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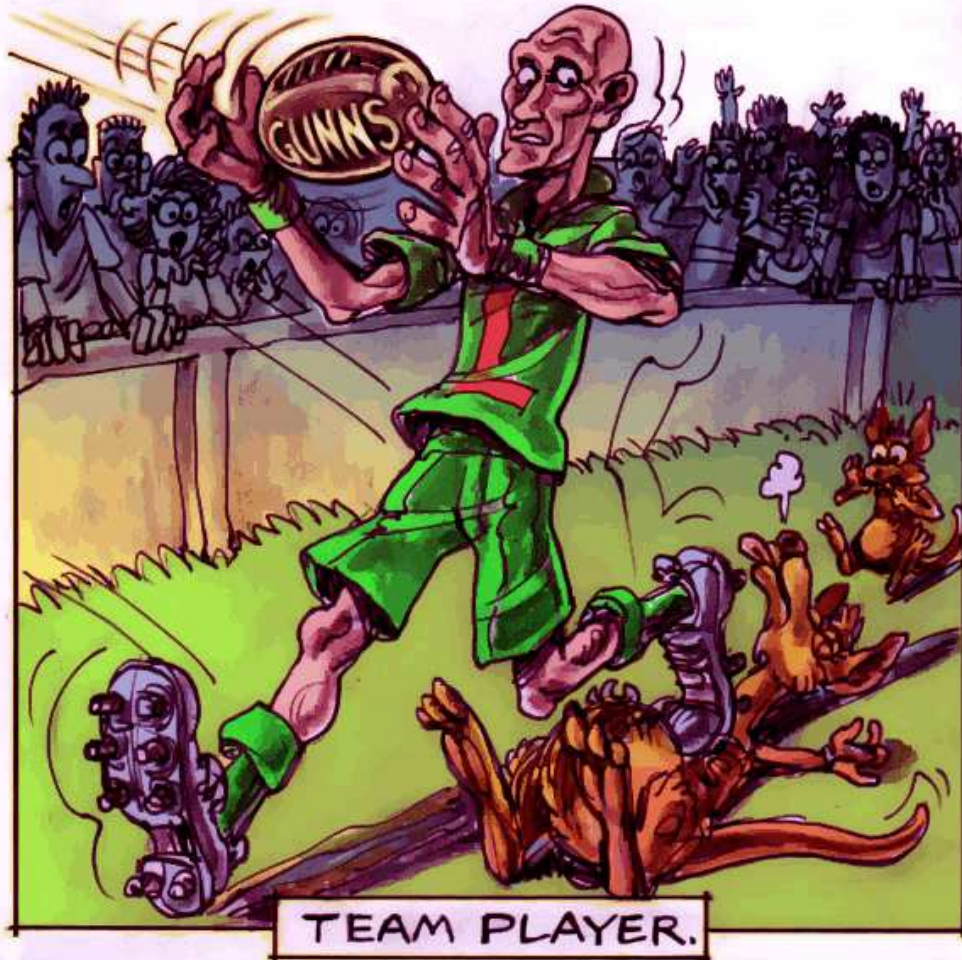
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Politics is a team sport

POLITICS

John Warhurst



Peter Garrett, the shadow minister for the environment, is suffering substantial damage to his reputation over the Tasmanian pulp mill.

He stands by Labor policy to support the federal government's decision to approve the mill, despite his long history as a leading environmentalist and his past presidency of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

Environmentalists are already campaigning against him in his NSW seat of Kingsford Smith.

Senator Bob Brown, leader of the Greens, has ended their friendship and another former colleague, Geoff Law of the Wilderness Society, now describes Garrett as a traitor to environmentalism. Brown says Garrett has gone missing in action on the environment and many others have echoed these criticisms.

Yet these criticisms are beside the point. What Garrett thinks personally doesn't actually matter, other than ultimately to his conscience.

Politics is a team sport. Individuals, especially those with particular enthusiasms, need to recognise this. Major party politics is not made for determined individualists.

It is irrelevant to query whether the private and the public Garrett are on the same page, just as it is pointless to ask the same question of other politicians. Does Malcolm Turnbull really believe all he says about the pulp mill? Does Joe Hockey really believe all he says in defence of Work Choices? We may never know and it doesn't really matter. We judge them on their actions as ministers.

The same is true on other issues. Turnbull must bow to his team's view on the republic, at least until John Howard goes. Tony Abbott, at least since his loss of control over RU486, can only talk about his personal opposition to abortion.

Like it or not our Westminster system does not depend on ministers and shadow ministers believing what they say. Some might find this a remarkable statement, but government depends in practice on a collective view. In fact collective ministerial responsibility for government policy makes a virtue of group solidarity prevailing over individuals.

Ministers and shadow ministers will not always be on the winning side in internal debates

about policy directions. They can argue their case strongly, of course, but they have to be ready to lose.

Nevertheless, unless they choose to resign from their positions on principle, they must then go out into the public arena and sell their party's policies whether or not they believe in them. They must flick the switch in their brains and become true believers in the government policy for which they personally are responsible.

Resignation is always an option, but the assumption is that, unless the deepest of principles are involved, ministers and shadow ministers will be team players rather than individualists and, therefore, will not resign from the team. Careers and reputations, as well as consciences, are at stake here. Resign once and you might come back; resign twice and you will probably be out for good.

There is a good, though counter-intuitive, case, for usually allocating portfolios to generalists rather than enthusiasts like Garrett. Rudd will face this problem with Greg Combet. He should keep him away from industrial relations, because of the conflicts that will certainly follow him from his previous job with the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and use his talents in another area.

It was always dangerous for Garrett to be made shadow minister for the environment. Despite the attraction of his past record, his obvious subject knowledge, and his potential electoral appeal to environmentalists, Labor should have avoided it.

But his position is not unique. Garrett, assuming he wants to, can only speak out against his party's policy if he is willing to damage both his own career and his party's prospects. Unfortunately, many ministers and shadow ministers must wrestle with the same conflict between their individual conscience and the collective will of the ministry on a regular basis.

John Warhurst is Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and a Canberra Times columnist.

The human rights cost of intelligence activities

POLITICS

Bill Calcutt

The images of the September 11 terrorist attacks are now etched deeply into our psyche. The resultant global 'war on terror' has largely crystallised international efforts by governments to combat terrorism in a 'new post-September 11 security environment'.



Struggling to respond effectively to the prospects of devastating attacks from a highly committed and unconventional foe, governments have adopted a range of exceptional and sometimes indiscriminate measures. Some of these measures have impinged significantly on important and longstanding conventions that have traditionally assured human and civil rights.

Covert intelligence operations have played a major role in the global war against an elusive enemy, and intelligence advice has been pivotal in the development of national and international responses to the threat of terrorism.

Because of the secrecy that invariably surrounds intelligence activities, the community remains largely oblivious to the true nature of intelligence and its inherent limitations. In national security matters the community has to trust in the government's integrity, and assurances that it would only act responsibly and with substantial justification.

While intelligence activities can include the collection, evaluation, collation and analysis of information, the overriding objective is to develop insights that provide direction for effective action (called intelligence product). A disciplined approach to the collection and analysis of information raises the level of confidence in the reliability and accuracy of the interpretations.

