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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

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Religion and republicanism in Australian politics

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

Within days of becoming Prime Minister, Julia Gillard declared she was an atheist. Sensing this would not go down well with voters, she soon backtracked, explaining that she was actually an agnostic.

In contrast, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott wears his Catholicism on his sleeve. And it's often said Kevin Rudd and John Howard were our most overtly religious prime ministers.

The interviewee featured here has devoted his working life to observing what motivates politicians. He is particularly interested in their religious beliefs. John Warhurst is a highly esteemed professor of political science, and one of Australia's most astute commentators on politics.

This interview is part of a series of conversations with prominent contributors to *Eureka Street* to mark the 20th anniversary of the journal. For many years Warhurst has written with deep insight into the political process, helping readers understand the inner workings of politics and politicians.

Warhurst was born, grew up, and received his school and university education in Adelaide. He attended the Jesuit St Ignatius College in Norwood before going to Flinder's University where he gained a BA with Honours in politics and economics, and a PhD in politics.

A career as an academic followed, with teaching positions at the Warnambool Institute of Advanced Education, the University of London, the University of New England in Armidale, and the Australian National University in Canberra where he is now Emeritus Professor of Political Science.

Warhurst has never been confined to the ivory tower of academia, and always sought to share his insights and ideas with the broader community. He has a long-running weekly column in the *Canberra Times*, and makes regular appearances on TV at election time.

He is probably best known for his prominent role in the [Australian Republican Movement](#) (ARM). He has been a public activist for a republic since the early 1970s, and has been both the ACT convenor, and national chair of the ARM.

When asked what motivates him he says: 'I am passionate and determined about an Australian republic because only then can Australia fully reflect its distinctive, independent national identity. It is a logical, necessary and natural evolution of Australian political and constitutional identity.'

Warhurst has been honoured with a number of major awards, including an Order of

Australia in 2009 for services to political science and to the community. In 2010 he received a fellowship from the Prime Minister's Centre at the Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, in Canberra for a research project entitled 'The Faith of Australian Prime Ministers'.

He is a prolific author, with some of his later books including *Behind Closed Doors: Politics, Scandals and the Lobbying Industry*; *John Howard's Decade*; and *Australian Political Institutions*.

Lucking out in Libya

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

Colonel Gaddafi's regime is crumbling. Dramatic announcements are being made of his perishing in battle or of total victory. But this was meant to happen sooner, when NATO forces began assisting Libya's rebel forces with tactical airpower in March. Many in Libya will rejoice in the regime's fall. But it is fitting to see exactly what has and has not gone right.

The passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 took place ostensibly to protect civilians with an unspecified 'no-fly zone'. 'This is the international community acting under international law to prevent mass murder,' suggested Daniel Serwer in *The Atlantic* in March.

A closer reading of what happened shows something different — that the resolution, according to a Security Council source cited in the *Guardian*, was intended to 'throw a protective ring around the Libyan rebel stronghold of Benghazi'. Sides, in other words, were taken early on in the conflict.

From the start, it was questionable whether the resolution authorised regime change, let alone the backing of one faction in the conflict. The Arab League expressed its fears that the resolution was being violated. Russia and India made similar protests at such hair-splitting by NATO forces.

The Obama administration and NATO have been lucky that this campaign has worked thus far, if imperfectly. Slaughter may have been avoided in Benghazi and other strategic rebel points. But to participate in a brutal civil war is always a dangerous game of chance.

'Your own instinct is to say: "We must do something,"' Germany's foreign minister Guido Westerwelle told the *Guardian*. But once committed to, such engagements can be prolonged.

They can also be confused. Disagreements between NATO members began early in the campaign. Was the regime the intended target? Or was protecting civilians the order of the day?

The haphazard outcome has encouraged some to predict that the Libyan 'solution' might reveal how the US will involve itself in humanitarian interventions on the cheap. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has insisted European powers throw in more military muscle behind such missions.

Could this be the face of humanitarian intervention after the debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan? Perhaps we are set to continue what *New York Times Magazine* contributor David Rieff, among others, termed a 'new age of liberal imperialism'.

What should bother members of the international community is where the rebel National

Transitional Council goes next. NATO members have wholeheartedly embraced the rebel collective, but continue to know little about its rag-tag members. What is better known is that the NTC has proven to be a fractious entity prone to acts of spontaneous and at times lethal violence.

In March, its members detained their own leader, General Abdel Fatah Younes, summarily charging him with treachery. There were few formalities — he was taken away from his guards and killed.

While this was taking place, the wheels of recognition for the NTC were moving at some speed. As Patrick Cockburn, veteran journalist of middle eastern affairs wrote in the *Independent* this month, 'The rebel leadership, previously portrayed as a heroic band of brothers, turned out to be split by murderous rivalries and vendettas.'

Given that such individuals are happy to dispatch their own leaders one wonders whether the temptation for retribution will prove too strong once Tripoli is secured. So far, the rebels have limited their bouts of revenge to arson and looting. A blood bath has not ensued, at least not yet.

Then there are such immediate concerns as to the fate of Gaddafi's weapons supply, comprising 30,000 shoulder-fired rockets, an assortment of chemical agents and raw nuclear material. For one, a last apocalyptic stand might be mounted by the besieged Colonel. Alternatively, they might fall into the hands of other militant factions.

The NTC will have to be reminded that the Security Council Resolution 1970 gives the International Criminal Court full jurisdiction 'over crimes committed in Libya after February 15', a referral made necessary by the fact that Libya is not a member of the Rome Statute.

The ICC has indicted Gaddafi, his son Saif al-Islam, and intelligence chief Abdullah Sanussi for crimes against humanity in their alleged targeting of civilians in Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata and other Libyan cities. Whether they will ever see a court room alive is another matter.

The demise of the Gaddafi regime will add another trophy to the 'spring' movement that has swept North Africa and the Middle East. Where this will go is hard to say. Syria might be next. What the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated is that eliminating brutal dictatorships is a relatively simple matter. Reconstruction, democratisation and reform will be quite something else.

Exploiting the elderly

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Win Win* (M). Director: Thomas McCarthy. Starring: Paul Giamatti, Amy Ryan, Bobby Cannavale, Melanie Lynskey, Alex Shaffer, Burt Young. 106 minutes**

Yesterday Frank Brennan wrote of the '[social determinants](#)' (such as education, housing, income, connectedness) that have an impact on individuals' health. This calls to mind psychologist Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of need', which ranks physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, self-actualisation and self-transcendence as factors determining a person's growth and wellbeing.

The Salvos, among whom I had my religious upbringing, had a simplified version of this for their social outreach mantra. Founder William Booth spoke of 'soup, soap and salvation', evoking the need to meet people's physical needs along with their spiritual needs.

But 'salvation', stripped of its esoteric connotations, might also be seen to refer simply to emancipating individuals from social structures or material lacks that keep them oppressed. A new film *Win Win* offers several models of people in need of this kind of salvation, to varying degrees.

First there is Mike (Giamatti), a small-town lawyer who is reluctant to reveal to his wife — the mother of their two young daughters — Jackie (Ryan) that his practice is in dire financial straits. To his credit the financial difficulties are due to the fact that his focus is not on high profile, high paying cases, but on assisting elderly and put-down people with tricky legal minutiae.

One such client is Leo (Young), whose ailing mental health, and the fact that his only daughter is out of contact in another state, mean he is due to become a ward of the state, and to be forced from his house into a nursing home. He needs 'salvation' in the form of personal care that is arguably better provided by loved ones than an institution.

But Mike's compassion is overrun by his material needs. He quietly decides to exploit Leo's plight. He convinces a judge to allow him to become Leo's guardian — which will entitle him to a monthly payment from the State — on his word that he'll allow Leo to stay in his own house. But, not wanting the additional burden Leo will place on him and his family, Mike shifts him into the home anyway.

Win Win finds strength in understatement. Mike's moral and ethical breach occurs without fanfare or fingerprinting from unobtrusive director McCarthy. Giamatti is a likable actor, and his performance here is so plump with soulful, sad silences, that — rather than judging him — we feel concern for him and his ill conceived scheme, and the way it might lead him to further

corruption.

Of course we also feel for Leo, whom Mike has betrayed. Yet we sense Mike is oppressed not only by his own material need, but by the way this need has moved him to act against his better nature.

The situation becomes more complex. Kyle (Shaffer), Leo's blonded teenage grandson, turns up. His mother (Leo's absentee daughter) is in rehab, and Kyle has fled from her abusive boyfriend to the town where he knows his grandfather lives. He too is in need of salvation, or at least respite.

Mike and Jackie take him in. Jackie initially acts out of a sense of duty ('We have no choice') in the face of her distrust of the rebellious boy, and eventually through a sense of motherly nurturing and protection. Life with Mike's family provides Kyle with some of the stability and security he has lacked. He starts going to school and joins the wrestling team, in which Mike is an assistant to the coach.

Kyle turns out to be a prodigy and instant star of the struggling team. Mike, himself a one-time wrestler, and his best friend Terry (Cannavale), gain vicarious pleasure and much needed inspiration from the boy's increasingly impressive victories.

In this there is a sense that Kyle, like his grandfather, is being exploited by the mostly well-meaning Mike to meet his own emotional needs. But neither boy nor old man are means to ends. Mike's manipulations are exposed when Kyle's mother (Lynksey) eventually surfaces, and Mike sees in her an extreme refraction of his own subtle greed and corruption.

Kyle and Leo are vulnerable human beings, and only through compassion and understanding can salvation can be theirs. By favouring these over material preoccupations, Mike can save himself, too.

Talking back to the Church

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Sometimes things come together in unexpected ways. They did so for me last Sunday when a Gospel story, prison, World Youth Day and a [petition](#) to the Australian Bishops fell into place.

