the Western world remained in place. Key features continued to be: mandatory, indefinite, non-reviewable detention; Temporary Protection Visas; the Pacific Solution; naval repulsion of asylum seekers arriving by boat; and 'excision' of Australian territory to preclude people seeking asylum in Australia at all.

While the reforms ended or limited the agony and uncertainty for many subjected to the system, the new detention regime left the ultimate power of release into the community entirely to the discretion of the Minister, with still no other legislative limits placed on the government's ability to indefinitely detain innocent people. The whole reform framework was essentially dependent not on the rule of law, but on the grace and discretion of the Minister and her Government.

It is clear that under the Government offshore processing proposal, the protection of borders prevails over the protection of people. Were all other countries to adopt such policies and practices, the international framework designed to protect refugees would be so seriously undermined as to be rendered ineffective and meaningless. It would, in fact, collapse. And from an ethical standpoint, such practices seem to cast our country's commitment to justice, to fairness and to decency out onto the high seas.

The proposal has not yet become law, and its passage into law is not a foregone conclusion. In recent times, there have been some courageous stands - acts of conscience and conviction - and some substantial successes in seeking reform of refugee policy in this country.

David Manne is coordinator and principal solicitor at the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre in Melbourne. This article was taken from a speech he delivered last week for the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law - Boatloads of Extinguishment? Forum on the proposed offshore processing of 'Boat People'.

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The Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was treated like a pop celebrity in Indonesia while on his state visit last week. The popularity of Ahmadinejad among the Indonesian public has highlighted the wide appeal of Iran's defiant position in the Muslim world. The logic of Iran's position is simple: if the nuclear technology is good for the United States and other developed states, why not us?

This question taps into a deep sense of resentment at the unjust nature of international relations and the prevalent hypocrisy that characterises US relations with the Muslim world. There is a broad consensus among Muslims of diverse political persuasions that the present global order lacks justice when it comes to them. This is an emotive issue and President Ahmadinejad has shrewdly pegged Iran's nuclear ambitions to it.

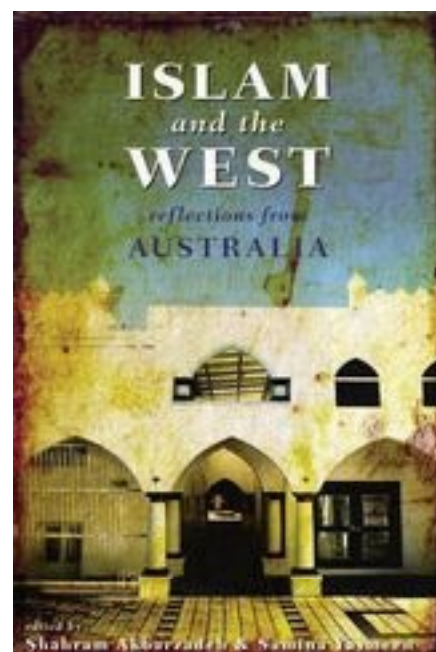
The question of justice in Iran's foreign relations goes back to the early days of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and is intricately linked with US-Iranian relations. As a mainstay of the detested Pahlavi Monarchy, the United States was scorned by Iran. Relations between Tehran and Washington went into free fall when Islamist students took US embassy staff hostage, an episode that lasted 444 days. But contrary to conventional wisdom, even at the height of the hostage crisis and certainly after the saga, Iranian foreign policy makers did not reject direct bilateral links between Iran and the United States.

Instead they emphasised their desire to be treated as equals as a pre-condition for any improvements in relations. Tehran's portrayal of Washington as a bully and domineering power reflected Iran's vibrant revolutionary domestic setting. This conjured up the image of David versus Goliath with reverberations that affected the Muslim Middle East and beyond. Iran's revolutionary fervor may have cooled over time as the population became increasingly disillusioned with the promises of the Islamic regime. But the logic of Iranian foreign policy has not.

Under the leadership of former President Muhammad Khatami, policy makers embarked on a serious attempt to revamp Iran's international image. The notion of 'dialogue among civilisations' gained international acclaim as the United Nations declared it the theme of global celebration in 2001. The notion of dialogue as a remedy to global tensions between the West and the Muslim world advanced the protagonists towards a constructive resolution of a number of key issues. First among them was the idea of openness to hear and acknowledge the position of the other side.

This facilitated the second: empathy and acknowledgment of genuine grievances. The third, and arguably the most important element of Khatami's notion of dialogue was the parity of interlocutors. Genuine dialogue is only possible between equals. Khatami's foreign policy initiative, moderate and flexible as it seemed, still contained the core of the Islamic revolutionary ideas that had stirred Islamist hostage takers in 1979.

To the chagrin of Iranian moderates and reformists, Iran's foreign policy doctrine has become more rigid and confrontational with the ascendancy of Ahmadinejad to the presidential office. The diplomatic cul de sac over Iran's nuclear energy ambitions has brought international tensions to boiling point. But Ahmadinejad's policies are only different in style to those of his predecessor. They do not represent a qualitative shift in principles. Iranian authorities justify Tehran's nuclear ambitions as purely civilian-oriented and consistent with the rights reserved for all sovereign states in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy, the argument goes, is a manifestation of its national sovereignty, harking back to the same desire to be treated as an equal among the community of equal states.



Iran's nuclear ambitions may have a hidden agenda. But what makes it seem justifiable to the Iranian population and other parts of the Muslim world is the powerful reference to the equal claim of all states to nuclear technology and the obvious hypocrisy of the United States in dealing with the issue. Washington has shown itself ready to provide nuclear technology to India, an open nuclear renegade state which openly snubbed the international community to develop nuclear bombs. In relation to Israel's nuclear program, widely believed to be directed at developing the bomb, Washington has been conspicuously silent. In contrast, the United States went to war in Iraq under the questionable pretext of hidden weapons of mass destruction, and has highlighted the real possibility that Iran may be the next target. These very different policies suggest to the Iranians, and the rest of the Muslim world, that Washington pursues one set of objectives in relation to Muslim states, especially those that are not US allies, and another for the rest of the world. This apparent duplicity feeds the common grievance that the United States, and international agencies that are often dominated by Washington, lack fairness and parity.