But even using multiple, diverse and independent information sources and the most critical and objective analysis, the intelligence produced remains intrinsically fallible because it always involves an element of human interpretation and subjectivity.

More than 20 years after the Hope Royal Commission spelt out the central role of analysis in transforming collected information into intelligence, and following a series of highly publicised intelligence failures, the Australian Government has moved to shield intelligence advice from further public scrutiny by blurring the vital distinction between intelligence activities and intelligence product — by portraying intelligence as 'covertly obtained

information’.

Under this definition it is virtually impossible for the community to determine whether what is being presented as compelling ‘evidence’ of a serious and imminent threat is unassessed raw data or carefully evaluated intelligence product, and whether a proposed response is justified and proportionate. Intelligence can undoubtedly constitute a valuable source of advice in the absence of facts and evidence. But the sensitivity and intrinsic fallibility of this advice means that it is rarely suitable for use in the public domain or as the basis for accountable decisions.

The limitations of secret information and intelligence product as evidence were previously revealed following a bomb explosion outside the Sydney Hilton almost 30 years ago, for which three men were first convicted, then later pardoned on the belief there had been a miscarriage of justice. Further limitations are likely to be exposed again as legal proceedings commence against suspect individuals and groups under recently-introduced counter-terrorism legislation.

Since September 11 the threat of terrorism has been a catalyst for an unprecedented concentration of authority and the emergence of a powerful paternalism under the guise of national ‘leadership’ in a time of crisis. ‘Secret’ intelligence has been used to justify policies and actions that shift the balance between the rights of the state and the individual, at the same time avoiding public scrutiny of decision-making processes. National priorities have been transformed, reducing an already inadequate level of funding support for the most disadvantaged members of our community (the poor, young, sick, aged, and indigenous Australians).

A primary objective of terrorism as an organisational strategy is to engender disproportionate fear within the wider community, and to act as a catalyst for negative changes to society that advance the terrorists’ goals. Because of this objective it is possible for terrorists to be highly effective without having to undertake any or many actual terrorism operations.

An alarmist and sensationalist media, an intelligence community that grows in importance and resources in the face of imminent threats, and a government that gains electoral advantage from appearing to be tough and protective, combine to reinforce community fear and inadvertently serve the terrorists’ interests.

Since the start of the ‘war on terror’ Muslim communities across the world have experienced unprecedented discrimination and victimisation. In the absence of a genuine understanding of the values and motivation of Australian Muslims, simplistic, ill informed and prejudicial stereotypes have driven policies and actions that have exacerbated the alienation of sections of the community. Ironically these actions have the potential to create conditions that will increase the future prospects of terrorism in Australia.

A government committed to maintaining a peaceful, just and humane society will always act to ensure that all Australians, regardless of their origin, religion, race or colour are respected as equals and enjoy fair access to the opportunities that this unique country offers.

[Click here](#) to read the longer paper on which this article was based (PDF 120k)



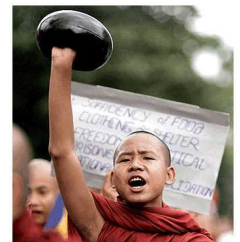
Bill Calcutt worked in a range of intelligence roles in the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the National Crime Authority for more than 20 years. In 1996 he was awarded the Public Service Medal in the Australia Day Awards for his outstanding service to national and international law enforcement in the development of a strategic intelligence training program. Bill now works in regional development and retains a strong interest in governance and public accountability.

A key role for Australia in Burma's democratisation

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Kevin

Following dramatic street protests that came frustratingly close to creating enough public momentum to potentially topple the military-authoritarian regime, Burma seems to have returned to the cruel status quo ante of a cowed population suffering ruthless repression. But is the democracy genie truly back in the bottle? Have the oppressed Burmese people nothing to look forward to but more of the same police-state monitoring and intimidation?



There is one hopeful sign of possible change. Last week, all 15 UN Security Council members agreed a non-binding UNSC presidential statement on Myanmar. The text 'strongly deplores the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators in Myanmar' and calls on Myanmar's military regime and all other parties concerned 'to work together toward a de-escalation of the situation and a peaceful solution'.

This statement is an important benchmark. First, because of its strength and clarity. Second, because it is the first time the UNSC has taken a formal position on Burma; China and Burma having hitherto argued successfully that it is an internal matter outside the council's mandate. Third, because China, the Burmese regime's strongest international protector, endorsed this statement after weeks of negotiating to soften earlier harsher Western drafts.

What persuaded China to support such strong criticism of its client regime? The ferocity of the repression, the victimisation of Buddhist monks, the sharp international distress at events, the forthcoming leadership transitions in China, and next year's Olympic Games in Beijing — all may have played a part in inducing China to ease its hitherto implacable position.

Now, there can be no going back from the new UNSC benchmark. From now on, the UN will have enhanced leverage to press for dialogue between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military leadership, and for more protection of the human rights of peaceful protesters. Out of this, democratisation can begin to take root in Burma.

In some ways, Burma today reminds me of that key moment in Polish history in the mid-1980s, after a bloody suppression of Solidarity strikes in the Gdansk shipyards. Under pressure from a horrified West, the regime agreed to enter into a structured dialogue with

Solidarity. Poland moved from iron-fist repression to a softer, more subtle repressive style. Ten years later, an ascendant Solidarity, backed by the Church, negotiated a peaceful transfer of power from a morally bankrupt communist regime.

That kind of future is foreseeable in Burma, but it will require years of determined but sensitive diplomacy, not only by the UNSC but also by China and other interested states — most importantly, the ASEANs and other regional countries like Japan, India and, oddly enough, Australia.

It seems unlikely the US will have a part to play. China is in no mood to tolerate lectures in democracy from its rival for hegemony and from a power that regularly violates human rights norms in the Middle East. In China's eyes, the US simply does not have moral standing in Burma.

The task for regional countries and Australia would be to dialogue with China from a different starting point; one that accepts the major strategic importance of Burma to China. For Burma is a glacis protecting China's vulnerable southern flank. It is also a trade access area to the Indian Ocean (including possible future oil transshipments from friendly Middle Eastern countries, if passage through the Straits of Malacca were ever threatened by a hostile US). And it is a resources-rich hinterland.

So for China it is strategically vital that no anti-Chinese regime under US influence ever be established in Burma. Such an outcome is simply not negotiable.

What is achievable is a gradual softening of the harder edges of the regime — some dialogue on human rights with opposition elements, more freedom in IT applications, more scope for legal opposition politics, and the acceptance of greater foreign investment to raise employment opportunities and living standards.

One is struck by the diversity of China's relationship with bordering states or autonomous regions. These relationships include frankly tributary relationships, like North Korea, Hong Kong, Tibet and Laos. Yet each is very different in character. Then there are non-tributary relationships like Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, Russia, the former Soviet Central Asian republics, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Vietnam ... and the troubled relationship with Taiwan.

The point is, there is no single model, but many models Burma might aspire to, as a democratic contiguous state that accepts a degree of Chinese hegemony. The trick would be to persuade China that it can both have its cake and eat it in Burma.