The story was from Matthew's Gospel where Jesus asked Peter what other people made of him, and then how Peter himself would describe him. When Peter answered that he was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus replied that Peter would be the rock on which the church will be built. This text has come to underpin the Catholic understanding of the role of the Papacy.

I preached on this text in a prison. In that context the two questions Jesus asked appeared courageous. At the best of times, to ask close friends what other people think of us, and even more what they themselves think of us, takes courage. Our self-doubt and uncertainty whether the regard we have for our friends is fully reciprocated mean we will hang on the answer with some trepidation.

But if you are in jail you have only to read the tabloids and listen to shock-jocks to know what people think of you. You may be preoccupied with how you will be received when you leave prison. And your sense of shame and the disruption to your relationships with family and friends put enormous strain on your sense of self-worth. You would be very fearful of asking them what they think of you.

So this story spoke powerfully to the prisoners. It invited them to ask what and who mattered to them. The context of the religious service provides a space for reflection, allowing some relief from the wheel of harsh judgment, made by themselves and others, on which they are broken. Here it is possible to entertain the idea that they are precious to a God who loves each person passionately.

Still musing on the morning spent in the prison, I later caught a few minutes of the World Youth Day Mass telecast from Madrid. The aging Pope Benedict was reading a scholarly sermon on the same Gospel story. Hundreds of Bishops in white their mitres and thousands of priests in their white sun hats sat close by. Young people stretched back, some tired, some listening intently.

When Benedict referred to himself as the successor of Peter it was possible to see the historical and personal weight of the office and the way it might shape his sense of what matters and of who he is.

From the perspective of the story of Jesus and Peter, World Youth Day is an occasion of reassurance. Bishops and priests are confronted daily with evidence that many people do not

have a high opinion of the Catholic Church or of its ministers. At World Youth day they meet young people who welcome them warmly and are enthusiastic in their own faith.

These young people, who may be isolated among their peers by their religious commitment, also find reassurance that they are in good and plentiful company. World Youth Day offers a controlled environment where people can reassure one another that they and their faith do matter. That surely is a significant reason why such large resources are put into such large, passing events.

When I turned at night to the Sunday newspapers, they carried news of a petition already signed by thousands of Australian Catholics. The [moderately worded](#) petition draws attention to the diminishment in the Australian Church, and the need for renewal in the governance of the universal Church. It asks the Bishops to bring these concerns to the Pope when they visit him later this year.

The petition took me back to the way the story of Jesus and Peter was heard in the prison. It is daunting to ask others what they think of you. It is also challenging to listen to what they tell you. It is easier to seek reassurance in more flattering conversations. But the story suggests that faith grows when Peter is asked what he makes of Jesus, and is heard.

The petition is a small, honest voice. How it is received and responded to will make its own statement. To know that you will be heard and taken seriously when you speak honestly is the best form of reassurance.

Towards health equality

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan

In June 2010 Martin Lavery, CEO of Catholic Health Australia, appeared before a senate committee to give evidence about COAG health reforms. He drew attention to a lacuna in the public discussion and policy planning. There was next to no reference to the social determinants of health. He said:

I would be misleading this inquiry if I suggested we were entirely happy with the announcements that COAG made. We are critical of what was not actually agreed to.

For example, income levels, as a measure of socioeconomic status, are a better predictor of cardiovascular death than cholesterol levels, blood pressure and smoking combined. A person's access to income is more important to the chances that they face of dying of a heart attack than whether or not they have high cholesterol, high blood pressure or whether they smoke.

The social determinants of health, those factors that include housing, income, educational level, family support, supports at times of personal crisis in a person's life, can have more bearing on a person's health outcomes than access to health systems.

No senator had any interest in taking up this challenge. There were more immediate issues to tackle – like hospital funding and the mooted structure of Medicare Locals.

There are five key influences on our health: genetics, social circumstances, lifestyle, accidents, and access to health care. There is not much we can do to alter our genetics. With better occupational health and safety at work, good design standards, and improved public infrastructure, we can reduce the risk of accident.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and Sir Michael Marmot in the UK have done a power of work finding that social determinants have a big impact on health outcomes. Fran Baum from Flinders University has worked closely with Marmot and brought home to Australia many of his key findings.

If you are from a poor, dysfunctional family with little education and low job prospects, your health outcomes most probably will be much worse than those of the person from a well off functional family with good education and fine job prospects.

Following the Blair initiative from the UK, Kevin Rudd announced a social inclusion agenda aimed at ensuring that all persons can secure a job, access services, connect with family and friends, pursue personal interests, engage with local community, deal with personal crises and have their voice heard.

The Rudd Government started concerted work on addressing the social determinants of health for Indigenous Australians with the annual Closing the Gap report. The Gillard Government has continued to present parliament with an annual update on closing the gap. It is time for a similar approach to address the health needs of marginalised groups in the community generally.

Marmot found in the UK that health inequalities result from social inequalities. He has put forward the idea of proportionate universalism: 'Focusing solely on the most disadvantaged will not reduce health inequalities sufficiently. To reduce the steepness of the social gradient in health, actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.'

In the Australian context, Fran Baum observes that 'while the Closing the Gap and the social inclusion initiatives tackle social determinants, they do this from the point of view of the most disadvantaged and don't tackle the issue of the health gradient'.

The Commonwealth has undertaken fresh initiatives to improve the lifestyle of Australians most likely to have poor health outcomes — especially smokers, heavy drinkers, the unexercised and the obese. But there is only so much government can achieve in attempting to modify people's behaviour without also improving their prospects in education, housing, work, income, and social connectedness.

Policies that target behavioural change in a vacuum do not work. There is little point in telling the unemployed, homeless person with minimal education and few social contacts: 'Don't smoke and don't eat fast food. It's not good for you.'

Steve Hambleton, President of the AMA points out, 'Generally, people on low incomes — including young families, elderly people and those who are unemployed — are often most at risk from poor nutritional choices.' The AMA has called on government to 'improve the quantity and quality of services to those in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities and make such services accessible to the resident populations'.

Most of the airplay on health reform is dedicated to better access to health care services. The research commissioned for the 2009 National Human Rights Consultation which I chaired found that such access is the issue of most importance to the majority of Australians — coming in ahead of pensions and superannuation issues, human rights, global warming and the quality of roads.

This becomes an issue of good money after bad unless there is also action on social determinants and lifestyle questions.

Though the majority of Australians think our human rights are adequately protected, over 70 per cent of those surveyed thought that persons suffering a mental illness, the aged, and persons with a disability needed better protection of their human rights.

Bishop Anthony Fisher, in a co-authored work on the health system in the UK with an already existing Human Rights Act, has advocated the extension of human rights protection to include an enforceable right to healthcare. He says:

A strong case can be made for clear legislative recognition of a right to healthcare, suitably delimited to genuine healthcare need, which could ground proceedings before some tribunal when it is the case that a person has been unjustly denied appropriate treatment ...

Because of the evidence of unjust discrimination against the elderly, and particularly the cognitively impaired elderly, there is a strong case for specific legislation to outlaw such discrimination in the allocation of healthcare resources.

It is not a matter of just providing more resources which improve the lot of all persons much like the rising tide raises all boats. At the same time as we lift the bar, we need to decrease the steep gradient between those with the best and those with the worst outcomes, whether the indicators are income, education, housing, employment or social connectedness.

In this land of the fair go, we need to flatten the gradient of adverse health outcomes, not just attend to those at the top or the bottom.

Improving the refugee debate

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy

This week's 10th anniversary of the Tampa incident sees a number of related issues converge.

Firstly, the High Court is considering a legal [challenge](#) to the declaration of Malaysia as a safe place to send asylum seekers, and whether the Minister as guardian of the unaccompanied minors should be party to such an arrangement. The judgment will be highly significant for the 'Malaysian solution'.

Secondly, there is an inquiry to examine suicide and self-harm in immigration detention. In 2010–2011 alone there were more than 1100 reported incidents of self-harm or threatened self-harm in immigration detention. That is significantly higher than in previous years. Some see prolonged detention as one factor causing this.

Concerns about healthcare in detention were recently raised by the AMA. And Parliament's Joint Select Committee inquiry into Australia's detention network commenced hearings this month. Over the years there have been several similar inquiries, but sadly there was little reform from so much paperwork.

In this context, a new [report](#) from the Centre for Policy Development (CPD) is welcome. Two of its authors, John Menadue and Arja Keski-Nummi, have long histories of senior level work in the Immigration Department. The third, Kate Gauthier, has a history in the advocacy and policy sectors.

They have drafted a document which hopes to change the direction of the debate on refugees, from one aimed at the lowest common denominator, to one based on the 'better angels of our nature' as President Lincoln said in his inauguration speech. Hopefully they will have better fortune than Lincoln.

The report proposes restructuring the debate on national security and asylum as well as engaging with other countries in the region; increasing resettlement numbers; delinking onshore and offshore processes; and introducing limited periods of detention for health and security screening only.

The significant savings from such policies could be more usefully spent on the settlement services that are needed by populations who have experienced trauma, than on interdiction and detention.

Written in the context of the world-wide movement of people, rather than a domestic political cycle, the report states that there are realistic alternatives to mandatory detention and

excision of territories. The recommendations will contribute to an informed discussion on refugees.

Currently, this policy area is dominated by slogans (e.g. 'Stop the boats') that avoid complex realities. Issues of forced migration are not properly addressed by simple solutions like mandatory detention, TPVs and excision of islands.

Only 40 years ago the White Australia Policy came to an overdue end. The policy was a major part of Australian immigration policy from 1900, yet now, it is rightly viewed as flawed and misguided.