Dr Shahram Akbarzadeh is Senior Lecturer in Global Politics at Monash University. His most recent publication is Islam and the West: Reflections from Australia (University of NSW Press 2005)

The real task for John Howard in Washington

POLITICS

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Our Prime Minister is currently on a jaunt to Washington, Ottawa and Dublin – and in some position to regard himself, and his country, fairly smugly by way of comparison. But it is not quite as simple as that. His government has handed down a fairly successful budget – showing solid fundamentals, if not much regard for what makes them solid or fundamental. The success of the budget depends on US economic stability and US relationships with China. The US is becoming increasingly bogged down in Iraq, while simultaneously seeming to talk itself into fewer and fewer policy options short of war in Iran. Furthermore, the question of selling energy, not least uranium to India and to China, involves important foreign policy considerations for the Australian and United States governments respectively.



On the face of it, there could hardly be a better time to be paying a visit to the United States, firstly to inform oneself about the state of American thinking on the many important questions, and secondly to press strongly some of Australia's different views and interests. By visiting important and significant progressive 'middle-of-the-road' powers, with a view of the world somewhat different from our own, Howard further cements his standing and appeases some moderates.

Alas, all too often we see little of the exchange of experiences, and in the general bonhomie and routine ritual which John Howard seems to love, the primary result is enthusiastic Australian endorsement for whatever the US is doing, with only token acknowledgement of the differing Australian interest.

Even at the best of times, it has been hard to get any concentrated American focus on the problems of failed economies and collapsing polities in the western Pacific. The US, quite reasonably, regards most of these problems as being for Australia and the 'neighbourhood' to solve, and confines itself, when taking any

notice at all, to ritual support of our initiatives, and, in the case of East Timor, a vague benevolence focused on helping to remind the Indonesians that they have no option but to get over the traumatic circumstances of its birth. Generally US policy does not contain much in the way of useful practical ideas.

But John Howard, in Australia's interests, should be concerned to let Americans – and for that matter the world - know what is happening, if only to help avoid Australia's being painted as the villain when things get worse. And not only in the Solomons, where the farce of local politics is making it clear that there will be little progress to political or economic stability in the short term. Papua New Guinea is edging towards a precipice, and Fiji is also a major worry. Australian naval ships are on standby not far from East Timor, lest the situation deteriorate and we be asked for assistance.

Various ministers, including the Prime Minister, have made it clear that any intervention will be only at the request of the East Timorese Government, but the lack of consultation with East Timorese ministers in the positioning is ominous, and is likely to be so read in Dili. Perhaps it will also be seen as a form of pressure on the ruling party to get rid of its failing Prime Minister, Mari Alkatiri. His departure would probably ease the internal tensions, but it will do Australia's standing no good if we are seen to have helped promote that result.

Only the mischievous would suggest that intervention or interference of any sort is in contemplation in relation to Papua. But the increased world attention to human rights violations there, and to the high-handed and colonial manner of its administration from Jakarta, as well as our own mismanagement of a confected refugee crisis, is also something that needs careful management, not least by the United States. It could play some role in allaying the genuine, if mistaken, fears that Indonesia has about the possibility of there being an agenda to push Indonesian atomisation - while making it clear that the world can not ignore its obligations under international refugee law. John Howard's own mismanagement of the affair, which has involved a humiliating and ethically questionable stance on our refugee obligations, is now causing him problems even in his own Caucus.

In the backdrop is Iraq, where, despite the ultimately successful selection of a Prime Minister, the security situation is worsening, factionalisation is increasing, and the occupying forces having fewer options that will allow for a dignified retreat, let alone anything George W. Bush could describe as success.

Behind that is Iran. Officially, both Australia and the US are putting the resolution on Iran's nuclear testing in the charge of the United Nations, while making it clear that they have little faith in a successful outcome. If John Howard has anything like the personal relationship with the President of which he boasts, he ought to be cautioning him that American bellicosity is probably only stiffening Iran's resolve. He might also remind him that the history of the exercise of American (or coalition) military might in Iran would hardly be likely to give Iran pause. Or even a sense of moral, as opposed to physical, disadvantage.

Jack Waterford is editor-at-large at The Canberra Times

Condoms discussion returns to traditional moral norms

THEOLOGY

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The recent report of the Rome correspondent of the London Independent, Peter Popham, that “The Catholic Church is on the brink of a historic change of approach over condoms” will be welcome news to millions in Africa particularly and in other parts of the world devastated by Aids. But it will also be welcomed by the not a few distinguished moral theologians who for upwards to ten years have been recommending such a change. The movement has gained momentum recently with the support of half a dozen Cardinals and a number of African bishops whose representations could not so easily be ignored by the Vatican.

THE ONLINE EDITION INDEPENDENT

Is Pope poised to sanction condoms?

Vatican's rethink on ban signals historic move to cut the spread of Aids

By Peter Popham in Rome
Published: 03 May 2006

The Catholic Church is on the brink of a historic change of approach over condoms which could bring hope to millions in Africa and other parts of the developing world devastated by Aids.

"We are conducting a very profound scientific, technical and moral study," said the head of the Vatican Council for Health Pastoral Care. The church is expected to give a guarded, provisional blessing to the use of condoms by married couples when one of them suffers from Aids, as a way of protecting the health of the other partner. It is only a technical concession, based on two ancient principles, but, against the background of the stolid refusal by church authorities to countenance even the slightest deviation for more than a generation, it amounts to a revolution.

It will be interesting, however, to see under which moral principle the Vatican subsumes the change – if indeed it does do so. It is important to remember that the 1968 Encyclical Letter of Paul VI, ‘*Humanae Vitae*’, only forbade the use of contraceptives in a conjugal relationship when they were used exclusively or primarily for contraceptive purposes. One could use the contraceptive pill for other therapeutic purposes, e.g., for ‘rebound’ fertility therapy, for a female athlete wishing to prevent menstruation, etc., provided that, as in these instances, the intention was not primarily contraceptive. It has been argued that this same line of ‘double effect’ reasoning could be used in the case of an Aids-infected conjugal relationship where the intention is presumably not contraceptive but life-saving. But there are difficulties with this solution. The traditional Catholic understanding of the marriage act requires that sperm be deposited in the vagina – which the condom effectively prevents.