Perhaps next year Kevin Rudd might help open up Chinese thinking on Burma? He has the expertise and standing to do so. It could be the first example in many years (since the UNTAC settlement in Cambodia) of a successful Australian regional diplomacy involving Chinese interests.



Tony Kevin retired from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 1998, after a 30-year public service career in DFAT and Prime Minister's Department. He was Australia's ambassador to Poland (1991—94) and Cambodia (1994—97).

Burma's new generation political activists

International

Carol Ransley and Toe Zaw Latt,

As the war being waged by the Burmese military against its own people slowly fades from international headlines, Burmese young people from all walks of life continue to step up their non-violent resistance campaign against the military leaders, while arrests and detention, violent beatings and night-time raids continue.



A new generation of young activists was born on the streets of Rangoon last month. They are drawn from Burma's young 'hip-hop' generation, as one exiled activist put it, have few memories of the upheavals and violence of 1988 and, until now, have been more concerned with a youth culture that revolves around music, computer games and trying to obtain a decent education. They have now witnessed — first hand — the brutality of their own government and have become politicised.

These young people are smarter, more exposed to the outside world and more familiar with modern communication technologies such as internet and video phones than young pro-democracy activists were in 1988. With the benefit of hindsight and more than 20 years of underground organising, former 1988 student activists have joined hands with newly-formed student and youth groups across the country. These groups are expressing fresh forms of political defiance and committing themselves to non-violent strategies. And they are determined to stick it out.

A young protester told Democratic Voice of Burma last month, 'I was only three (years old) during 1988. I didn't know what the 1988 students were doing and I didn't know how brutal the military was. But now I have seen with my own eyes the brutality of the military. (They have) beaten up monks and gone after fellow unarmed students. I will come out to the streets again whenever I get the chance.'

Committed to remaining inside Burma to advance the struggle against military rule, they have little faith in regional governments and the UN Security Council to apply effective pressure.

Some young student activists who took part in the demonstrations were from the All

Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABSFU or, in Burmese, Ba Ka Tha). This organisation, founded in 1938, has been the vanguard of movements for political and social change in Burma. At one time headed by revered independence hero, Aung San, Ba Ka Tha has a long history of working together with people of Burma from different walks of life. A member of the ABSFU's Foreign Affairs Committee stated, 'We struggled to resist fascism, to gain nation independence and to create an internal peace movement. Now we continue in the pro-democracy struggle.'



The ABSFU went underground when its headquarters at Rangoon University's main campus were demolished on 7 July 1962 during the military coup led by General Ne Win against the democratically elected U Nu government. The organisation has remained a strong underground force in subsequent movements in Burma since, but received a shot in the arm recently, amid the brutal military crackdown. A new leadership group made up of current students was established last week. Attempts were subsequently made to arrest the new student leaders a number of days ago. While two were successfully arrested in raids, the new chairperson, Kyaw Ko Ko, managed to evade police and at the time of publication remains active.

Despite the heaviest military presence in Rangoon and Mandalay in decades, activists have been able to continue their non-violent resistance and civil disobedience campaign. In Rangoon in recent days, animals such as country farm buffalos and mangy street dogs have appeared in markets and lanes sporting pictures of top military officials, inviting onlookers to 'kick them'. Being likened to a dog, considered the lowest form of animal life in Burmese culture, is deemed an insult.

Despite the crackdown, activists are still able to meet and organise in secret, as evidenced by a number of statements released over recent days. The General Strike Supervising Committee comprising nine different organisations that represent monks, 88 Generation student leaders, current student and youth groups and, for the first time in Burma's political history, ethnic youth organisations, has vowed to step up their campaign of non-violent resistance.

While protesters have not been able to march, they have used myriad other tactics. In the first week of October, protesters laid commemorative wreaths at the five worst sites of violence and bloodshed around Rangoon. Last week posters also appeared around downtown Rangoon sporting the words 'Killer Than Shwe'. Graffiti is becoming more and more common, and not just in the cities. Recent graffiti has particularly appealed for Burmese soldiers to join the movement for change. One example called for Aung San Suu Kyi's father, General Aung San, an independence hero and the founder of the Burma Army, to return to Burma, to not bring shame on them and to behave properly. Another student group released a swath of helium balloons into the air at Sanpya market in Thingangyun

Township tied to pictures of Senior Than Shwe with the word 'Butcher' on them.

While most 88 Generation 'frontline' leaders have now been arrested, four prominent leaders of the monks' boycott are still at large and able to give media interviews to Burmese news agencies, who in turn broadcast this back into the country via both satellite radio and TV, a form of communication that the regime just cannot block. Monks have continued their call for peaceful, non-violent protest.

News and images of the violent crackdown in Rangoon last month has spread quickly around the country and the population continues to roil against the regime, despite the military leader's propaganda attempts to counter such news. Pictures, such as those of a dead monk's black and bruised body floating face down in a body of water, are telling Burmese people a thousand words. This situation has the junta, which is used to exerting near absolute control over the media, apparently worried. In recent days it issued instructions to all of its regional command centers not to believe the news being broadcast into Burma from abroad.

Democratic Voice of Burma set up a telephone hotline for Burmese people to ring in and identify those soldiers, police and militia members who were responsible for the killings and violence. Every week the hotline receives hundreds of calls, and ordinary people also email in details from across Burma. While the media is not able to broadcast the details, it is providing a valuable record for a future where the military are on trial for the crimes they have perpetrated.

And the activists know if they push hard enough, the cracks will begin to show and the soldiers will eventually split from the ranks of the military elite.

In the meantime, a long and perhaps brutal few months awaits them.

With thanks to the All Burma Federation of Student Unions for photos.

Carol Ransley is a human rights advocate who has monitored the situation in Burma for 15 years. Toe Zaw Latt, a former 1988 student activist, is the Thailand Bureau Chief of [Democratic Voice of Burma](#) .

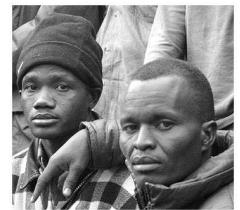
Echoes of Calwell in Sudanese refugee cut

AUSTRALIA

David Holdcroft

The Government feels that it has gone as far as it could reasonably go ... in granting ... | permits to persons of these classes on purely humanitarian grounds ... | It is intended that in future the approval of applications will depend more on the intending migrants' ability to contribute to Australia's economic welfare.

One might be tempted to think these words were spoken last week somewhere in Canberra. They were in fact the words of Arthur Calwell, the immigration minister, announcing a change of policy towards Australia's post-war admittance of Jewish refugees.



There is a stark similarity between these and Kevin Andrews' words spoken last week in explanation of the recent cut in acceptance of refugees from Sudan. Both place national interest criteria at the heart of the decision — in the Africans' case, the ability of refugees to integrate into the community. Unfortunately both have deep historical precedent and point to a question around Australia's refugee resettlement program: what and who is the program for?

Australia is generally considered to run the third most generous program of humanitarian resettlement anywhere, after the United States and Canada. Our program grew during the post war years as a subset of post war immigration and under the influence of the twin imperatives to accept people displaced by the war and those fleeing the rise of the communist bloc.

The key drivers however were the need to increase the country's overall population while making it younger and providing workers for the growing manufacturing industry.