Just over 30 years ago a Liberal Government was actively involved in resettlement of refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam and the first real test of a non-white Australia policy had begun. Several hundred thousand Vietnamese and Cambodians were resettled in Australia. In a generation, Australia was changed dramatically and forever. Then the reform slowed.

Twenty years ago, a Labor Government responded to the arrival of several hundred Cambodians by boat with the mandatory detention policy. This issue has so dominated debate about immigration that nothing else can seriously get a word in. In the same period, the migration program has expanded and contracted according to the particular interests of Governments.

Ten years ago the focus on the Tampa and more 'boat people' left no room to consider the significant increase in the student visa program and where that was heading. Long delays in the processing of some skilled visa categories attract little public debate, even though they affect probably three times as many people as are affected by detention policies.

Only the collapse of colleges or attacks on students drew attention to such issues.

Considering the numbers involved, it is hard to understand why asylum seekers attract such adverse policy attention. Last financial year the migration program totalled 168,865 people, not including refugees and humanitarian cases. In the same period, around 80,000 visas were issued for the four year 457 business visa, and over 250,000 student visas were granted.

Nearly 14,000 people were granted visas under the refugee and humanitarian program, including around 4500 onshore, but not all were 'boat people'.

Harsh reactive policies of Government affecting around 2 per cent of the total migration program drives the debate. This is despite serious questions about the viability and the adverse health consequences of these policies. These issues are picked up by the CPD report in a genuine effort to redirect and improve the debate.

Last week I attended a dinner celebrating a multicultural community. Many of the

Cambodians over 40 experienced war, the Pol Pot regime and probably were refugees. Some were even 'boat people'. One nine-year-old girl of Cambodian background spoke from her experience. 'Multiculturalism is a fact,' she declared; a glance around the room was all the evidence she needed.

A group of local school children sang the song 'I am Australian': 'We are one, but we are many, and from all the lands on earth we come ... I am, you are, we are Australian.' In a sports arena the song might seem jingoistic. But in a room where most of the people or their parents had arrived in Australia as refugees or migrants, the words led me to reflect on how much had been achieved.

We have come a long way in 40 years from white to multicultural Australia. Hopefully it will not be another generation before there is improvement in the debate on refugees.

Migrant myths and memories

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Julie McNeill

Out of sight out of mind: towards a final solution

My first Australian grandson will be born in Brisbane as I write. The kind of Australian society he will grow up in, influencing the young man he will become, matters to me. One day he'll learn that both his grandmothers were born in different countries, myself in England and Grandma Jan in Uganda.

In fact, I will show him on the map — everybody started in Africa. My mitochondrial DNA came from the cradle of agriculture in Syria. It's taken 10,000 years for me to become an Australian!

I'll be his grandmother, one of his teachers, preparing the way for the child to learn and cope with the realities of living in the world. The cooperation, civility and respect for other members of our Australian family will, I hope, transfer to the extended human family and wider body politic.

Scientific researchers are beginning to show how important grandmothers are to the evolutionary survival and thriving of the young. For our young nation of Australia I hope the fascist mentality of controlling borders by human rights violations is a trend we can reverse.

In 20 years the processing of refugees would be made less harmful by allowing us empty-nester baby-boomers to offer a spare room and vegie patch until life moves on for them. Melburnians hosted international visitors in 1956 without any worries.

Australia's obligation to share in alleviating the world's refugee problems won't have ceased. Millions of human beings have been forcibly displaced due to conflicts and persecution. The situation is not going away fast.

It is overwhelming but it is not made easy when many Australians hold a historic fear of invasion, and fear that all our prosperity will be taken from us. If my grandson's mates start expressing complaints about certain races of people taking over all the local shops I hope he will have no fear in informing them that this kind of prejudice against other human beings led to the Nazi genocide of 6 million European Jews, including one million children, during World War II.

While talking about a visit to Europe, I asked my psychiatrist how can Israel do to the Palestinians what the Germans did to them — the persecution, the stealing of houses and land, and the world letting them get away with it? It was perplexing and tragic. She replied it was a fact of life that the victims of abuse often become perpetrators of abuse.

When Grandma Jan was growing up in Uganda, President Idi Amin got it into his head that the 80,000 Ugandans of Asian descent didn't belong there and gave them a deadline to get out. It was 1972. I remember reading about it on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* in Birmingham.

I was nine years old, reading about murders and mutilation and rapes. On the radio I was listening to the Conservative MP Enoch Powell and leaders of The National Front saying we would have rivers of blood too, if we let more Asians in to the British Isles.

Grandma Jan's family was forced to walk away, take no money out of the country, only food they could carry with them and a bit of clothing. It took five days to walk to a packed United Nations refugee camp, where they waited for a visa to enter the freezing capital of the old British Empire.

Perhaps, by knowing his family history, our grandson will add value to a school essay. I imagine the topic will ask if there is a subtext of Australia's founding White Australia Policy in present day immigration policies.

Prime Minister William McMahon and his cabinet were adamantly opposed to accepting black African-Asian refugees into their homogeneous society, except for hand-picked highly skilled refugees, for example doctors who had been trained in British universities. All efforts by the British Government to persuade them to relax normal immigration criteria came to nothing.

Former ALP Leader, Arthur Calwell warned the Federal Parliament in May 1972 that the overwhelming majority of Australians didn't want to see any Ugandan-Asians brought to Australia, which would result in a 'chocolate coloured' Australia.

Even when Gough Whitlam came to power in December and removed the White Australia Policy, there was a tokenistic gesture to the international community — some money for the UNHCR to run the refugee camps, and a few highly-skilled workers.

The small island of Great Britain opened itself to 30,000 extra people. While anxious refugees shivered at the RAF Airbase in Somerset the Uganda Re-settlement Board, which incorporated local council organisations, assisted with accommodation, clothing, schools and employment.

Refugees were treated with dignity and were free to go into the village; 2437 private homes were available, offering rooms for free.

Grandma Jan would have been denied a home in the Australia of 1972, so it wasn't until she was a married woman with two children and a white husband (with skills) that she managed to find a warm state of grace to see her children grow and her grandchildren born in Brisbane.

I first came across the simple, rehabilitating option of offering a room in my house for

asylum seekers — like the Somerset villagers did — at a time when my need for protection and compassion was necessary, recovering as I was from an episode of severe mental illness.

It was while making the first tentative steps outside the enclosed mental health unit that I came across two empty chapels, side by side in the grounds of Wolston Park.

Like Goldilocks I tried sitting on the first pew. I guessed the chapel was of a Protestant vein, being bare and simple of ornamentation. The next chapel was Catholic, with more sacred adornments, and I found myself on the pew longer because the stained glass window got my attention. It was a young woman, medieval in armour with a sword. I mused on it being Joan of Arc.

Checking in with the psych nurse I got raised eyebrows when I asked for a priest. The priest in turn was surprised when I asked who the female figure in his chapel was. He hadn't noticed her! So we were educated on the life of Dymphna, Patron Saint of the Mentally ill (pictured). She was a refugee.

By boat she escaped the incestuous, deranged pagan king who was her father. At only 14 years of age she made this perilous journey to Europe with her priest guardian and people smuggler ...

Even in the 21st century a sixth century story resonates. Ongoing violence against women and children has never ceased. The fact that she was tracked down and murdered engenders compassion.

Not fearful or anxious about the increasing numbers of pilgrims with mental illness venturing into the town, the residents of Gheel opened their doors and continue to be a model therapeutic community. Foster family care has become integrated within the community. We could be given this choice.

The lingering echo of former Prime Minister John Howard at the launch of the 2001 election haunts us still — 'we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come'.

Continuing hostility towards asylum seekers is not due only to a dislike for Afghans or Iraqis, said sociologist and social commentator Eva Cox on ABC's Q&A. She'd heard all the vitriol about boat people before. In 1948 as a five-year-old Jewish girl, she had fled Nazi Germany with her family. They wound up on a boat crossing from Indonesia towards Australia.

Both major political parties claim they are tough on border protection. Philip Ruddock was the immigration minister who helped install the Pacific Solution, which incarcerated asylum seekers on islands sometimes for up to five years.

He visited the island of Nauru in 2002. The mostly Afghani men, women and children who

greeted him with their traditional hospitality still remember his harsh words as he told them to go back to their country because they had come through the window instead of the door. Many have since become proud Australian citizens.

Negative, hysterical publicity often attends those who arrive by boat. This contrasts with the response to those who arrive by plane on holiday or study visas then claim for asylum. They are discreetly processed and integrated into the community while they wait for the paperwork to be done. Refugees who don't have an airport or Australian embassy near their place of terror don't get a fair go.

While Cox and her family were settling into their new country in 1950 my nine-year-old mother was a different kind of boat arrival. She was greeted by fanfare and had a group photo in the local paper. She was one of 135,000 white Christian '[child migrants](#)', who weren't aware they'd be staying.

Then-Immigration Minister Calwell's 'Populate or Perish' policy adhered to a white European influx. It didn't matter that there was brutality inflicted or neglect when these child migrants arrived. Government conveniently trusted the various agencies to look after them and then forgot them.

It is hard not to be cynical and worry about the asylum seekers coming to Australia now being told they are being sent to Malaysia, which has a horrific record of human rights abuse to refugees.

So easily the government ministers can say we have an agreement with the Malaysians, that these asylum seekers will be treated with respect and dignity. Understaffed United Nations workers are expected to monitor treatment and conditions. They will be tagged so they are not caned. They will be in a holding centre and then free to go into the community.

In the eight years that my mother was at the orphanage a representative for her guardian, the State of New South Wales, showed their duty of care by turning up once a year and asking the child, with a nun on either side, if they were being looked after well.