A second line of justification invokes the right to self-defence. A wife is justified in using defensive measures to protect her health and life when sex with her husband will threaten either or both, as is demonstrably the case in an Aids-infected conjugal relationship. But traditionally this line of reasoning has been invoked when the husband is insistent on his marital rights. Can its application be extended to all cases of Aids-infected conjugal relationships? Hitherto the Vatican has argued that there is an alternative: abstinence. But perhaps there is a further line of argument, namely, that such enforced abstinence will cause the relationship to wither on the vine, and to that degree it is necessary (the “insistence” dimension) to permit condom-protected sexual relations. This is not the “ideal” morality which the Church usually espouses, but it is a realistic “morality for a broken world”.

A final line of justification is the ‘lesser evil’ argument which was recently invoked by Cardinal Martini in his conversation with the medical professor, Ignazio Marino. While it is not a good thing to use a condom, it is better than endangering a life. This line of argument has most secular appeal. But the Vatican is uneasy with this ‘ends justifies the means’ line of reasoning, smacking as it does of utilitarianism.

Benedict XVI is a sophisticated theologian, and is no doubt aware of all these justifications and their difficulties for the Catholic tradition. But a willingness to open the matter for discussion is a sign of his sophistication, and of his awareness of the ongoing attempts of moral theologians to find a morally acceptable Catholic solution to this human catastrophe. It will be more than interesting to see if the Vatican can change in the face of this pandemic, and, if so, whether it can do so by invoking one or other of these justifications in such a way that continuity with traditional moral principles is preserved.

Fr Bill Uren SJ is Rector of Newman College at the University of Melbourne and a member of the Australian Health Ethics Committee.

Theologians adrift in the sea of art

THEOLOGY

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The exhibition *Crisis, Catharsis and Contemplation*, which concluded at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, on Sunday, was worth seeing. Because it brought together art and Christian faith, it also left artists and believers scrambling to find words from their own traditions to explain why the Exhibition worked.

Christian theologians have not had much to say about art. Mercifully little, some would say. Early reflection drew on a classical aesthetic, according to which underlying the beauty of particular people or artefacts, was an ideal beauty in which they shared. Art was to embody this ideal beauty. When people contemplated beautiful images, they would also share in this beauty. So artists had a responsibility to make noble representations of reality. In the classical world, Greek statues embody this ideal.



When Christian thinkers adopted this approach, they made God the source of all beauty. The beauty of the world, and particularly of human beings, mirrors divine beauty. Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, fully embodies divine beauty in his human reality. Our beauty comes from our relationship to Christ.

This theory enabled the early Christian theologians to say two things that were controversial in their culture. They could affirm that the human and material world was not ugly and evil, but beautiful. They could also affirm that all beauty, including that of artefacts, was not autonomous, but was derived from God through Jesus Christ. Ideally, the beauty of this world would lead us to contemplate the beauty of God found in Christ.

Although they affirmed the place of art, Christian thinkers subordinated it to truth. The truth of humanity and of the world that art represented was Christian truth. This implied that the best art is representational, because representational art, that draws on Christian symbols and conceptuality, best conveys Christian meaning. This theology is rich. It can encourage Christian communities to appreciate artistic expression and its place in faith. These are some of the goals of this Exhibition, which is sponsored by *Carnivale Christi*. The theology, however, fails to address contemporary art and its relationship to faith. For it, art without explicitly Christian inspiration and abstract art offer little more than material for conversion.

A reason for the failure of this theory of art is that it privileges representative art whose meaning can be put into words. It asks first, what does this painting, poem, play or cantata mean? It expects that the meaning will be put into words, and judges the work by the extent to which its meaning is consistent with Christian faith and values.

To focus so narrowly on the meaning of works of art neglects their importance and complexity as expressions of human creativity. Artists engage with aspects of humanity or their world that lie beyond words. They struggle to express this through a medium that resists easy expression. If their artefact works, it will be to the delight and surprise of the artist. When artists are asked what their artefact means, they naturally respond by saying, 'Look.' Those who do look may find illumination.

Christian theory needs to find space for this rich process. When theologians wish to give full weight to process as distinct from content, they usually invoke the Holy Spirit. The images of flame, of power, of the wind that blows where it will, of dove, of understanding that transcends linguistic difference, suggest freedom, surprise and fecundity. These images are central also to the making of art. They can form a place where art and faith flow together.

Reference to the Holy Spirit, too, invites us to explore the intimate connections between art and prayer that are glimpsed in this exhibition. For St. Paul, prayer involves a helpless desire for expression before a broken but tremendous world, a sense that what we express is a surprising gift. And that it remains beyond our comprehension. This process is mirrored in artistic creativity. Both require space.

The Spirit, too, links art to Christ in subtle ways. In Christian tradition, the Spirit has no face except the face of Christ. But we recognise Christ only through the Spirit. This suggests that we never possess Christ. The Spirit will lead us to him in many ways, including through artistic creation. This means that, in a Christian view, artists and believers have much to gain through an exhibition of this kind.

Andrew Hamilton SJ is an editor at EurekaStreet.com.au who also teaches at the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne.

Da Vinci's conspiracy of cryptography

SPIRITUALITY & WORSHIP

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The Da Vinci Code, like all good thrillers, begins with a murder. The curator of the Louvre is found dead in the museum, his body disfigured and a cryptic message scrawled on the floor near him: O, Draconian devil! Oh, lame saint! It's a code, one of a series of clues setting the reader on the path to uncovering hidden secrets about Jesus and his relationship with Mary Magdalene.



Amidst the hype surrounding the book and movie has come a re-awakening of people's interests in puzzles and codes. TV shows have jumped on the bandwagon, advertising mysteries 'to rival the Da Vinci Code'. The judge on a court case involving the book's author Dan Brown published a coded message in his findings. Even churches have gotten in on the act. An Anglican website has been set up, challengingdavinci.com, that mimics the official movie website and has its own religious code to crack in order to 'find the truth'.

These puzzles can be fun ways to spend time. But it prompts the question - is hiding the truth really the best way of serving it?

Codes aren't about truth, they're about power. They are about controlling information, limiting its availability to those who aren't in the know, and keeping it hidden among those who are.

Cryptologist Ron Rivest writes that 'cryptography is about communication in the presence of adversaries'. It began with finding ways of encrypting messages in war. In the mass media age, adversaries communicate along shared lines. It means people have had to find new ways of manipulating language and form to their own ends. People in power today are used to manipulating words and their meanings. Politicians in particular are skilled at responding to questions with answers that give nothing away that they don't intend to. Holding power in the mass media age is about controlling the message.