Up until 1975 some 3.5 million people made their way here. Of these, just under 10 per cent — or 350,000 people — were refugees. The arrivals were not exactly free: they participated in government directed labour schemes for the first two years of their stay as a condition of their entry. Nor were they randomly selected: preference was given to the young, healthy and European looking. There were also various schemes to ensure the integration of new arrivals.

The first arrival of a boatload of Vietnamese in 1976 ushered in a new era of

humanitarian arrivals. No longer were economic and demographic motives the main drivers. Rather Australia's desire to be a good East Asian citizen, coupled with a sense of pragmatism that recognised the inevitability of new arrivals, combined to push the Fraser government to negotiate the Comprehensive Plan of Action with East Asian governments. This scheme saw the eventual resettlement of 1.3 million refugees from indo-China to the west in a multilateral approach to solve a problem held in common.

Recent years have seen a breakdown of this pragmatism. In response to the rise of the 'jet age asylum seekers', the rapid movement of people across borders, there has been the tendency of all western governments to restrict access to newcomers. But perhaps uniquely, Australia has revisited its tendency to seek immigration outcomes in its humanitarian program.

In one of its first moves in regards to refugees, the Howard government included spontaneous arrivals — cross border asylum seekers — as part of its overall humanitarian quota, which is itself placed within the overall immigration intake. At the same time there persist consistent accusations that the program continues to weed out those who would burden our society, the old and infirm.

Yet each year the government seeks advice from a wide range of NGOs in determining the make up of its humanitarian quota. The assumption on which these negotiations rest, at least from the NGO's point of view, is that the needs of refugees are genuine and urgent; most continue to languish in developing countries with far less capacity to absorb large numbers of entrants than a relatively wealthy country such as Australia.

Which is why Senator Andrews' recent comments made such disturbing reading. For many Sudanese Australians it was hurtful and prompted the question: What more can we do? For those charged with advising the Department on humanitarian quotas it represented a grave breach of trust over what was believed to be the shared understanding of the program's purpose.

Seen in historical context the statements prompt the spectre of a return to the days when only 'suitable' refugees are deemed eligible for entry to these shores. For those left in camps it represents a further retreat from responsibility by the West. For those applying for family reunion in Australia it prompts the disturbing question: Will we ever see our loved ones again?

The remainder of us must ask on what basis — on what set of values — do we wish to build our society? Is it one that seeks advantage over and separation from the weak and the voiceless of our world, or one that builds on compassion and the desire to pull our weight as a nation?



David Holdcroft SJ is director of the [Jesuit Refugee Service](#) .

Building relationships settles refugees

OPINION

Michele Gierck

There's been a lot of talk lately about Australia's refugee program. Unnecessary remarks made by Immigration Minister, Kevin Andrews, have upset some, and given others the false impression that Africans – Sudanese in particular – are not settling in to life in Australia.



Seventy per cent of Australia's refugee intake in 2003 was African. Due to recent policy changes, the 2008 figure will be 30 per cent.

The minister could have explained the change in policy as taking on a more regional focus, much like Australia's international aid agency, AusAID. That would have sufficed. But instead, he added anecdotal evidence about Sudanese refugees having difficulties settling in Australia, rather than reliable research or data prepared by key agencies doing resettlement work.

As an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who has worked with refugees from many countries, including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan, as well as having worked in a war zone and with the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, I can only wonder if the minister has any understanding of the critical need for refugees who have suffered severe dislocation, loss and trauma – as have the Sudanese – to experience a sense of safety and security in their place of resettlement.

And was the minister unaware of how upsetting his remarks would be to the African community?

One Sudanese woman expressed a common sentiment. 'We came here half way across the world so our children would be safe and now we don't feel safe.'

Using anecdotal evidence to back up government policy is dangerous. If there are resettlement challenges with any refugee community, they need to be dealt with in a more systematic way than having the federal minister spout off to the media.

I have as many positive anecdotes about Africans as the minister has negative. Teaching refugees, you build relationships, offer students the opportunity to express themselves, and know that their life stories are respected. You accompany them over the many hurdles

associated with resettlement, which years in the refugee camps or on the run have not prepared them for.

One of my students, Maryam, is so inspiring. A Sudanese woman who has not seen her husband for over a decade, she was on the run with her five children, before making it to Kenya. Somehow she managed to get her oldest son educated, and when he was given a scholarship to medical school in Australia, she soon followed. Maryam is a determined woman, full of life and vitality, serving her community and keen to become a politician.

Last year Maryam's family grew to include six of her brother's children who no longer had anyone to look after them. When we had a class celebration, Maryam was first up to dance. She was also the only one of my ESL students to bring along meat pies and sauce.

Emma Drew, an Australian aid worker based in Africa, who has spent time in Southern Sudan and in Kakuma refugee camp, is inspired by such stories of hope, which arise amid the hardships endured every day by refugees.

'I am totally devastated to hear about Sudanese being beaten in Australia,' she wrote. 'Imagine surviving 13 years of war in Southern Sudan, walking for days, months, and thousands of kilometres to get to Kakuma refugee camp, waiting for years to be processed as a refugee, finally coming to a beautiful, multicultural country like Australia, and then you are murdered at a train station!

'It's heartbreaking ... I really respect them for surviving such persecution and neglect for the past generation, and coming out of it all with a smile and determination to succeed in our society which is so absolutely, totally different from theirs.'

Recognising the distress of Sudanese refugees, last Saturday, the Fitzroy Learning Network and the restaurant Lentil As Anything, in inner-city Melbourne, organised a festival 'celebrating the rich dignity the Sudanese bring'. Many gathered, not just Africans, but people of many cultures - a show of support for the Sudanese community. Thankfully, not everyone thinks like Kevin Andrews.



Michele Gierck is a freelance writer. Her book, 700 Days in El Salvador, was published by Coretext in 2006.

Nothing new in cynicism towards politicians

COLUMNS

By the way

Brian Matthews

At about this time of the year in 1837, the second year of settlement in South Australia, various Adelaide luminaries and newly emerged leaders set up what they called a Nomenclature Committee. The task of this group was to assign suitable names to youthful Adelaide's major streets and squares in order to bring not only a territorial logic to the carefully planned city, but also an appropriate dignity which would be endowed by reference to achievements, history and aspiration.



The members of the committee were Governor Hindmarsh (pictured), Judge Jeffcott, Robert Gouger, James Hurtle Fisher, John Morphett, Edward Stephens, T. Bewes Strangways, Thomas Gilbert, John Brown, Osmond Gilles and John Barton Hack.

Of this august crew, Hack was the least obviously distinguished yet most visibly dynamic; a go-getter of amazing energy; a visionary when it came to pioneering ventures; and a daring, risk-taking business man. In the years following, he would run the gamut from spectacularly successful land deals and farming to ever less lucrative enterprises like whaling, gold digging and carting. He ended his working life tied to a desk as an accountant for the railways.

It is possible his fellow important citizens had a whiff of something feckless in Hack; possible too that Hack didn't pay enough attention or assign sufficient importance to the task of naming because he was so busily focused on the opportunities unfolding in the colony's deceptively promising infancy.