James Hathaway, a leading authority on international refugee law at the University of Michigan, said the Australian Government shows an 'extraordinary callous disregard' for human rights by pushing asylum seekers into countries like Malaysia that have not signed to the very conventions they helped write. Malaysia has no legal obligation to share the responsibility with Australia; 'It's an illegal deal'.

The natural law of cause and effect seems not to worry us. The long-term generational effects of the Child Migrant scheme with mental and physical illness, poverty and substance abuse is now widely known. Kevin Rudd's government apologised and recompense will be made.

Our obligation to pay for the damage we have caused to refugees is something Australia

should bear in mind. It's up to us.

What a relief to hear former Prime Minister Bob Hawke say Tony Abbott's 'Stop the Boats' slogan was ridiculous, and remind us that we were all 'boat people' once. 'The boat people who are fleeing their homelands to stay alive are people this country needs — people with initiative and courage,' he said.

The White Australia Policy was struck off years ago, but I reckon if white, African farmers were expelled by Robert Mugabe and came to our shores on boats, we would open our doors and windows.

I read the local newspapers and am shocked at the public animosity towards asylum seekers. I set the record straight to counteract the fear of showing compassion, the refusal to step into another human's thongs ... choosing open hearts, minds and spare rooms.

Reality trumps Japanese horror stories

MEDIA

Stephen Alomes

The Skyhooks said it well when they described the evening news as ‘a horror movie right there on my TV’. The small screen loves disasters: fires, floods, tornadoes, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes. It also loves displayed emotion, as evoked by the tasteless ‘How does it feel?’ question often asked by tabloid television and press reporters.

This was brought home to me as a visitor to Japan in the months after the March tsunami, the Fukushima earthquake and nuclear power plant disaster in the Sendai regions. I have been here since June, based at Yamaguchi University, an internationally oriented university in Yamaguchi City. This inland city is nearly 800km south-west of Fukushima and further away from Sendai.

Yamaguchi has no N-plants. Nor is it an area with active earthquake patterns. Nonetheless, before we left Australia people asked, ‘Are you still going?’.

All too often anxiety trumps reality. In Melbourne in recent years, we received emails from friends overseas worried that we might be affected by the Queensland floods or NSW bushfires. We were of course hundreds of kilometres away.

Unfortunately, TV prefers emotions to time and place. Commercial tabloid current affairs TV never shows map locations, even on Australian stories, and the ABC’s *7.30 Report* is rarely any better.

Apparently one television tabloid reporter — the classic fly-in or parachute journalist who knew nothing about Japan — reported that the Japanese were wearing masks for fear of a nuclear threat. In fact they usually wear masks to avoid spreading colds and flu.

Japan does have problems, some immediate and some ongoing. The regions around Sendai and coastal Fukushima have been battered. Japan has a long-term problem as an energy-less country reliant on N-power. Like Australia, it has failed to learn from Germany about developing solar power. Its regulatory systems also have severe weaknesses.

But Japan is not, in general, a disaster zone. For most people life goes on as normal despite a revival of the ‘no tie’ policy introduced some years ago by then Prime Minister Koizumi, due to higher temperatures in offices. People are urged to save power and while there are fears of outages, they’re concentrated in Tokyo and its Kanto region rather than the rest of the country.

Across Japan, while N-power stations are checked and tested, some businesses and offices, and people at home, are running air-conditioners at 27–28°C rather than 20°C. Car plants have moved their ‘weekend’ to Monday–Tuesday to lessen the weekday power load.

At the same time, Japan is aware of the human and economic costs of the tsunami and the nuclear power problem. Tanabata, a summer festival where people seek good things for the future, including relationships, has made people think about those they have lost and what they have. News reports have suggested that in anxious times the security of marriage has become more appealing.

Japan remains a place of considerable courtesy, with an increasing number of signs in English, and helpful people who often take lost tourists to their destination. Its supermarkets and fruiterers have bananas which are both cheap and of the highest quality, as is all food, including ice cream, chocolate and other delights.

As long as you like sushi, teriyaki, noodles, pizza, pasta and salads, Japan is also cheap. Prices have not risen after almost no inflation for over a decade. Japan is also remarkably safe — the only country in which I carry my wallet in my back pocket when travelling!

As Victorians found when tourists avoided Healesville after the Black Saturday bushfires, one thing that regions and countries afflicted by disaster don't want is an end to tourism. That applies to the islands of Japan, too, from Kyushu and Shikoku in the south to Hokkaido in the north, as well as to the main island of Honshu.

Disastrous television news exaggeration is a disaster we can do without. In contrast, travel is one way to begin international understanding which deepens wisdom. What Australians need today, as always, is a mature international approach to the world — a world which is even more interesting than it is complicated and accident-prone.

Peter Steele's King James flurries

POETRY

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

More swift than stern

(for Peter Steele SJ)

For years you've taught us all those things
To disconcert imaginings
Or glint like hummingbirds' flashed wings,

Dear Peter;

None of us wanted your imaginings

To be neater.

Discerning planets from prismatic angles
(Far from drab academic wrangles);
Your verse can prance but never tangles

In granny-knots

For all its curlicues and spangles,

Of which there's lots.

You are sustained — I guess I know —

By the Holy Spirit fluttering below

And you become its Papageno,

Sagacious poet.

If there's a conceptual furbelow

You'll know it,

Taming that jigger as metaphor.

But the merest bud or apple core,
A cairngorm or a mouse's paw

Can be your grist

As you give it several octanes more,
 Evangelist
Or prestidigitator of
A maplike sphere infused with love,
Showered with subjunctives from above,
 Sublimely good.
Even your Trinitarian faith
 Can serve as food
For those of us who blandly lack
Such nourishment, or at our back
Hear the vague tread, the clickety-clack,
 Of those great stories
And gorgeous King James Bible prose,
 In weakened flurries.
You've written, alas, that you'll no more travel
To hallowed sites where cameras marvel.
Hearing this note, I'm stung to cavil
 That it can't be true,
But no blip or snitch will ever unravel
 My love for you.

Behind Berlin's and Israel's walls

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

Walls are not merely concrete manifestations but cultural and psychological ones. Such barriers can be external or internal. In the case of the Berlin Wall, which began construction on 13 August 1961, it was both the symbolic site of conflict between global ideologies and systems, and an actual manifestation of brutal state fear.

'Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall', encouraged US President Ronald Reagan before it in June 1987. President John F. Kennedy proclaimed his allegiance to the city as a Berliner before it in 1963: 'Ich bin ein Berliner'.

When it began to fall to the hammers of the Mauerspechte in November 1989, its physical destruction did not erase the Wall's legacy. On the contrary, it affirmed it as the high point of government policy in controlling mobile populations.

Such walls are part of the modern state, precisely because the idea of 'open borders', while desirable economically, is notably feared when it comes to people. The modern state apparatus busies itself with erecting and preserving barriers against enemies known and unknown while also keeping its residents closed off in the name of security. Mobility is highly circumscribed.

When the Second World War ended, Winston Churchill alluded to this trend when he spoke, in his speech of March 1946, of an 'Iron Curtain' descending on Eastern Europe 'from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic'.

The Berlin Wall was designed to keep people in, and the strict instructions to shoot anyone escaping the East were indicative of that. As the East German leader Walter Ulbricht explained on 3 August 1961, 'active measures for ending the recruitment of people [by West Germany] from our Republic are necessary'.

This was a dramatic reversal from such political contexts as those of the Great Wall of China or Hadrian's Wall, both built in the name of keeping the 'uncivilised' out rather than subjects within the borders of the realm.

When Israel began constructing a wall around Jerusalem, the then Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat referred to it as a 'Berlin Wall'. The current West Bank barrier is some 760 km in length, made of part electric fence, part concrete wall, part razor wire.

The linguistic relevance here is important. To many Israelis, it is a mere fence. 'It is a security fence,' claimed former Defence Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer. 'It is not diplomatic. It is not political.' The Berlin Wall was similarly rationalised at times as a security barrier — an 'anti-fascist' barrier.

For others, the West Bank creation is an amorphous thing. Most in the Western press use the more benign term 'separation barrier'. Walls do not merely have ears — they have distinctly different meanings to barriers.

A similar disagreement on what role the Berlin Wall played in history featured during this year's commemorations. Norbert Polster, a 37-year-old East Berlin native recalled that his mother 'cried for hours when the wall fell'. Her wall was her belief, a construction of ideology that was a reassurance.

Little surprise then at the results of a survey reported in the *Berliner Zeitung* showing that one in five East Berliners, who make more than a third of all Berliners, felt the building of the wall was justified.

In building such a structure, Israel was facing a host of issues as complex as those facing East Germany, if not more so. It was enacting a doubly negative policy.

In one sense the state enclosed the Palestinians through what the International Court of Justice termed in 2004 to be a *de facto* annexation. But Israelis were also sealing themselves off not merely from potential suicide bombers but Palestinians in general. A wall of concrete and razor wire often begins as a wall of the mind, an idea that spawns awful progeny.

The Berlin parallels have also appeared to the north of Israel. In the town of Ghajar, which lies in the border drawn between Israel and Lebanon, Israelis haven taken moves that supposedly follow the Berlin formula, retaining soldiers in the southern part, and keeping the city divided. Deputy Director of the village council Ahmed Khatib drew the lines with starkness. 'Civilised Europe destroyed the Berlin wall. Now it will be rebuilt in Ghajar.'

While Israelis and Palestinians continue to struggle with current narratives of security and separation over an all too genuine barrier, the memory of the Berlin Wall has become a classic case of how capitalism can assimilate all forms of life, including the cruel and grotesque. The eastern part of Berlin is becoming a horror theme park, a place where memory is up for sale.