That's also the main theme of the Da Vinci Code. The story's villains are those who seek the secret of the Grail for the power that secret brings. At issue is the true nature of Jesus, and how Catholics around the world see him. Was he the Son of God, or just a political figure? The truth lies in the Grail, it seems, and whoever controls the Grail controls the fate of the church.

Of course, unlocking a secret isn't the same as knowing the truth. As we see in the Da Vinci Code, the truth often depends on the one telling it. Or as Dan Brown's grail aficionado and conspiracy theorist extraordinaire Leigh Teabing proclaims in the book, 'The greatest story ever told, is the greatest story ever sold'. The book re-interprets famous pieces of art and architecture to fit its own version of history, even creating a new organisation known as the Priory of Sion and populating it with well-know historical figures. Rather than offering readers a chance to liberate themselves by asking questions, the Da Vinci Code is really just about selling them an alternative story.

There is a great sense of power in unlocking a code and discovering a hidden secret. Each time we unlock one of the puzzles in the Da Vinci Code, we are drawn deeper into the inner circle of those who know the true nature of the Grail. We're now keepers of the secret. However, finding the truth involves asking questions about the world we're presented with. The Da Vinci Code gives us a puzzle, solved in a series of revelations that come together in an alternative version of the Christian story. As a thriller, it follows a predictable but entertaining formula. As a path to the truth, it leaves a lot to be desired.

The search for truth is separate from the quest for power. One seeks to enlighten and enrich the world, the other to control it. Solving a code is a good way to exercise your problem solving skills, but it's not really about exercising the analytical part of your brain. The Da Vinci Code would be a far more liberating and empowering experience for the reader if it was about asking questions, rather than unlocking answers.

Michael McVeigh is editor of Australian Catholics.

The Australian wound

ESSAYS

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Tired of the outback? Australian writers, artists and filmmakers aren't. It's not just that there is a lot of it out there. Perhaps there is something we are, as a nation, trying to express or work through in all our journeys into the desert on horseback or camel, in Kombis and 'Cruisers, with whaleboat or caravan in tow.



Poststructuralists tell us that the age of the questing, conquering explorer-hero is long dead, and that today we are telling new stories about the outback. Stories reflecting generations of local knowledge instead of the traveller's distant gaze; stories of struggles for land rights and reconciliation; of the farmer's battles with drought and flood; of women who have survived and prospered in the bush, or escaped to brilliant careers. We are also telling more stories about the places where most of us live and play — the city and the coast. Feminists remind us that the myth of the outback was forged and perpetuated by men, and that women feel the pull more of the liquid sensuality of the coast and the promised intimacy of the suburbs.

Yet myth is stronger than fashion. Movies such as *Japanese Story*, *Wolf Creek* and *The Proposition* remind us that the outback is, as Robyn Davidson put it, the 'mythological crucible' of Australia — the place where we set many of the stories that nurture and guide, challenge and delude us.

The journey to the outback in a vast, flat land is analogous to the journey to the underworld in the mythologies of the mountainous lands of Europe. And just as the modern idea of the unconscious as a place of depth and otherness came out of the vertical landscapes of Austria (Freud) and Switzerland (Jung), so in Australia our sense of who we are is defined by our encounters with the 'empty centre.'

Above all, the outback is where Australians go to die. From Burke and Wills through Lassiter and Voss to Azaria Chamberlain and Peter Falconio, the journey to the outback has been suffused with the aura of death. Impending or averted, fated or random, in fiction or history, it is as omnipresent as the heat, flies and red dirt.

Death and rebirth

In myth and literature, death usually leads to rebirth, as in the resurrection of Jesus or the reconstitution of Osiris after his dismemberment and a 'night sea journey' in a coffin. Through the encounter with death — real or symbolic — one is initiated into a new life, usually with greater wisdom or powers. Stories of death and rebirth are often connected with rites of passage, especially from childhood to adulthood, through which one dies to an old way of life in order to embrace the new.



Jung interpreted the archetype of death and rebirth in terms of the ego's struggle to separate from the unconscious in the process of psychological maturation. The supposed universality of the theme became the basis of Joseph Campbell's idea of a universal hero's journey, which has recently become a formative influence, for better or worse, on the plots of Hollywood movies. The young innocent squares up to his or her demons, nearly dying in the process, but eventually emerges triumphant.

That's not the way it pans out in Australia, however. Here, death seldom leads to rebirth. Take Patrick White's *Voss* (1956), the paradigmatic literary narrative of the outback quest gone wrong. After the death of the German explorer at the hands of Aborigines, the novel ends with the sullen survivor Judd meeting Voss's fantasy lover Laura Trevelyn years later, now a withdrawn and funereal headmistress. 'Voss did not die', Laura proffers, 'He is there still... and always will be', yet only as a ghostly presence and a reminder of the folly of hubris.

A similar pattern of decay, disappointment and death without rebirth can be observed in more recent narratives of outback journeys, such as Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1963), and Dal Stevens' Miles Franklin Award-winning but now forgotten *A Horse of Air* (1970); even Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1988), in which the narrator 'Bruce's quest to discover the secret of the Aboriginal songlines eventually descends into a brutal 'roo hunt and is only rescued, near the end of the book, by Chatwin inventing a marriage between two of his characters and a peaceful deathbed scene under gum trees for three old Aboriginal men he supposedly meets en route back to Alice.

Likewise for film, most notably in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (not set in the outback as such, but close enough), with three schoolgirls lost, apparently dead, without explanation; *Walkabout* (the young Aborigine played by David Gulpilil hangs himself while the white children return to their old lives, largely unaffected by their experience); the *Mad Max* trilogy, most notably *Mad Max 2*, which ends with the antihero Max left alone in the desert after the petrol tanker he has driven to safety turns out to be full of sand; and *The Tracker* (2002), with the white policeman played by Gary Sweet killed by David Gulpilil's black tracker.

In history, there were plenty of explorers who made it back — Mitchell, Oxley, Giles, Warburton — but we obsess over the dead: Burke and Wills, Leichhardt and Lasseter; or those who nearly died and limped home, not conquerors but survivors, like Eyre.