Whatever the inner truths of the committee's deliberations, its actual work reveals a good deal about what must have gone on around that dignified table. Hindmarsh's name lives on in two avenues, two roads, two esplanades, a crescent, a place and one of the city's five major squares. Jeffcott is memorialised in Jeffcott Street, which becomes Jeffcott Road, a central artery of North Adelaide.

Hurtle has an avenue, three streets and another of the five squares. Lest Morphett be forgotten, there are 14 Morphett Roads, and Morphett Street is a main artery in the western half of the city. Osmond has Mount Osmond and Glen Osmond road, both en route to the

city from the hills. And so on.

Hack, it would appear, was either unable or unwilling to impress himself upon his peers to quite the extent that they impressed themselves on him and on the map. Hack might have sensed some worrying signs had he not been proceeding at breakneck speed to fame and fortune.

Whatever the explanation, the family name came badly out of the nomenclature committee's work: Hack gave his middle name to a terrace on the town's furthest periphery and his family name to a couple of back streets and cul-de-sacs. But he could scarcely have expected that the family name's near invisibility in what would become the Adelaide Street Directory, was a paradigm of his own failing endeavour.

It is not easy to establish what the ordinary man and woman of early Adelaide thought about the street signs and plaques flowering around the city after the Nomenclature Committee had set the pace, but it seems fair to assume a degree of cynicism. Even then, in Anglophile Adelaide, a migrant population on the make would have turned a healthy blast of what in later years became a trademark Australian irony on such blatant, shameless monumentalising among their leading citizens.

Which is why, when in our own time the proximity of an election leads to our being confidently, even reverently, saluted by politicians on both sides as intelligent, canny and discriminating paragons of the democratic polity, we can't suppress a frisson of cynicism. And more than a frisson when political advantage is seen to be available in the facile exploitation of tragedy and loss.

It is one thing to throw money at hospitals and roads and enterprises in marginal electorates all over the country. We expect that. It is the level our political drama has sunk to; from a desperately hoped-for, intense and considered clash of views and positions to a vaudeville show of clowns, invective and show-bagging. But when reconciliation — long adamantly resisted, suddenly adopted amid wince-making talk of profound epiphanies and heart-searching — becomes a last-minute vote catcher, only the deepest, most corrosive cynicism is possible. The word 'reconciliation' does after all encompass ruined lives, family tragedies and heartbreaking losses.

It might have been a tenable position to deny its force and the urgency of its claims for action and appropriate penitence on both sides of the sad story. But it is opportunism of the crassest and most grievous kind to use the concept and its penumbra of shame and disgrace for a minute-to-midnight electoral ploy.

Another brick in the evolving, would-be fifth term monument — but already besmirched by unforgiving history and, like most disrespected monuments, the irreverence of indifferent pigeons.



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Gutted kiwis eat humble pie

SPORT

Peter Matheson

Well, there it was, the whole of New Zealand gutted. France in, the All Blacks out. As always our men had performed their haka. We lifted up our hearts, choked down our emotions, and prepared ourselves for glory. But it wasn't to be. The magic didn't work.



Our hopes initially soared heavenward. The first half really lived up to all expectations. Carter kicked like a man inspired. Line-outs were won with monotonous regularity. We were so obviously on top at half-time, despite that officious English referee. Like millions of others I rushed out for a quick fix of coffee and spooned in some m¹/₄slⁱ. I even nurtured quite generous thoughts about the French who had tried so hard, but were not, alas, in our league.

Then came the second half. Unbelievable. No justice in this universe.

We invested \$50 million in this team, the front page of my newspaper screamed the next day. But of course it was the emotional investment that really cost. We had been betrayed, cosmically, and we found a discourse to express this. Never has the word 'gutted' been used so frequently before in this fish-obsessed country.

'Gutted' — a biblical, bowel-evoking word if ever there was one. St Erasmus, you may remember, was the most notable victim of gutting, his martyrdom consisting of his entrails being wound out of him by a sort of capstan, or so the stained glass windows would have us believe. Today we Kiwis stand shoulder to shoulder with saints and martyrs such as Erasmus. Our Otago hero, Anton Oliver, even likened the post-match desolation to the smell of death at Passchendaele.

These French, of course, have a habit of gutting us. And not only at rugby, though 1999 was solemnly and repeatedly remembered. It was not so long ago that their agents mined and scuttled the Rainbow Warrior. And got away with it, too. Unforgotten. Unforgiven.

So, yes, we're gutted. Don't underestimate our pain, please. It's not just in the pubs and clubs that grown men have been reduced to tearful dissolution. At Satay stalls, manned by gentle figures with scant resemblance to front row forwards, huddled figures know only one topic of conversation; and among the crisp women in the computer centre, one has to choose one's words and gestures these days with the utmost pastoral sensitivity.

We're all on edge. Even I, as a soccer dude, a life-long supporter of Hibernian (doing very nicely this year in the Scottish Premier League, thank you), was devastated.

As one astute columnist pointed out, however, this dark hour could conceal within it priceless spiritual gains. For example, we now know, existentially, what it means to be among the downtrodden of the earth. Such solidarity in pain with the oppressed could open up quite new horizons, and the suffering itself will be ennobling, character-building. Humility is already becoming our second name.

Graciousness, too. When our conquered heroes limped back into Christchurch, expecting derision or worse, 2000 of us crammed into the concourse of the airport to welcome them back. Children held assurances of eternal support. 'All is forgiven', another newspaper headline emphasised.

This might, on first blush, appear to show considerable forbearance on our part, but what is our suffering, after all, compared with theirs? If we are gutted, the players are disembowelled. If we have wept, they have been driven to pile up enormous bar tabs and take out their agony on cars conveniently parked outside their London Hilton.

How will they ever cope with the guilt of having let down the sorrowing millions on the home front? How will they face down the intolerable embarrassment about the stratospheric financial rewards they have been pocketing? Lonely and terrible hours lie ahead for them, not least as they have to renegotiate their advertising contracts.

A few rat-bags, true, have gone bananas on talk-back radio, attacking the ref, piling into poor old po-faced Graham Henry, alarming the women's refugees by their ungoverned rage and search for scapegoats. Yet the fundamental, Edmund-Hillary decency of the Kiwi character will shine through in the end. You just wait and see.

For deep in our heart, we know that all this pain must be teaching us something. Maybe our affections have been in the past just a shade inordinate, the hype over the top? Maybe the entire focus of our national hopes and fears need not centre on the try line? Perhaps, to deploy the ultimate sacred term in the anthropologist's vocab, our 'identity', the thickening history of our 'we', could be located beyond the green sward? Could the Garden of Eden conceivably lie elsewhere?

Humility, graciousness, forgiveness, long-suffering; all these we are learning. Could the next step be an eschatology which is a tad less realised; a shift of some of our yearnings from All Black to All Green; even a utopian willingness to look at alternatives to the double predestination fatalism of the market economy?

Across the ditch, we know, you Australians are suffering too. In our shared affliction we are surely being drawn together, Heidegger-like. Could a joint team for the Beijing Olympics, perhaps, be the first step, so we can embrace the smog and the hypocrisy

together? Now there's a thought. All Black and All Gold.