Andr   Prager, for one, has established 'Trabi Safaris', where tourists in Berlin traverse the route of the old wall: 'Discover the last relics of real-life socialism.' Vegas meets a trivialised terror on the strip. Memory here is not merely desensitised — any trace of a sting is removed.

Not that Prager cares, having himself inverted the meaning of the Trabi. 'The Trabi isn't a symbol of oppression', but rather, the object of a simpler world.

ABC deaths put journalism in perspective

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

It is a commonplace that death puts things into perspective. But the reason why it is commonplace is that we experience its truth again and again. So it was with the deaths of the ABC journalist Paul Lockyer, photographer John Bean and pilot Gary Ticehurst in a helicopter crash near Lake Eyre. Their deaths put journalism into perspective.

The image of journalism that has dominated the news in the last month has been one of grubbiness. Phone hacking, cover-ups, the collusion of police, politicians and media executives have jostled for attention with the habitual sins of tendentious reporting and pontifical commentating. Together they have plunged journalists even further down the most-admired profession scale.

Lockyer's death reminds us how much we are indebted to ordinary, decent and self-effacing journalists. I never knew him, but his name and voice have been a constant presence on the ABC, telling stories, describing situations and landscape, explaining what we might have missed.

I did not learn from his reporting what his political views were, who his friends were or what interesting experiences he might have had in his life. He was the servant of his craft — uncovering aspects of Australian reality for interested readers.

Neither did I meet John Bean, never heard his name nor heard his voice, but I realised after his death that many of the photographs have defined aspects of Australia for me. I was even less connected with Gary Ticehurst, but his death reminded me yet again how much what we know of our nation depends on people who fetch and carry and never leave a byline to recognise them by.

Their deaths also remind us of the risks that journalists take in pursuing their craft. To tell their stories, journalists are drawn to places isolated from civilisation. Sometimes the isolation is physical, taking journalists to places where travel always involves some risk. At other times the isolation is from civil society, whose risks took journalists like the Balibo Five and Neil Davis to their deaths.

In many nations the isolation is from any moral universe, working in a society where powerful people make it their business to suppress knowledge of reality and those who come to hold such knowledge.

The death of ordinary people doing necessary work in a decent way turns around the questions we usually ask about journalism. When confronted by the corruption of something good, we usually ask how we can stop the corruption. When touched by the death of someone

good, we will do better to ask how we can encourage what they were doing.

How can we encourage journalists who are good at their job, keep themselves out of their stories, are aware of their own prejudices, and struggle for objectivity in the way they present reality to us?

Encouragement comes from friends and a decent culture. News organisations are not simply businesses or faceless bodies, but are composed of people linked in their working relationships with one another. For the ABC the death of Lockyer, Bean and Ticehurst is more than the loss of business resources and skills. It is the loss of friends and companions. We feel with them in their loss.

And finally these deaths remind us of how important the ABC is as a home for journalists. It is important that they find it a home where they are encouraged to avoid the moral gutters of celebrity hounding and of exposing the powerless, and are encouraged to give their time to more expansive stories. For all its faults, the ABC has been such a home.

It is important that it continue to be so and not a branch office that distributes the [work of others](#). Ensuring that this is so will be its proper tribute to Lockyer and those who died with him.

Alice Springs drinking stories

NON-FICTION

Ellena Savage

On my last night in Alice, we went out to the pub. We drank and danced with some locals, who were as warm and funny as you'd expect in a remote country town.

One woman, Patricia, for whom English was a fourth language, had moved to Alice to be with her husband, and was doing a course intended to get her work-ready. She said she missed being home and with her family a lot, but liked living in Alice, because she was with her husband. Her manner of speech was beautiful. When she invited us to her table, she said, 'Come, I'll tell you a story.'

The racial current in Alice is difficult, as an outsider, to understand. On the one hand, there are town-camps for Aboriginals, and the early-opening pubs that are frequented by local Aboriginals are known colloquially as 'animal bars'. These two facts alone, notwithstanding some of the dodgier NT Intervention policy, are incredibly confronting to my East-coast sensibilities.

On the other hand, it's a place that constantly reminds one of Australia's pre-colonial history, and, like finding bullet holes in Roman ruins that poke through Gothic laneways in Barcelona, just how powerfully a people's long history in a place can haunt it.

While I did some grocery shopping one evening, I stopped by the liquor shop to pick up a cask of wine. As a poor person (I don't even have the excuse of being a student anymore), I generally veer towards value for money. But Coles and Woolworths had set 'floor prices' for liquor before I arrived in Alice. The cheapest bottles of wine available were \$8, and casks had been removed from sale.

I splurged and bought a \$14 bottle. What the heck, I thought. We'll be civilised tonight.

This initiative by Coles and Woolworths, of setting a regulated lowest price per standard drink, was trialed for a few months in 2006. Back then, the alcohol consumption rate dropped by 20 per cent. Its instantaneous effect on my own alcohol choice was remarkable.

The interesting thing about this initiative is that it is not a policy imposed as a part of the Intervention, but voluntarily taken up by local businesses in response to pressure from community bodies, such as the People's Alcohol Action Coalition.

It's clear the Territory has a serious drinking problem. The Intervention has not delivered significant outcomes in relation to substance abuse, but locally endorsed initiatives have.

Petrol-sniffing, for example, has been almost eradicated. Opal fuel (low aromatic petrol) is now used in as many as 106 communities in remote and regional Australia. It was campaigned

for locally by organisations such as the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council.

I met with a youth worker from the Council. He stressed that controlling the supply of substances is only one facet of mitigating destructive behaviours. To really see change, it is essential that supply control occurs in conjunction with rigorous community-building efforts.

So much of mainstream journalism that comes out of the red centre [sensationalises](#) the dysfunction of Aboriginals without any attempt to put that dysfunction — and racialised perceptions of it — into any kind of historical context.

Substance abuse occurs in combination with the profound individual challenges that come with lived experiences of trauma, or with mental illness. Inter-generational trauma, which I argue is at the core of the Territory's social problems, is the passing on of grief, often expressed through dysfunctional behaviors, from generation to generation.

The Stolen Generations are well within living memory, and inexplicable Aboriginal deaths in custody, world record-breaking incarceration rates and inequitable access to resources are ongoing wounds.

If we deny the trauma associated with displacement and incredible persecution, we undermine any attempt, however well intentioned, to remedy its effects.

As we left the pub that night, intoxicated and in pain from trying to keep up with Patricia's dancing, her husband joined us outside for a cigarette. He was doing that quite nice thing that people often do when they're drunk, which is spout platitudes about universal love and friendship.

'This is my town. I was born here, but I welcome you here. Doesn't matter if you're an Englishman, Indian, if you're from Africa. We're all the same. We brothers.'

As we piled into a cab, promising to have a beer with him next time we saw him, he turned back to the pub's entrance. The bouncers refused him back in.

Abbott's budgie-smuggler blues

MEDIA

Moira Byrne Garton

Responding to an illustration that [appeared](#) in *Eureka Street*, one regular correspondent lamented the portrayal by cartoonists of Tony Abbott wearing Speedos. Others elsewhere have [expressed](#) similar frustration at such humorous if crude references to Abbott's choice of swimwear.

Abbott's representation in political cartoons increased after he became leader of the Liberal Party in December 2009. This is not unusual. Party leaders, particularly those of the major parties, invariably attract more attention from cartoonists than most other politicians. Abbott's cartoon appearances in Speedos became more frequent.

But these portrayals are not part of a sinister plot to undermine his authority. Don't attribute to conspiracy something that can be explained by silliness. The initial media photographic and film images of a serious politician wearing what are colloquially known as 'budgie smugglers' naturally set the tone for an atmosphere of frivolity.

In the early days of his growing political profile, Abbott was frequently depicted in one of two ways. The first was as a [monk](#), referencing his Catholic identity, Jesuit schooling and time in the seminary. (Kevin Rudd's religious belief was similarly caricaturised in [this](#) later cartoon).

The second was as a pugilist, alluding to his [boxing](#) days and his role as Liberal Party 'head-kicker' under former Prime Minister John Howard.

As a politician with a growing public profile, Abbott provided media opportunities to publicise various issues. Such appearances included [cycling](#) events (such as the charitable 'pollie pedal' bike ride he initiated), iron-man and triathlon events, and, yes, [surf lifesaving](#) activities.

Given the sense of humour prevalent in Australia (even the term 'budgie smugglers' says something about our culture's humour), it's no surprise that after making numerous public appearances in his Speedos, many cartoonists gleefully seized the opportunity to represent Abbott thus attired.

Many of Australia's most prominent cartoonists co-opted the image of Abbott in his Speedos, but this is by no means the only characterisation. Some continued with the distinctive red and yellow lifesaving cap, even if they dispensed with the Speedos. Others simply depicted Abbott on a bike.

Illustrations reflecting Abbott's Catholic identity and boxing also continued. And of course

there are many cartoons in which he simply looks like a well-dressed politician or corporate figure.

Many cartoonists reference all of these, depending on the message of the cartoon or perhaps simply happenstance. *Eureka Street* cartoonist Fiona Katauskas used Abbott's [cycling](#) in one cartoon and his [Speedos](#) in others. For some, the Speedos image has become exaggerated into caricature over time.

Cartoonists themselves noticed this: Paul Zanetti [commented](#) that Abbott is now synonymous with Speedos, while Warren Brown [regards](#) them as Abbott's trademark.

It would be interesting to determine whether any politicians changed their behaviour as a result of a particular illustration. Certainly Alexander Downer did not make the mistake of appearing in fishnets again following [this](#) photograph (designed to draw attention to a charity). A decade later, cartoonists were still drawing Downer in stockings and heels.

If Abbott did not want to be represented in Speedos, it's reasonable to suppose he would not provide media opportunities wearing them. In fact Abbott explicitly drew attention to his swimming attire when he promised to not appear in Speedos, then [broke](#) his undertaking.