The missing container

To die into the land is part of the inevitable process of coming to belong in a new land. Judith Wright knew this. In 'The Upside-down Hut', written in 1961, she asked:

Are all these dead men in our literature, then, a kind of ritual sacrifice? And just what is being sacrificed? Is it perhaps the European consciousness — dominating, puritanical, analytical... that Lawrence saw as negated by this landscape?... Reconciliation, then, is a matter of death — the death of the European mind, its absorption into the soil it has struggled against.

Yet we have become content with making a religion of sacrifice and failure — witness *Gallipoli* and *Waltzing Matilda* as well as outback narratives — rather than asking what it is that prevents new life from emerging out of surrender, sacrifice and defeat.

In myth and legend, fools and heroes need guides on their quests, as rites of passage need elders to help the novice to surrender to death and make it through to the other side. Guides and elders hold or contain the alchemical process of transformation. In their absence one is forced to take on the role either of the hero who conquers death, or the antihero who surrenders to it.

In modern Australian culture, however, we lack a sense of the land as a container that would hold our stories of death and transform them into stories of rebirth. This may be partly a function of time: Europeans have only lived here for two centuries and have not had time to sink the deep roots that would give them a sense of being part of, rather than threatened, by the land. But this process has been slowed down even further by the failure on the part of non-Indigenous settlers to make real peace with its Indigenous peoples and to acknowledge their prior ownership of (and by) the land.

As a result, for all our roads and fences, bricks and mortar, laws and signs, our outback stories remind us that we are at best still tourists, interlopers and renters. Perhaps non-Indigenous artists and writers sense that their culture cannot hold and guide them when they face death in the outback, because its presence is still superficial. Perhaps this is also why murders and disappearances in the outback attract so much more publicity than those elsewhere in the country: there but for the grace of God, even though statistically we're probably in more danger at home or commuting to work. It's like sharks in the ocean; it's a reminder that we don't really belong.

Exceptions to the rule

Still, there are exceptions. Robyn Davidson's bestselling *Tracks* is one journey that involves disappointment, defeat and death (of her beloved dog Diggity, of her ideals for the journey), yet it ends with her being transformed by the experience and providing inspiration to others through her writing.

Perhaps it's because she starts from the centre of the continent and works her way out, instead of setting out on yet another heroic attempt to penetrate the emptiness within. Perhaps it's because she's a woman, and therefore has less of the heroic baggage that men and male characters often carry into the outback. Or perhaps it's because the high point of her journey was a week spent in the company of a male Pitjantjatjara elder, who effectively initiated her into the country through which they were travelling.

An even more popular narrative that doesn't fit the typical Australian pattern is *Crocodile Dundee* (1988). Mick Dundee (Paul Hogan) is a white blackfella: able to wrestle crocs and psych out buffalos, and more at home in the wilderness than his Aboriginal mate Nev (played by David Gulpilil), who says at one point, 'Oh, God, I hate the bush!' It is Mick, rather than Nev, who becomes guide and protector to Linda Kozlowski's fish-out-of-water American journalist Sue Charlton.

Likewise, one way of reading the symbolism of *Japanese Story* (2003) is to see the Japanese interloper Hiromitsu, all alien stiffness and dangerous naivety, as a surrogate whitefella, while the white Australian geologist Sandy (played by Toni Collette) is more at home in the bush, and thus able to initiate him into the land and a kind of love.

In *Tracks* and *Japanese Story*, it is the presence of a guide who is at home with the country that allows the story to move beyond a meeting with death into a journey of relationship with the land, other people and oneself. This movement is handled particularly beautifully in *Japanese Story*, with the last half-hour devoted to a slow and painful exploration of Sandy's grief and her encounter with Hiromitsu's wife, who has come to collect his body.

Never has death been handled so directly and patiently in an Australian film. While set in a fishing town in South Australia rather than the outback, grief is a central theme, too, in *Australian Rules* (2002), the best portrayal to date of race relations in Australian cinema. Only after the white teenager Blacky has been allowed to join the family of his Aboriginal mate Dumby Red at the funeral do we see him with Dumby's sister Clarence in a relationship that has real hope for the future.

If you don't have guides and elders, the other way to avoid falling into either heroic conquest or fatalistic sacrifice on a quest or a rite of passage is to embark on it with one's peers, learning from and supporting each other on the way. While Aboriginal people can sometimes help guide white Australians into feeling the sadness that lies close to the surface of the old land beneath their feet, and have legitimate grievances for which the remedies need to come from white culture and institutions, I suspect that a deeper sense of belonging in this land will only come out of a true sense of the equality of our cultures and peoples.

While we can try to legislate this, it is more likely to come when we are able to do some more grieving together — whether on screen or through initiatives like the *Sorry Books*. Then perhaps we will be able to go down to the multiplex and see a film in which whitefellas can enter the interior, surrender to it, and be reborn into a larger sense of themselves as Australians rather than transplanted Europeans or Asians.

Still, when we look to the land as well as to our supposed leaders for guidance, we recognise that this is of necessity a long process. John Howard appeared to scuttle the reconciliation process with a few strokes of his pen in May 2000 when he changed the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation to suit his own agenda (and then promptly forgot about it). However, if the process had had enough momentum he would've been forced to go with it: witness East Timor in 1999.

When you look at the way race relations have been handled in Australian cinema over nearly a century — the predominance of fear, mistrust and hostility, with only a few stories of hope and friendship — you recognise that change comes slowly, mostly, on the world's oldest continent. What are those lines attributed to Vincent Lingiari in Paul Kelly's *From Little Things Big Things Grow*? 'We know how to wait... Let the stars keep on turning...'

This is different, of course, to mere passivity or denial. Lingiari's people were patient in their defiance, just as, in *Australian Rules*, Blacky and Clarence's coming together also depended on Blacky eventually standing up to his brutal father, a symbol perhaps of racist, patriarchal old Australia.

Coda

Grieving, waiting, defiance... If the outback — the dead and the red heart — is within each of us, then it comes down to an individual as well as a collective dilemma: to what do we need to surrender, and what will help us to do this in a way that will facilitate rebirth? I am reminded of a line from the American poet Wallace Stevens: 'The lion roars at the enraging desert'. The American Jungian James Hillman, comments:

The more our desert, the more we must rage, which rage is love. The passions of the soul make the desert habitable. One inhabits, not a cave of rock, but the heart within the lion. The desert is not in Egypt [or the outback]; it is anywhere once we desert the heart.

Show me your outback, and I'll show you your rage, your longing, and your love.