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Kevin Rudd's political cowardice

THEOLOGY

Scott Stephens

On Sunday afternoon, Kevin Rudd confirmed that his official election campaign will be the vanity exercise, the gutless appeal to a shallow and disaffected electorate, that most of us suspected it would be.

Positioned against the ubiquitous sky-blue billboard — which now bears the rather pretentious slogan 'New Leadership' — Rudd could have cashed in a little of his electoral capital and kicked off the campaign with a 'vision for Australia' that is so generous, so expansive and morally engaging that any residual concern over his federal inexperience would have evaporated amid the heat of his fidelity to such an ideal. He could have lifted his listeners out of their prosperity-induced lethargy and directed them, much like Paul Keating did in his 1993 campaign launch, toward a great Australian social democracy, a proud and independent country, united and cohesive — and able to deliver to all our people living standards and a way of life unequalled in the world.



Instead, the launch was everything we've come to associate with the 'Kevin Rudd Show' to date. He presented as relaxed, vaguely affable, and completely sterile. The actual content of his speech was inconsequential, because its overall intention was to give the public nothing to object to, and John Howard no ammunition to fire back at him. Rudd is clearly convinced that this election is the Coalition's to lose, and that popular discontent with the government has finally reached critical mass — as it had in 1996, the election that saw Howard defeat Keating. The political pendulum is swinging. The time for change is nigh. All Rudd has to do to win is play it safe, avoid any issue or matter of principle that Howard could use to drive a wedge between voters, and, above all, keep playing the media dandy.

There's no doubt that this has been a remarkably successful strategy, one that will more than likely carry Rudd through to victory on 24 November. If it does, the media will have played a crucial role in determining a candidate's fate: it would seem that years of whoring himself to journalists (Latham once described him as 'a fanatical media networker ... | he is addicted to it, worse than heroin') has finally paid off. And yet one cannot shake the feeling that Rudd has sold his soul in the process — presuming, of course, that bureaucrats have souls in the first place. Rudd's new slogan is thus only half true. For while he has embraced the aura of glitzy political novelty, one looks in vain to find anything resembling the

virtues that define genuine leadership.

Rudd's diminished political capacity is thrown into sharp relief in an unexpected juxtaposition in Don Watson's outstanding memoir, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*. In the first vignette, Watson describes how it was reported by the ABC's Jim Middleton that, 'on the flight from Pusan to Beijing, in a conversation about Mabo and the premiers, [Keating] made unflattering remarks about Wayne Goss and called his adviser, Kevin Rudd, a "menace".'

On the same page, as if providing the ultimate foil to Rudd's soulless brand of politics, Watson describes a moment during the 1994 H. V. Evatt lecture, in which Keating spoke of the chief among the political virtues: 'Between the conception and the execution there is faith, hope — and courage.' Keating went on to say that 'it is never the people who let their countries down, but governments that 'lack heart', politicians who 'imagine things but don't do them', bureaucrats who 'thwart initiative'.'

Such courage — which Watson later describes as 'Keating's hallmark and his stock in trade ... | the prime element in the Keating mythos' — is defined by a leader's willingness to wage war against the people's baser instincts, to expand the public's moral imagination rather than simply pander to avarice, to stare electoral oblivion in the face by defying popular opinion, to be willing to sacrifice oneself for the sake of a larger cause. In his justly famous address to the National Press Club on 7 December 1990, Keating lamented the absence of this kind of courageous leadership from Australian politics.

'We've got to be led, and politics is about leading people ... | The United States had three great leaders, Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt, and at times in their history that leadership pushed them on to become the great country that they are. We've never had one such person, not one.'

It was his commitment to this political virtue (which is the subject of Michael Beschloss' stunning new book, *Presidential Courage*) that motivated Keating's blistering attack on Kevin Rudd in June this year. Keating complained that Rudd had surrounded himself with 'conservative tea-leaf-reading focus group driven polling types' who lack 'the creativity or the passion or the belief to go and grab the prize'. Rudd was thus adopting a craven, unprincipled brand of politics that had lost sight of what political leadership was all about. As if this diagnosis of Rudd's cowardice needed any further proof, one cannot help but be sickened by his recent rebuke of Robert McClelland — the only shadow minister to demonstrate any moral insight or political courage all year — over his opposition to the practice of capital punishment in Indonesia.

The great hypocrisy of Rudd's style of politics is that he launched his challenge for the Labor leadership 12 months ago with an appeal to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's courageous opposition to National Socialism in the name of robust Christian commitment. But it was

this same Bonhoeffer who urged Christians not to fear 'being publicly disgraced, having to suffer and being put to death for the sake of Christ', for it is by such courageous discipleship 'that Christ himself attains visible form within his community'.

Perhaps it is time for Rudd to consider Christ's warning, which had seared itself into Bonhoeffer's conscience: 'What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his soul?'



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Sir Ronald Wilson's life in compartments

COLUMNS

Frank Brennan

Western Australian legal academic Antonio Buti has written a detailed biography of the late Sir Ronald Wilson, that State's first High Court judge. *A Matter of Conscience* (UWA Press 2007) surveys Wilson's three major legal and political roles — first as a West Australian crown prosecutor and solicitor general; then as a High Court judge fiercely protective of state rights; and finally as a national social justice advocate, especially through his joint chairing of the Human Rights Commission's report on the stolen generation, *Bringing Them Home*.



The backdrop for all three phases is Wilson's family and his church — the family from whom he often had to be absent, catching the 'red eye' across the continent for work for years on end, and the Uniting Church, which he helped found as a leading Presbyterian and over which he presided while still serving as a High Court judge.

Buti acknowledges the many unresolved tensions between the public roles and private persona of Wilson, once described by the legendary Reverend Jim Downing as 'the biggest little man I have ever known'. His fellow judge and state solicitor general Sir Daryl Dawson observed of the 5' 4... Wilson: 'Any impression his small stature may have given was immediately eclipsed by the strength of his personality.'

Wilson was a ruthless prosecutor. As a judge, he stood firm on state rights even when such rights would interfere with the basic rights and liberties of Australian Aboriginals. But on retirement from the bench, as a social justice advocate, he espoused Aboriginal rights in the face of strong antipathy and government intransigence. Buti gives the reader copious quotes from Wilson's supporters and critics at each stage of his public life, allowing the reader to decide whether Wilson got the balance right.

Wilson lived with tension all his public life as he moved from advocate of state rights to judge and ultimately to advocate of human rights. At his swearing in, he paid tribute 'to all those brothers and sisters in the law who have journeyed with me from time to time and who have provided me with such rich personal relationships, for which I shall always be grateful'.

In his early professional life such relationships were forged with police and lawyers, and

then with judges. Later they were forged with members of the stolen generation who held him in high regard. These relationships helped shape his perspective on the legal or political issue of the day and fortified him in the stands he took. At all stages, he felt very at home and supported in the Uniting Church.

On a final court of appeal, judges confront hard cases in which law, morality and policy seem irreconcilable. Judges and advocates have distinct roles to play in recasting the law so that justice according to law produces outcomes more acceptable to the formed and informed conscience of those seeking to resolve disputes in society. Wilson's judgment in *Mabo No. 1* and his public advocacy following *Mabo No. 2* and *Wik* provide a good case study.