In 2001, the Australian Review of Public Affairs featured an article by University of Sydney political scientist Dr Michael Hogan, expressing concern that political cartoons may undermine public confidence in politicians, parties and democratic institutions.

Two Flinders University academics, political scientist Dr Haydon Manning and English department political satire lecturer Dr Robert Phiddian, later responded. Their 2004 article defended political cartoonists' licence to mock public figures and institutions, and disputed their effect on public opinion. They concluded that citizens' capacity to recognise cartoons as exaggerated political commentary is underestimated.

History demonstrates that politicians are almost always pitilessly represented in cartoons. Just ask John 'Eyebrows' Howard, Mark 'Frankenstein' Latham, Kevin 'Tintin' Rudd, Brendan 'Hair' Nelson, Malcolm 'Dark Circles' Turnbull, and Julia 'Nose' Gillard (or '[Bottom](#)' as the case may be). There's no need for anyone to have a glass jaw on Tony Abbott's behalf.

Australian and South African migrant hostility

HUMAN RIGHTS

David Holdcroft

Two months ago, 29-year-old Godfrey Sibanda was walking home from work in the early evening in Seshego township near the regional centre of Polokwane in northern South Africa. A mob set upon him in the semi darkness, beat him and threw rocks at him.

The police in the area had been on alert but were too late at the scene: Sibanda succumbed to injuries sustained in the attack. His crime? He was a Zimbabwean and he had a job. In Seshego, as elsewhere in South Africa's poor township communities, this combination can be a capital offence.

Previously in nearby Lebowakgomo, 3000 people of Ethiopian origin were rendered homeless after a South African family accused a young Ethiopian man of raping the family member he'd been seeing.

Such incidents follow a disturbing pattern. In Seshego, years of frustration at lack of services led to a meeting between the community and its political leaders. The meeting called for the 'eviction' of local Zimbabwean residents that are seen as competing for the same jobs, waiting at the same bus stops for trucks to come along and offer them casual 'piece' work for the day.

The local councillor is one of the 12 people charged with Sibanda's murder.

As horrific as this incident was, what is more worrying is a recent shift in the message from parts of government towards migrants in general and the Zimbabweans in particular.

Two years ago South African authorities declared a special dispensation trying to cope with the thousands of irregular movers crossing the border from Zimbabwe. This made the crossing, albeit still risky, much safer. This dispensation ended last year as South African authorities announced that all Zimbabweans living in South Africa should henceforth be registered and properly documented.

The measure intended a beneficial outcome — it was aimed at regularising Zimbabweans in the country so they would not become the victims of 'impunity' crimes or attract unscrupulous labour practices. But the refusal of the Department of Home Affairs to admit that its registration process may have missed important sub-groups (normally the most vulnerable) and its scepticism about total numbers of Zimbabweans, have the potential to compromise the expected benefits.

More damaging was a statement made in June by Maggie Maunye, head of Parliament's oversight committee on Home Affairs, which suggested foreigners were compromising the

freedom South Africans gained in 1994. As well as being inflammatory, this suggests a political agenda is at play.

Like Australia, South Africa is concerned that it has become the nation of choice of forced and other migrants. There is increasing evidence of an unofficial policy of preventing forced migrants from entry, forcing countries to the north — namely Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique — to accept asylum seekers on a more or less permanent basis.

Like Australia, there is a moral argument that South Africa, by virtue of its greater economic capacity, has an obligation to accept a greater proportion of those on the move. Most commentators would argue that, with 171,702 asylum seekers pending processing of their claims (compared to Australia's 3760), South Africa has met its international obligations. Many South Africans would agree.

At the same time there is a body of opinion within government that suggests the Zimbabwean government should take greater responsibility to prevent migration from within its borders. This hits at the heart of Zimbabwe's policies that have resulted in its economic collapse and slow recovery.

A young Zimbabwean man recently told me of the great kindness he experienced in a South African township when, sleeping in a forest nearby, he came down to seek 'piece' work. This suggests there remains a deep reservoir of good will in the community.

It is disappointing to see elements of government, so long respectful of the Refugee and OAU conventions and of general humanity, may be bowing to short-term political opportunism.

The Government needs to limit its rhetoric, take ownership of the larger social and economic grievances expressed by marginalised communities, and finally develop an integrated migration policy that admits the potential benefits of all forms of migration to a struggling community.

They could take a leaf out of the older members of this small community, who provided a bed, water, food and clothing to this young Zimbabwean, giving him a chance to get on his feet. He now works as a translator, pays taxes and contributes to his community.

By providing such hospitality in the critical days after he crossed the border, his hosts demonstrated the power of the *ubuntu* tradition of which Africans are so proud.

Catholicism at high speed

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Senna* (M). Director: Asif Kapadia. Starring: Ayrton Senna, Alain Prost. 106 minutes**

The word ‘mercurial’ evokes both its earthly and divine connotations when applied to the career of three time Formula One world champion Ayrton Senna.

During the decade from 1984, the enigmatic Brazilian branded the world of auto racing with his brazen ability and driving genius. He was good-looking, humble and charming, and inspired the kind of admiration and hysteria often reserved for movie stars. What’s more, his unabashed public proclamations of religious faith added to his mystical aura: he was quite literally a messenger of God.

Senna is a compelling documentary of his remarkable career. It is assembled from archival footage (including televised race and interview footage, white-knuckle sequences captured by on-board cameras, and Senna family home videos), and knitted together by recollections, in voiceover, from Senna’s family, journalists, and his racing nemesis and former teammate, Frenchman Alain Prost.

You do not have to be a racing aficionado to enjoy this gripping account. It is a meditation on humanity and mortality as much as it is a great sports documentary. Senna is a fascinating subject, and his story a tragedy of the highest order: his career and his life came to a sudden end on an Italian Grand Prix circuit in 1994, when he was aged just 34. This fate looms throughout the film.

Senna’s faith is a central tenet of his character. Winning is not a goal but a necessity (because why compete if you do not win?), and he credits his victories to God. And although he feels his failures deeply, through the lessons learnt and progressions made from them he grows closer to God.

Prost at one point accuses him of conflating faith with indestructibility; Senna differs, affirming, ominously, that in the high-speed sport of Formula One, he is ever conscious of his own mortality.

The rivalry with Prost is tensely evoked. It, perhaps more than anything, proved to be the greatest test of Senna’s character. He both won and lost world titles to Prost on the basis of technicalities. In these instances, the film posits implicit, unresolved questions regarding the apportioning of blame.

During the penultimate race of the 1989 season, in Japan, Senna crossed the finishing line first, but was disqualified after Prost, an astute politician within the sport, reported him on a

technical breach; Prost walked away with the title. The following year, Senna claimed the title on a technicality following an accident on that same track which prevented both himself and Prost from finishing the race.

Footage of Senna in the wake of this incident reveals him looking withdrawn, even sheepish. We are invited to infer that Senna may have employed kamikaze tactics to take the title, and perhaps to exact revenge for Prost's slight the previous year. If this is the case, then Senna, the philosophical proponent of 'pure racing' free from politics, must have felt deeply conflicted over this victory.

Such speculation remains muted; necessarily, given that Senna is not alive to speak for himself.

In fact understatement proves to be one of the film's great strengths. Rather than offering a garish, concrete image of a man he obviously admires, director Kapadia presents the evidence gently. He invites his audience to reflect deeply upon Senna's very human strengths and weaknesses, faith and fears. This is much more affecting and compelling than polemic or sensationalism would have been.

Arguably the Brazilian Senna's most ecstatic victory occurs when he wins on home turf. After leading for the entire race, Senna's car suffered a gearbox malfunction. But, determined to claim victory in front of his countrymen and women, he completed the final laps despite being stuck in sixth gear.

By the finish he was suffering severe shoulder and neck spasms due to the additional physical strain. Yet his agony did nothing to stifle his shrieks of delight, captured by the on-board microphone, or to stop him, on the winner's podium, from hoisting the trophy painfully but proudly above his head.

The moment underlines the hero status that Senna knew he held in his impoverished home country, where he was seen as a symbol of hope and inspiration, and where to this day the Ayrton Senna Institute works to improve the lot of Brazilian children. For emotional impact, this sequence is rivalled only by the film's tense, tragic retelling of the days that led to Senna's final, fatal drive in 1994.

'Boat people' and the ethics of presence

POLITICS

Andrew Hamilton

As former director of Jesuit Refugee Service Southern Sudan David Palmer [remarked](#) in his article yesterday, passion often trumps reasoned argument in discussion of asylum seekers. So I welcome the clarity and courtesy with which he makes his ethical case for the Malaysian solution. Although I agree with many of his points, I would like, with equal civility, to argue against his conclusions.

The core of David's argument that the Malaysian solution is ethical lies in his analysis of the argument from proximity: the moral obligation to meet the claims of people who make their claim on us in our own territory.

He argues that in an age when distance is relativised, proximity is not a decisive factor. The appeal to proximity, too, ignores other factors that are equally important: the relative needs of different groups of refugees; the unequal resources of these asylum seekers compared to others, and the need to maintain public support for refugee programs by controlling entry to Australia. He concludes that the Malaysian solution balances these different demands in an ethically acceptable way.

I agree with David that the core of the argument lies in the ethical significance we give to proximity. We both accept that an ethical refugee policy must be fair and attend to the relative needs of different asylum seekers. We differ about the point at which fairness and need should be taken into account, and so on how they are relevant to ethical judgment of the Malaysian solution.