Dr Mark Byrne is Senior Researcher at Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre, where he occasionally writes and gives talks on race relations in Australian cinema. His doctoral thesis was on hero myths and male rites of passage.

Living in the online comfort zone?

MEDIA

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Blogs, or weblogs, are one of many online forms of personal expression and publishing that have emerged with the rise of the internet. They are an ever expanding phenomenon. Technorati, a real-time search engine and self-proclaimed authority on blogs, reports that the "blogosphere" continues to double every six weeks and currently includes more than 35 million weblogs.

For bloggers such as Elaheh Farmand, an eighteen year old Iranian-born woman living in Virginia in the United States, blogs are replacing the personal diaries of generations past.

Elaheh Farmand commenced her personal blog *BlueBirdEscape* in July 2002. Now just finishing high school in the United States, she migrated with her family from Iran when she was 11. Her older brother lives in Belgium and a sister and brother have remained in Iran.

Digital Radio set for 2009 stillbirth?

MEDIA

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In 1995, a Fairfax journalist told me that I should not worry too much about the Internet. Ignore it, he reassured me, and it would go away. He added that those who were predicting that the Internet would completely reshape the media landscape, were living on another planet. As we now know, his prediction - in common with that of many others - could not have been further from the reality of what has occurred.



In 2006, I could envisage a commercial radio employee telling me the same thing about digital radio. Ignore it, and it will go away. In this case, he or she would be right, more or less.

Last month, Communications Minister Helen Coonan confirmed that she does not believe it should be introduced for some time. She nominated a launch date of January 2009. In reality, she is reflecting the desire of the commercial radio industry to see it delayed until it has passed its use-by date. They don't want anything to change.

However the industry knows that change is inevitable, and that it will destroy the oligopoly. Austereo has long been one of the most profitable players in the industry. Its CEO Michael Anderson admitted on Channel 9's Business Sunday at the weekend that radio as we know it "is coming to an end". He and other executives realise that it is in their best interest to delay the introduction of digital radio. They have lobbied the Minister for extra time.

Speaking at April's Australian Broadcasting Summit in Sydney, Senator Coonan announced a 2009 start: "This is a realistic estimation of the time needed to put into place a complex legislative and regulatory time frame for the new broadcasting technology."

But it's arguable that digital radio could begin almost immediately. Successful test transmissions have taken place in Sydney and Melbourne over the past two years. With the appropriate political will, the ABC would need much less time to prepare to commence ongoing digital radio transmissions. The required political will might have been manifest in a designated allocation in last week's Federal Budget, as it was with respect to other ABC activities. The ABC is already organised to offer extra services such as DIG music channels for niche interests such as jazz and country. Digital would also allow it to put special programming types such as Parliament and cricket and other sport on dedicated channels, rather than interrupt regular programs. As regulators and broadcasters in the UK have realised, the best time for the consumer to benefit from the mooted digital radio technology is now. Known as Eureka 147, or DAB, it's been on air there for a decade. The technology has matured, and its usefulness will soon decline. It will be overtaken by more and better options by 2009.

In Australia, digital radio is already available in a number of other forms less convenient than a conventional portable or car radio receiver. For example, Foxtel and other digital pay TV providers offer dozens of digital radio channels as part of their basic package. But more than likely, it will arrive in more convenient forms by 2009, and this will make DAB unnecessary.

There are many emerging technologies. The most prominent of these is podcasting. Because it is simple, and uses the Internet, almost anybody can be a broadcaster, and the technology has the potential to take power and profits away from the traditional broadcasting sector. Aside from iPods, mobile phones are already a source of media content. In Australia, 3G mobile phones offer TV. If there is consumer demand, service providers are equipped to offer radio on mobile phones.

There are, and will be, further options. Who will want to pay \$200 for a DAB receiver when they can get the same service on their mobile phone or pay TV service for little or no extra cost?

In recent decades, the Australian Government has become indebted to the commercial radio industry, since it has established the practice of raising revenue through the public auction of broadcast licences. In 2004, the DMG group paid a combined \$158 million for the FM frequencies used by its Vega stations, which commenced broadcasting last year. Minister Coonan has said that FM analogue signals would not be turned off. The opportunity cost of this would be significant, given the more efficient use that could be made of the limited spectrum it occupies, in a fully digital environment. The possibility - or hope - that digital radio might just go away may not be completely fanciful.

DMG was paying not just for the frequencies, but for the right to a disproportionate say in determining public broadcasting policy. This means that the policy effectively has as its major goal, the health of the balance sheets of the commercial broadcasters, rather than the public good. That is why, unlike consumers in the UK, we are currently missing out on the benefit of DAB digital radio.

Michael Mullins is editor of Eureka Street Online.

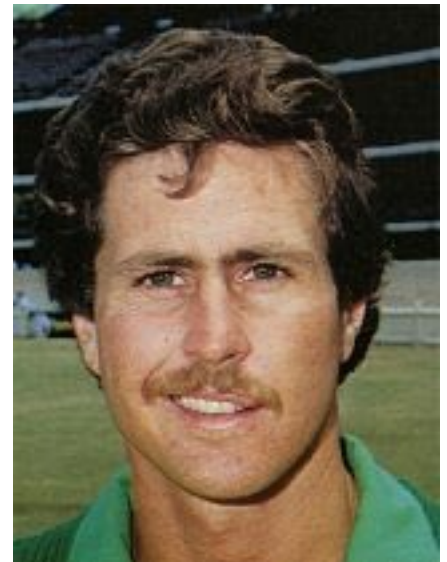
Don't run out on modern sport

SPORT

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I have never devised questions for a sports trivia night. But an easy question might be to name the moderately successful Australian left-hand opening batsman of the late 1970s and early 80s who was considered a bad judge of a run.

If you are thinking Graeme Wood, you have won the jackpot. Debuting for Western Australia at the age of 20 in the 1976-77 season, Wood played his first Test the following year. The team had been gutted by the exodus of top line players to Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket. He maintained his place in the national team after the return of the rebel players two years later, finishing his international career in the summer of 1988-89.



He averaged in the low 30s in both Test and One Day Internationals (ODI) but showed determination and skill in overcoming his short frame and a barrage of lethal West Indian bowlers at the pinnacle of their powers. He played in over 40 international matches against the West Indians. Opening the batting against Holding, Roberts, Garner, Marshall and company was not for lily-livered souls. Wood showed great courage in these encounters which were as much about physical prowess as they were wars of the mind.