When asked after his retirement from the bench if his Christianity influenced him as a judge, Wilson replied: 'I've been rather firm in my belief that my integrity as a judge required me to apply this rigorous intellectual discipline ... | to the legal sources and to arrive at a solution that satisfied my mind. And this can be demonstrated by a couple of cases when the conclusion that I expressed in my judgement would not have accorded with my heart. Particularly, in the overruling of the Queensland legislation in *Mabo No. 1*, I was glad the majority was 4–3. I was one of the three so I think I'm pretty firm on that answer.'

The *Mabo* litigation had commenced in Queensland in 1982. When Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's legal advisers told him in 1985 that the Torres Strait Islanders may have a case, he introduced the Queensland Coastal Islands Declaratory Bill to the Queensland parliament. Its effect was to wipe out any property rights held by Torres Strait Islanders when the Torres Strait Islands became part of the colony of Queensland, and ensure that the only property rights which existed in the Torres Strait were those granted by the crown.

If the law applied by the courts did recognise native title rights which existed before colonisation and which survived the assertion of crown sovereignty, this Bill tried to do away with all such rights and interests. By 4–3, the High Court found the Queensland law in conflict with the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act.

In dissent Wilson said: 'The Queensland Act purports to deny, retrospectively, the survival of those rights after the annexation and to exclude any question of compensation in respect of the loss of them. But if there are no other persons of another race who are shown to enjoy rights of the same kind as those of which the plaintiffs have been deprived, then it will be impossible to find a foothold for s.10(1) of the Commonwealth Act.

'On the contrary, its effect is to remove a source of inequality formerly existing between the plaintiffs and persons of another race because ... | the plaintiffs were alone in the enjoyment of traditional rights. Henceforth, by virtue of the assumed operation of the Queensland Act, the plaintiffs will enjoy the same rights with respect to the ownership of property and rights of inheritance as every other person in Queensland of whatever race.

There will be equality before the law. Of course, a deep sense of injustice may remain.'

In good conscience, Sir Ronald, as a public advocate, would later welcome the High Court's decision in Mabo No. 2, knowing that such a decision would not have followed had the court followed his line of reasoning in Mabo No. 1.

No-one is likely to conclude that Wilson struck the right balance at every stage in his public life. John Button, one of the wronged criminals from Wilson's zealous prosecution days, came to his funeral and opined: 'Wilson would have had some guilt at having been the person that successfully prosecuted some innocent people ...' and this drove him to do good deeds such as his human rights work.'

Buti disputes the guilt. Wilson lived life with a passion for justice and right according to law. Justice according to law is a demanding life task for the advocate or for the judge, and doubly so for the advocate-turned-judge-turned-advocate-again.



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Playwrights finger reality missed by politicians

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Flynn

Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda, Hilary Glow
Sydney: Currency Press, 2007, PB, RRP \$32.95 ISBN: 978-0-86819-815-6
[website](#)

'We don't want our artists to be lecturing us about what's wrong with the world. We want to be transported to another world' — Franklin, in Stephen Sewell's 2006 play, *It Just Stopped*.

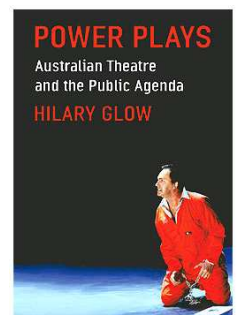
As Australians wait for a Federal election, Hilary Glow's book is timely evidence that what is wrong with the world is what politicians would have us believe. Controlling agendas is what they do — assisted by battalions of media advisers, 'in the wings' as it were, the doctors of dishonesty, the specialists of spin. But there are 'countervailing voices' out there that will not be so easily silenced.

Somewhere in the chatter, phrases such as 'core Australian values', 'a nation united', 'the stolen generation', 'children overboard', 'the Pacific solution', 'protecting our borders' and 'refugees' are bandied around. Not to mention 'the war on terror'.

Should we be afraid? Well, not so much of 'these people' (John Howard's dismissive term for asylum-seekers and refugees in general; also the title of Ben Ellis's play written in 2003) as of those who would argue we need protection. And they want to decide the degree. 'We're from the government and we're here to help.' But who, exactly?

In *Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda*, Hilary Glow examines contemporary writers whose work in the past decade or so has been staged by mainstream companies like Melbourne Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Sydney Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre Company, and Black Swan Theatre of West Australia. The writers are Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Reg Cribb, Ben Ellis, Wesley Enoch, Hannie Rayson, Stephen Sewell and Katherine Thomson. But others, including film makers, find a place in the discussion as well.

While the plays are about power and its abuse, the book's particular focus is the ends to which characters will go — on both sides of the argument — in wielding the power they have. As always, the stated purpose is rarely the real agenda. It will be no surprise then, for



any lover of theatre, and even those who get their news (and too often their opinions) from TV and newspapers alone, that John Howard and his cohort cop most of the flak.

It's no accident that the last dozen or so years have seen Australian playwrights, both indigenous and white, re-emerging, no longer confined to theatre on the fringes, but now the mainstream. That development is significant.

Each writer wrestles with the issues seen as crucial to the notion of who we *really* are as Australians in the 21st century. This fast-tracks them to the firing line as never before. Their material is unpalatable to government, the 'big end of town', and many other citizens 'relaxed and comfortable' with the status quo. The plays hammer the issues that won't go away simply because 'nobody sees them as issues any more — just leftist beat-ups'.

But the playwrights do not have it all their own way. Attacks came from the likes of *Herald Sun* columnist, Andrew Bolt, who, in 2005, launched several tirades on *Two Brothers*, a play by Hannie Rayson, based on the sinking and huge loss of lives of the SIEV X. Bolt's reactions were triggered no doubt by the tone of the play, but he devoted his bile to an unconscionable *ad hominem* onslaught on Rayson herself, a recipient of grants from the public purse. But others in the media were kinder.

Chapter headings might suggest a dull read: 'Political Theatre', 'Indigenous Identities', 'The History Wars', 'The Politics of Place', 'Globalisation and Class', 'Fortress Australia' and 'The War on Terror'. But that would be wrong. This is a carefully researched, well written analysis. If you have been fortunate enough to see on stage any of the plays discussed (such as *Holy Day*, *Last Cab to Darwin*, *Falling Petals*, *Two Brothers*, *Myth*, *Propaganda* and *Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America*), you are twice blessed.

Hilary Glow interviewed the eight key playwrights and others besides. Of the process, she writes: 'Each discussed their own work and was asked reflect on its engagement with contemporary public debates. The key and common feature of their self-definition is that they understand their work as explicitly "political" in the sense that they are engaged in the task of "challenging systems of power" ...| a commitment to bringing discovered truth to the people.'

This gives the book an authority and sense of immediacy not possible when dealing with writers of the past, although their contributions too are acknowledged.

Theatregoers in particular will enjoy this look at a slice of contemporary Australian theatre and its take on a range of issues; if you're John Howard (or Andrew Bolt) however, you might be less than thrilled.