David and I may also differ in the starting point of our ethical thinking. His reflection begins from above with a broad overview of the elements involved in a refugee policy abstracted from the people who are involved. Perhaps that is how thinking about policy works. My concern is that this starting point encourages the assumption that the only relevant ethical question to be asked about policy is whether it will bring the greatest benefit for the greatest number.

My reflection begins from the concrete dignity and experience of the people about whose treatment ethical questions are raised.

In this case these are the people who will be the objects of the Malaysian solution, and particularly those who discover that they will be sent to Malaysia as a result of the policy. The Malaysian solution is defined by the swapping of particular asylum seekers for others, and the sending of those who arrived by boat to live in Malaysia without lasting or specified guarantees about how they will live. These are the central ethical questions to resolve.

Our different starting points may shape the way each of us sees proximity. I see David's account of proximity as thin. It refers to geographical closeness, with no discernable difference in principle between the proximity of things and that of people.

The heart of my ethical argument is that the proximity of human beings is of a special kind, and is better described as presence. When people come into my presence and ask for my help, they make a claim on me to which I must respond. I am engaged in a different way than if the claim were made at a distance. This, and the progression of my argument, can best be seen through an extended example.

Suppose that in France under Hitler's occupation, a bloodied man arrived at our doorstep asking for shelter from a Nazi mob. His presence to us would be of a special kind. So his claim on our response would also be of a quite different order than that made by a brochure left on our doorstep, asking for help for Jews in Germany. The claim made by the presence of the endangered and injured man would precede questions of fairness and relative need.

We would be entitled to ask whether his claim was genuine — whether he was feigning risk or was planted on us by the secret police.

But we would not be entitled to send him away on the grounds that, whereas he was only at risk of a beating, there were Jewish Rabbis in town who were in danger of being killed. Nor would we be entitled to take him into the countryside and leave him to his own devices on the grounds that we were already contributing to a fund to support Jews in Germany that would help more people.

The moral claim made on us by people who are present to us may not ethically be discharged by kindness to others. Only the people present to us may free us from the claim they make on us. The only relevant thought experiment is to look into the eyes of the people we are sending away and tell them that we prefer to help others.

Fairness and relative need make their claim on us only after we have met the needs of those who make a claim on us by their presence. When we have helped the bleeding man, we may then reflect on the situation of Jews in occupied Europe and ask how best to help the most needy. In the same way the Australian refugee policy rightly takes into account fairness and relative need in its offshore program, and works to build a principled international response to refugees in urgent need.

In occupied France we might have chosen to join an international chain that would smuggle Jews through Europe. We could then pass on the bloodied man after we had assured him and ourselves that the chain would enable him to rebuild his life. Once we were part of the chain we would hold its security and strength in trust, for people's lives depended on it.

To risk the international solidarity required for the chain to work effectively by bypassing it and handing people over to an untried group with a dubious history would be ethically

irresponsible.

The international network that offers some protection to asylum seekers is the UNHCR Convention. It provides a framework for enabling burden sharing among nations and in its provisions represents the ethical claims made by refugees. I would argue that to break that chain, inadequate though it may be, by substituting for it a parallel framework without equal force, is ethically irresponsible. It weakens the support for refugees. That is the second argument against the Malaysian solution.

Finally the protection of Jews in occupied France would have relied on tacit public support. So does the protection of asylum seekers in Australia. That requires political leadership, of which much needs to be said. But the absence of support would not justify sending away the bloodied man who came to our door. Nor does it justify sending away asylum seekers who make a claim on us by their presence.

I have argued that people in genuine need make a decisive claim by virtue of being present to us. We must respond to this claim. We may not swap people who are present to us for others, because the claim made by presence is not transferable. In our subsequent response to the needs of refugees more generally, we should take into account relative need and justice.

And finally, although we should help asylum seekers living in nations that have not signed the Convention, we may not ethically make side agreements that set aside the claim made directly on us by on-shore asylum seekers.

Gillard, work and welfare

MARGARET DOOLEY AWARD

Sarah Burnside

A sense of malaise and uncertainty pervades the Australian political scene, with both major parties derided as bereft of ideas.

This was not always so: in the 1900s, prior to the advent of the two-party system, Australia was perceived as a testing-ground for experimental, egalitarian policies. As the historian John Rickard wrote in his biography of Justice Henry Higgins, the first President of the Arbitration Court, social experiments such as arbitration, the eight-hour day and old age pensions led to Australasia being dubbed 'the social laboratory of the world'.

Of course, this egalitarian vision had appalling flaws, including its exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Asian migrants. It should be noted, though, that the benefits of the Protectionist Deakin Government's reformist legislation went beyond the tangible; it spoke to the deeper needs of human beings within the capitalist system.

The 1907 Harvester decision exemplified this ideal: Higgins interpreted the expression 'fair and reasonable wage' to mean 'the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilised community'.

Although in rejecting John Howard's Work Choices regime at the 2007 election the nation reaffirmed its commitment to the rights of employees, Australia now seems a laboratory of a very different kind: there is a bipartisan commitment to the testing out of punitive welfare policies, particularly on Indigenous people. Sociologist Eva Cox has been a trenchant critic of the income management policies of the Howard, Rudd and Gillard governments, characterising 'the whole Northern Territory' as an 'experiment'.

The persistence of the emphasis on work from both sides of politics is also striking. Tony Abbott's language — including suggestions that long-term unemployed people be compelled to move to areas where unskilled work is available — seems a continuation of the rhetoric of the Howard and Costello era. It is Julia Gillard's approach that has attracted more commentary, precisely because it seems inconsistent with aspects of her party's history.

The journalist Brian Toohey noted that 'in emphasising hard work, Gillard never gives any hint that she values the labour movement's contribution to reducing working hours, starting with the eight-hour-day campaign in the 1850s'. Toohey further noted that despite the nominal 38 hour week, in July 2010 men in full-time jobs worked an average of 41 hours a week and women almost 36 hours, and that around 1.5 million people now work 50 or more hours a week.

The difficulty of combining work with family and other commitments has been addressed

in limited fashion with the parental leave scheme but Howard's famous 'barbeque stopper' remains unsolved.

At the 2007 Federal election, Labor successfully asserted the primacy of familial life over 'workplace flexibility'. The omnipresent 'working families' slogan evoked Kevin Rudd's 2006 *Monthly* essays, where he argued that 'the impact of neo-liberalism cannot be effectively quarantined from its effect on the family'. Although many grew weary of its repetition, the slogan implied that we have an essential value beyond our labour — we are members of families and communities and our conditions of work must address our human needs as well as our employers' profit margins.

There was hope, then, that this government would take a more holistic view of the place of work in Australians' increasingly crowded lives and translate that view into innovative policy.

In her 2008 *Quarterly Essay 'Love and Money'*, public intellectual Anne Manne persuasively critiqued what she termed the 'Get to Work neo-liberal program'. The essay catalogued market capitalism's destructive impacts on families and championed an ethic of care distinct from 'the work ethic', with its focus on a narrowly construed 'productivity'.

Manne suggested that Australian society found itself 'at an historic turning point in the relation between family and work', and found 'common ground' with 'Rudd's sense that we must create the social and economic foundations on which we can fulfil our responsibilities to others'.

The writer May Lam was more dubious, musing: 'I'd love to know how far Kevin 24/7 acknowledges the need for his staff and public servants to spend time with their families'. Given Gillard's fulsome praise of those who 'set their alarm clocks early' — not to spend time with their families, friends or neighbours but to increase the nation's productivity — Lam's scepticism seems well-founded.

Gillard's speech at the inaugural Whitlam oration was noted for her bald statements that 'we have moved beyond the days of big government and big welfare' and that Labor was 'the party of work not welfare'. These simplistic phrases are problematic — in the context of a globalised system with little regard for societal harmony, the national welfare state needs defenders. As the late historian Tony Judt wrote:

Social democrats, characteristically modest in style and ambition, need to speak more assertively of past gains. The rise of the social service state, the century-long construction of a public sector whose goods and services illustrate and promote our collective identity and common purposes, the institution of welfare as a matter of right and its provision as a social duty: these were no mean accomplishments.

Parties of the centre left are often reluctant to laud this legacy, as can be seen from Gillard's adoption of the language of the right. There are dangers in this timidity, as the achievements

Judt mentions are always contingent and cannot be taken for granted. Praise for the dignity of work may also be taken to imply a corollary: that those who are not in paid employment — who care for children or relatives, who undertake volunteer work or who are incapable of working — cannot possess dignity.

The implication that all work is inherently rewarding also overlooks the role of social class in the modern economy. A journalist or politician may derive great status, satisfaction and meaning from his or work; a person who slaughters cattle in an abattoir may not. Those who romanticise the dignity of labour in the abstract often do so at a great distance from the less appealing specifics.

Further, as *Overland* editor Jeff Sparrow observed recently, 'too often, work's discussed simply as an end in itself, as if the main thing was to keep us all busy, irrespective of the purpose to which all that frantic activity is directed'. This focus elides the 'uncomfortable truth that not all production is actually productive'. Sparrow suggested: 'You can create as much work building nuclear missiles as by planting wheat, even though the world undeniably needs less of one and more of the other'.

Capitalism is above all amoral, demanding ever greater production and consumption without bothering overmuch about the nature of the goods or their societal impacts.

As the party of social democracy, it has historically been Labor's mission to moderate capitalism's impact on workers, and Gillard's 'alarm clock' rhetoric does not negate her government's support for workers' rights. As Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in the Rudd Government, Gillard was instrumental in overturning Work Choices and replacing it with the Fair Work Act 2009. The Coalition's attacks on the FWA have been somewhat muted due to its appreciation of the continuing unpopularity of Work Choices — a policy which Abbott has declared 'dead, buried, cremated'.