But Wood remains known to Australian sports followers as a very poor runner between wickets. But I always thought this an unfair legacy for Wood to inherit. Perhaps I sympathised with him because I too was a left-hand opener!

A review of Wood's Test career supports my case. He was run out on only a half a dozen occasions in 112 innings. But he did feel short of his crease 10 times in his 66 dismissals in international one-dayers. In five successive games in 1981, Wood was run out four times.

But Wood's legacy to modern cricket is more significant. He was playing the shortened version of the game in its infant days. And one-day cricket has also left its mark on other forms of cricket. The first World Cup had been held in 1975. But Australian cricket fans' introduction to the game was really through w the colourful Packer circus.

Contemporary cricketers think little of dropping the ball at their feet and setting off for a run. The Waugh brothers ran a production line in their efficiency at this practice. It is now an instinctive part of the game at all levels. The 22 yards from stumps to stumps no longer seems a proverbial country mile. Wood was a pioneer in this practice. He was misunderstood in his sorties down the wicket by team mates and by cricket lovers. They did not see how cricket was changing from its 100 year old ways.

There are contemporary lessons in Wood's experience. Criticism about the increasing commercialisation of sport or about rule changes, including those in Australian Rules football and rugby league, should take a broad view. Restructuring of games demands lateral thinking. We are only in the second decade of truly professional sport in a small nation. National football competitions (with the exception of soccer), player drafts and salary caps are common-place terms and realities. They were not heard before the 1980's.

Who is to say that Aussie Rules is a lesser game because long kicking is less frequent, or that Rugby Union has lost its element of can really say that Aussie Rules is less of a game due to the infrequency of the long kick or that in rugby union players contend less for the ball because "lifting" in the lineout is allowed? And should the sight of players arriving to games in suits and at home with corporate heavies in hospitality suites, prevent us from enjoying the athleticism they display on the field?

It is rash to judge changes before their effects have time to appear. Only the passage of time distinguishes the approaches to a run adopted by Wood and the contemporary paragon, Andrew Symons.

Tom Cranitch is CEO of Jesuit Communications, which publishes Eureka Street. His greatest sporting feat was scoring two centuries for his Brisbane sub-district club, the Banyo Bloods, in the 1987-88 season.

Towards an Australian "voice"

BOOK REVIEW

Published

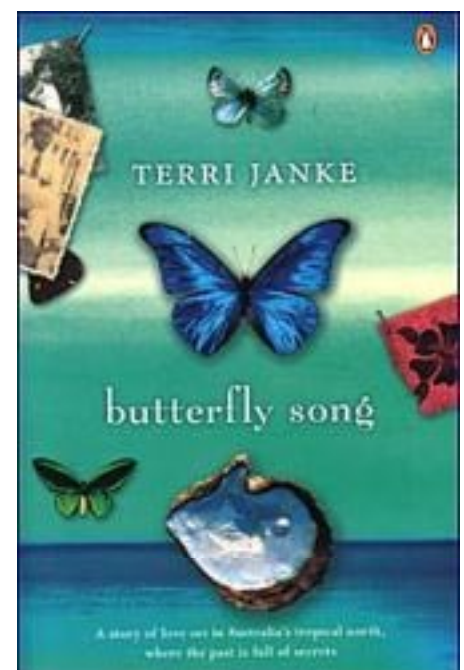
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Butterfly Song, Terri Janke, Penguin 2004, ISBN 0-14-300262-7, rrp \$22.95

Behind the Moon, Hsu-Ming Teo, Allen and Unwin 2005, ISBN 1-74114-243-1, rrp \$22.95

By emphasising cultural distinctiveness, recent novels by two young female authors advance the development of an Australian 'voice'. Literary voice expresses social mores, represents characters and creates a space and language for dialogue between subcultures. The central characters in Terri Janke's *Butterfly Song* and Hsu-Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon* are young people exploring their identities within a diverse and dynamic Australian society. The novels demonstrate that while there are some common Australian traits, there is no one way to look, sound and behave as an Australian. Australian writing is similarly difficult to define but is distinguished by freshness, a dry sense of humour and an understated anti-authoritarianism.

The narrator of *Butterfly Song*, a young Murri named Tarena, attends a 'tombstone unveiling' on Thursday Island. Although Tarena has just completed her final law exams, Tarena's mother urges her to investigate the ownership of a butterfly carved from pearl shell and turned into a brooch.



Tarena's mother and uncle believe that their father Kit made the carving for their mother Francesca, and as it was neither sold nor given away, it is rightfully theirs. Tarena's search is engrossing enough, but several sub-plots and analogical themes enrich this thought provoking novel. Gazing towards the ocean Tarena says: 'I see other islands in the blue distance.... like stepping stones to another world'. Tarena's hunt for the provenance of the brooch leads to discoveries about her family and herself. Becoming more secure in her family relationships, she forms a constructive attitude to her future within a legal system that in 1992, before the 'Mabo' decision, seemed hostile to Indigenous people.

This novel is a stepping stone to entertainment but also to knowledge, empathy and understanding. Janke writes engagingly and her story tells itself. She does not preach, but rather recounts good humouredly, with this gentle humour even extending to Tarena's experience of racism. While some non-Indigenous people deny the truth of dispossession, no fair minded reader will be threatened by Janke's understated style. At school, asked about Katherine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*, Tarena lazily objects that being by a non-Aboriginal writer, 'that's got nothing to do with me'. As with the output of so many other Indigenous writers, such as Colin Johnson, Kevin Gilbert, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Philip McLaren and Sam Watson, pigeon-holing belittles Janke's work. While Janke's novel is informed by her heritage and sub-cultural experiences, her work is unique, just as Tarena is a complex individual who cannot be reduced to racial caricature.

Janke's use of short sentences makes the narrative style consistent with the dialogue. The sequence is thematic rather than strictly linear, so Tarena's 1992 adventures are interspersed with tales of her childhood, her parents and grandparents. Janke leads the reader so gently that even the most unlikely scenes are acceptable. When Kit dies and appears to his beloved Francesca, the scene could become melodramatic, but Janke makes it seem feasible. Janke's unpretentious language is surprisingly rich. Of her childhood home Tarena says Cairns never looks as good in postcards as it really is. If Cairns were a painting, it would be an abstract swirl of red, blue and purple, with a childhood yellow claiming one corner.