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Death and birth set cerebral thriller in motion

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

Eastern Promises: 90 minutes. Rated: R. Starring: Viggo Mortensen, Naomi Watts, Vincent Cassel, Armin Mueller-Stahl. Director: David Cronenberg; [website](#)

Blood is spilled on two separate occasions during the opening moments of this cerebral thriller. In the first, a gruesome hit against a Chechnya mobster is carried out in a London barbershop. In the second, a pregnant young Russian girl suffers a complicated delivery and dies on the operating table, leaving her newborn child a virtual orphan.



These two separate incidents — a death and a birth — set into motion an interwoven chain of events that unfold in the bloodiest of fashions.

Director David Cronenberg started his career making smart horror movies, and his penchant for portraying violence as realistically (albeit fleetingly) as possible is a hallmark of most of his films, and *Eastern Promises* is no exception.

But what is ostensibly a gruesome thriller about the Russian mafia also evolves into a kind of bleak and bloody fable, which reflects equally upon the ‘migrant experience’ and the difficult nature of parenthood.

The aforementioned hit was ordered by Kirill (Cassel), a hot-headed mobster whose volatile personality may in part be attributed to his father, Semyon (Mueller-Stahl), the leader of the local Eastern European organised crime brotherhood, regarding him as somewhat of a disappointment.

This already complicated relationship between father and son is further exacerbated by the fact Kirill’s mysterious and charismatic driver, Nikolai (Mortensen), seems to have fallen into Semyon’s favour. Loyalties and allegiances will be put to the ultimate test after the hit Kirill ordered triggers a turf war.

Meanwhile, London doctor Anna (Watts) has taken the baby, Christine, into her care, trying to track down the extended family and ensure Christine will have a safe upbringing. Anna, it turns out, once suffered a miscarriage, and it’s fair to assume her concern for

Christine is heightened by lingering grief from that past tragedy.

Gradually, Anna uncovers a link between Christine's late mother, and the Russian mafia; a discovery that places both her and the baby in grave danger.

In typical Cronenberg fashion, *Eastern Promises* will leave you thinking. His plot twists arrive with so little fanfare as to be almost imperceptible. And his ending is abrupt and unresolved enough to demand retrospection.

Particularly resonant is the sense of displacement evident in both the tragic story of Christine's mother and the more complicated experiences of Nikolai. Despite dwelling at opposite ends of the power spectrum, they each know the desire to seek a new life in a new land, and have both experienced first-hand how difficult and painful that transition can be.



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Perhaps dying isn't hard after all

POETRY

Ice

The sun slides westward.
 Silvering icy seas
Warming my cold-blotched hands,
 Shriving the skin of my soul.
Blue sky belying polar wind,
 Green grass infertile land,
Creased smile the belch of pain:
 Uncharted worlds.
Or do these steadfast, gurgling waves,
 Kaleidoscopic magpie calls,
Dear friends' departing touch,
 Betoken rhythms underneath
Which ear nor eye nor mind can trace,
 Or even guess, but only celebrate?
Walk we this thin and silent ice
Because a pillowed master sleeps?

Peter Matheson

Mopoke

Into the cool precincts of night

like winged Buddha,
silent, full-moon-eyed
in the blue shadows
under the eiderdown
of a flaming coral tree,
watching the night-watchmen
with their blue-white beams,
possums rummaging in the bins.

Mopoke. Mopoke.

Rodents scurrying, brushed
off the bush rug, one by one,
unlamented,
as if they were brown buds.
So, I thought: perhaps dying
isn't hard after all,
but so much softness
wrapping itself around us—
as soft as down, thick and cushiony.

Spirited away
nestled in a feathered chest
we close our eyes
against the dappled, vaulted light,
riding the high notes
beyond pain,
the strings of our sinews plucked
until our bones are clean and white.

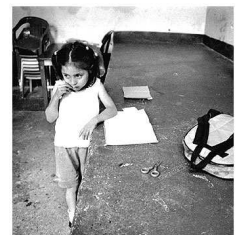
Cassandra O'Loughlin

Keeping families safe from violence

COMMUNITY

Trish McNamara

Very few in Australia can have escaped harrowing exposure to two family tragedies during the past month. The abandonment of a little child in Melbourne took a tragic turn with the discovery of her young mother's body in the boot of her father's car in New Zealand. Now a father in rural Victoria has been convicted of drowning his three small boys by driving them into a dam on Father's Day. The boys were in their father's care during an access visit, following an acrimonious marital separation.



Mothers and grandmothers in deep mourning have since been exposed to unrelenting public scrutiny. It often seems that a woman's private pain only becomes public when it is too late to keep her family safe.

Women grieve deeply the loss of female victims to family violence. Indeed, for many, each news report of yet another episode of family violence means a painful revisiting of trauma, sadness and loss. Female friends of victims of intimate partner homicide are especially affected. For these women, such reports mean an agonised re-working of enormous frustration and regret at having been unable to protect one of their own.

Five women friends of a deceased victim of intimate partner homicide recently joined with me to explore the profound personal experience of change since the loss of their friend. These women have courageously explored how they think and feel differently now about partnerships, parenting, gender, power and violence.

One woman described having become hyper-vigilant to inappropriate levels of control or domineering behaviours on the part of males. She remarked: 'I've changed ... | at social events, even if I haven't known the woman, I'm right on to it. If I have to say "do you want to talk?" I do. I say "that way he spoke to you ... | are you ok?". I say "there's number you can ring". I weigh every word now and look at the meaning.'

Four of the five women in this group are parents. They have re-examined their roles and thought deeply about how children come to understand issues of gender and power as a result of their socialisation within the home.

One mother of a teenager described her feelings as her daughter embarked on her first

heterosexual relationship. At the time of the murder, her daughter, then aged 12, had said she would never have boyfriend. When the daughter's friends developed relationships she was clearly apprehensive; she seemed especially alert to issues of power and control. She would often remark 'he (the boyfriend) is making her go places she doesn't want to go'.

Things have moved on during the four years that have passed. Now it is the mother who worries about an imbalance of power in the relationship her daughter has recently formed. 'She's into going to balls and being beautiful and I didn't really expect that. She's trying to be the pretty little thing. He (the daughter's boyfriend) seems to sit back and look a bit smug ... I like "I've got the better of you!"'

These women feel that those aware of family violence have a role to play in prevention. Several of the women had observed bruising on their now deceased friend. They very much regret not having questioned her more closely. They feel that they missed important opportunities to offer support, advice and even refuge. This was especially true in the weeks prior to her death after she had left her violent partner. They have since learned that this is often when a woman leaving a violent relationship is at her most vulnerable.

For all of the women in this group of friends, the urgency of preventing family violence was paramount. They saw improved community education as vital. Some stressed that we should 'talk about how to treat each other kindly ... about living together. You don't always have to have your own way. We can agree to disagree. We need tools to live by.'

It has been a privilege for me to join with the women whose experiences I have, in part, shared here. It seems especially poignant now that I was drawn to share their experiences with more Australasians after talking about our study on Radio New Zealand as part of the September, 2007 launch of the New Zealand Families Commission's '[Family Violence – It's not OK](#)' campaign. Such campaigns stress collective responsibility for keeping families safe. It seems clear that 'As long as good (wo)men stay silent' family violence will continue.



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