If a person, Cairns would be 'an old wise woman with big breasts that sag from years of nurturing children'.

Tarena feels alienated from the blank faces in Sydney where she studies. Finding that 'friendliness and smiling are not part of the code of conduct', Tarena remarks: 'Terra Nullius. I have got terra nullius of the brain. They have got terra nullius of the heart'. The intangibles that came with the Mabo decision are as important as the material fact of the land. Sam, a guitarist and singer, learns a song about a butterfly that Kit wrote for Francesca. Tarena remembers that her mother could hum the tune, but did not know the words. 'And now Sam has given them back to us. Life moves in mysterious ways. I hug Sam. "Thank you", I whisper'.

The butterfly was stolen not by its present owner but at a distance. The same applies to Aboriginal and Islander land, culture, identity and autonomy, as those who seek to undermine reconciliation conveniently forget. Tarena's journey of reclamation succeeds because the brooch's owner sees the injustice of the current situation. The language of *Butterfly Song* is deceptively simple. Tarena laments, 'I can't remember where I am and now I have forgotten the language of rain'. Indigenous peoples have been deprived of so many cultural underpinnings of their identities, but others of us have lost the ability to think critically, to feel compassion and to make ethical decisions. As with many works by Indigenous writers and artists, *Butterfly Song* speaks subtly of complex themes. Readers should not think that lack of cathedrals with intricate architecture means absence of spirituality. Rather, we should seize the opportunity to assess what is important in our own lives, beliefs and culture. This could heal our 'terra nullius of the heart'.

While both works are complex and multi-faceted, Hsu-Ming Teo's work, like Janke's explores the pressures on young people squeezed between the demands of a dominant culture and the hopes of their families. Justin Cheong, Tien Ho and Nigel Gibson are schoolmates who explore the boundaries of friendship as they grow to adulthood. They bring to their relationships the shared experiences of their generation, the diversity of their family backgrounds and the individuality of their personal identities.

Each chapter is prefaced with an extract from the Vietnamese poem, Nguyen Du's 'The Tale of Kieu', and reading these 'scented pages' is itself pleasurable. Du warns of the painful choice between 'love and filial duty'. Justin (Jay), whose parents are Singaporean Chinese and whose mother, Annabelle is obsessive about cleanliness (especially in toilets,) creates tension at the 'Dead Diana Party', by declaring his sexual orientation as a 'Rice Queen'.

Nigel (Gibbo), whose father served in Vietnam and knew Linh, Tien's mother, declares his love for Linh, stalks her and becomes the subject of a restraining order. Tien declares her independence and her Australian credentials by marrying an artist and moving to California. Tien, who was raised in her extended family, is angry towards her mother for abandoning her, but when she treats Linh badly, she learns something else. 'Tien never realised how much she wanted her family's approval until they withdrew it'. In the USA she tries to locate the man who fathered her while he was in Vietnam, and breaks with the husband who treats her as one of his 'cosmopolitan accessories.'

All three friends, and not just the two with the 'immigrant' appearance, feel isolated from their parents, but after traumatic experiences discover a new closeness. The three families are reunited after Justin is bashed by gay haters. This partly explains why some friendships survive and others are 'as weak as water, sparkling and slipping away through cupped fingers, leaving only the impression of wetness and a thirst unquenched'.

In Hsu-Ming Teo's novel, Singlish is used to great effect, Vietnamese culture is exposed positively and the problems for an Anglo family with a welcoming attitude are presented in some complexity. In the sweet melodies of Cantonese influence, Annabelle tells Justin that he will take speech lessons from Gibbo's mother: 'Wah, Jay. See how Mrs Gibson speaks so good English! Got standards, leh Must want. Cannot don't want'.

People are supported by their cultures but can also be overwhelmed by them. No single experience represents the positions of all Indigenous people or the perspectives of all immigrants. The young people in these novels must negotiate both with the broader society and with the older generations of their sub-cultural origins. As feminists have observed of the experience of being a woman, identity is as much thrust upon us from outside as created within. Indigenous people and immigrants including refugees can be excluded, marginalised or kept in prescribed sub-cultural places.

In her recent novel, *The Apricot Colonel*, Marion Halligan has her narrator explain that she loves novels because 'They write us down and in doing so cause us to exist'. Some artists anticipate the whims of cultural consumers and meet the demands of a genre, but the most vibrant writers lead readers' understanding rather than follow fashions and market demands. Perhaps because both *Butterfly Song* and *Behind the Moon* stretch boundaries and challenge stereotypes, neither has experienced the critical acclaim or the popular success it deserves. Perhaps the books have been pigeon holed, wrongly, as ethnic literature of interest only to minorities. But neither work should be regarded as a mere snapshot of a piece of an Australian mosaic. Rather, while very different in setting, characters and style, *Butterfly Song* and *Behind the Moon* are Australian in their very essence, and readers will understand this country better for having engaged with them.

Tony Smith holds a PhD in political science. He has taught at several universities, most recently at the University of Sydney. His writing has appeared in newspapers and journals including Australian Book Review, Australian Quarterly, Australian Review of Public Affairs, Online Catholics and Online Opinion.

A sickle moon

POETRY

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It having been summer for five
days any human being goes off to
sleep uneasily, akimbo, because
that blot on the white ceiling might
be a spider or else merely

a wedge of solid black left
in some building operation when
they were doing those renos on
your house's old fabric, quite
recently. And in this morning's

Age your horoscope was rather
melodramatic for a Monday, I'd
say: it being no more than
an insect-warm day, just right for

a really lush green salad with
three little cutlets generously
basted. On the six o'clock ABC
news our plump treasurer looked

disconcerted at his, I wouldn't
quite say, gaffe but there it
stood, plain as the nose on somebody's

face. In December's climate sandals can be
just the bee's knees, encouraging
the getting around on your newly-brown

legs, until the blurred hour comes
to sleep uneasily again, because
the trembling white gossamer heads of

Queen Anne's lace out there cannot do
anything to soften downright human

disconcertedness, nor ease hay
fever, which is nearly over this

fortnight, I'd be inclined to say.
Venus glares beside a sickle moon.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe's most recent publication is the late-modern epic, "The Universe Looks Down" (2005)