However, as journalist Bernard Keane noted recently, the 'labour market deregulationistas' in the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group and the commentariat have stubbornly continued to demand greater workplace 'flexibility' despite low unemployment rates and modest wage increases.

A campaign is building: journalist Geoff Kitney has suggested that Abbott's recent appeal to the mining industry to become 'political activists' is part of a 'broader strategy to create a powerful anti-Labor alliance between the conservative parties and the business community on a scale similar to that which worked to bring down the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s'.

Opponents of workplace regulation are well-resourced and powerful. In order to meet them head-on, the Government must do more than invoke the value of hard work, which tends to play into the hands of those who seek 'workplace flexibility'. After all, if work automatically confers great dignity, what does it matter that conditions are unsatisfactory?

Surely work of any kind — no matter what the circumstances — is preferable to the shame of welfare?

The British literary theorist Terry Eagleton is rightly critical of the contemporary mindset that sees politics and morality as separate, with the former ‘the technical business of public administration’ and the latter merely ‘a private matter’. The notion that politics belongs to the boardroom and morality to the bedroom has, Eagleton suggests, ‘led to a lot of immoral boardrooms’.

In defending its reforms, the ALP will need convincingly to assert the innate value of human beings beyond their labour, both as individuals and as members of families and communities. In so doing, it must remind the electorate that working conditions, like the supports offered by the welfare state, are not solely a political or economic matter — they raise deeper moral questions about the state of the nation.

Nursing home subversion

POETRY

Jim McPherson

Diversional therapy

Our kelpie would stalk avian invaders
then give chase
 simply for the sport.

I

Friday afternoon
they herd us into the Activities Room
for diversional therapy

 threadbare songs
 childish games

 Death Row Comedy Hour

It's a long way to Tipperary.

 Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do!

 I refuse to inquire.

I tell the nurse it is obscene
to focus on a post-nuptial synchronised rhythmic activity
in which the seat is given prominence.

'You've got a wicked mind, Padre.' 'All the wickeder for seeing you.'

Enter Big Nurse.

 Big Needle.

 Big Sleep.

I check the stopwatch when I wake.

I do not tell Big Nurse

her response time is a personal best.

II

Some Friday afternoons

I hear them coming

and ostentatiously

bury myself in a Sudoku, or

slowly, aloud

pray the Lord's Prayer in Greek

— Luke is enough —

hoping please God they'll leave me to it.

Or take my player and immerse myself

in the lilting melancholy of a Sibelius symphony
or sing along to Shosta's *Siege of Leningrad*

until Security forces the en suite

and leads me back to bed

Big Nurse comes with her riot shield in a teaspoon

and proffers it with honeyed words.

She does not know

I always check the stopwatch.

III

The benchmark for banal

is a nursing home Christmas.

I sit grim and stony-faced under the tinsel

as they sing *Jingle Bells*

and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*

and *We Wish You A Merry Christmas*.

'The Padre just doesn't understand Christmas.'

I do.

There's the rub.

IV

Now bewhiskered

for lack of one to shave me

bedridden, frail and deaf

waiting for the priest to come
as I so often came to others.

They told me later I had been asleep
and she had not wished to wake me.

Through the pain the medication and the torpor

I feel a gentle pressure on my hand.

Slowly

slightly

I turn to see

her Communion kit unopened

her lips moving

her prayer a silver flame

into which

I am ever so gently
so lovingly

placed

and cradled like a little child.

Bathed in this delicious silver warmth

my very bones glow

to hear the delight of angels heralding

that soon

— soon —

this kelpie will run free

An ethical defense of the Malaysia solution

POLITICS

David Palmer

Robust public debate over the treatment of asylum seekers who arrive unauthorised by boat is important, for the stakes are high. If the arrivals are forced home, their future prospects, freedom and very lives may be at risk. At the very least, they or their families will have wasted a lot of money, and perhaps be deeply in debt.

The stakes are less dramatic for Australians, but they are not inconsequential. Individuals and state authorities are torn by conflicting values and sentiments, ranging from compassion for the arrivals, to anger and frustration over the disruption they cause orderly and targeted migration and humanitarian programs, to anxiety over the possibility of a trickle becoming a flood.

In this environment, moral passion — a desire to do the right and the good — is common, especially among those who cast themselves as refugee advocates and proponents of value based policy, or at least policy based on respect for human dignity and human rights.

But moral passion should not be confused with moral superiority. The ethics and politics of refugee policy are complex, and the 'caring for us, caring for them' conundrum that underlies it is difficult to juggle. Any claim to occupy the moral high ground in this area of public policy is at best brave and at worst self-serving.

To illustrate we need only consider the Malaysian solution, under which unauthorised boat arrivals will be sent to Malaysia in exchange for UNHCR-recognised refugees.

The Government sees the initiative as a way to discourage people entering Australia using risky, uncontrolled and self-selective processes. Critics see it as an uncaring, politically motivated response to people whose sufferings are real, and who we have a legal and ethical obligation to assist because of their proximity.

Obligations based on proximity may seem consistent with the principle of the Good Samaritan, which suggests we should help anyone who falls within our immediate reach. They are at the heart of the non-refoulement clause in the Refugees Convention, which obliges us not to return any arriving person to a place where they have a well-founded fear of persecution for a Convention reason.

However, a refugee and humanitarian policy based on proximity has critical flaws, including from an ethical point of view.

Firstly, physical distance is no longer the barrier it once was to individuals and governments learning about and reaching out to help refugees and asylum seekers wherever

they may be in the world. Convenience, economy and media coverage may be reasons for giving priority to the few who turn up on our own shores, but it is difficult to argue that these factors carry much moral weight.

Secondly, a policy centred on proximity fails to address questions of relative need. Differences exist among asylum seekers and refugees in the urgency and severity of their protection and humanitarian need. These differences can be found even among people who live in refugee camps, let alone those with the opportunity and means to move beyond them.

If we are prepared to accept this, then we have a concomitant responsibility to structure our refugee and humanitarian program in ways which preference those with the greatest need. The various ways in which this might be achieved, for example through offshore selection procedures, refugee processing and swap arrangements with other countries, or differentiation in the type of refugee and humanitarian visas we give to people, become secondary issues.

Thirdly, human dignity and human rights are important in asylum policy making, but so too is fairness, whereby we try to even out the effects of some people having more money, connections and luck than others. In considering the pros and cons of the Malaysian solution, we need to consider the interests of people who will gain from the policy, and not just those who will lose.

We might do this by listening to what refugees in Malaysia say about the policy, or by conducting the kind of thought experiment developed by justice theorist John Rawls, whereby we try to devise a set of rules to govern Australia's refugee processing and resettlement arrangements from behind a 'veil of ignorance' about the individual circumstances of the people we seek to represent (and not knowing which group we ourselves might belong to if suddenly put on the other side of the veil!).

At the very least, if we are going to debate the morality of the Malaysian solution, we should imagine defending our position not just before our peers, but before the 4000 that will miss out on being resettled in Australia if the policy is abandoned.

Finally, our capacity for hospitality in our homes and communities is linked to our ability to set at least some of the terms and conditions on which we allow others to enter and live in them.

When we feel in control of our borders, we are likely to be more accepting of new arrivals, and more relaxed about greater numbers of them, than when we are not. A high migration intake will be received best when people view it as a measured response to economic and labour market needs. A high refugee and humanitarian intake will be received best when people view it as a well-targeted expression of community compassion.

This was the paradox of the Howard Government: the tough measures it adopted in regard

to unauthorised boat arrivals arguably contributed to the remarkable lack of community disquiet over its dramatic expansion of the immigration program, including an increase in the refugee and humanitarian intake and the proportion of migrants from non-European countries.

In sum, the Malaysian solution can be defended on ethical grounds to the extent that it results in our refugee and humanitarian program being based on more sophisticated assessments of need than just possession of Convention refugee status; that it can be perceived as fair by the least well off asylum seekers globally; and that it permits a larger number of people with protection and humanitarian needs to be resettled in Australia than would otherwise be the case.

It may be argued that a needs-based approach to the refugee and humanitarian program is inappropriate because 'they are all refugees'. Further, that it encourages prejudicial language such as 'deserving' and 'undeserving', and introduces too high a level of complex and subjective administrative decision making.

However, tough and difficult decisions are required whenever limited resources and opportunities face unlimited needs and entitlements. The alternative is a system of refugee protection that will remain heavily biased in favour of the few asylum seekers who can reach Australia, where they have access to a well-developed legal, welfare and advocacy system, and benefit from the Convention's exclusive concern for the treatment of in-country refugees.

Disaster capitalism on Manus Island

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Prime Minister Julia Gillard [referred](#) to arrangements for the proposed reopening of the Manus Island detention centre as a 'partnership' with Papua New Guinea. It is wishful thinking to consider people smuggling a regional problem that bothers our neighbours as much as it does us.

The partnership consists of Australia funding the detention centre and PNG providing the location. In reality, PNG is not worried about people smugglers but supports the partnership because it sees the detention centre as a boost for the local economy.

Earlier this year, ABC correspondent Liam Fox [visited](#) Manus and discovered overwhelming support from locals for the mooted reopening of the detention centre. Business owner Ken Kuso told him:

'I think it's good news for me, when they established the asylum seeker centre in Manus last time, actually I benefited yes, the Australian Government planted a lot of money to this small island community and we really benefited from it.'

Profiting from the misery of others is the odious principle underlying 'disaster capitalism'. Disaster capitalism was conceived by extreme neoliberals at the University of Chicago who argued that profit rather than humanitarian concern should be the motive behind disaster management.

A [background paper](#) from the Edmund Rice Centre explains that disaster capitalism is 'financing a new world economic order'. 'Each new disaster can generate great excitement as reconstruction becomes a big business'. The authors suggest the concept also applies to Australia's asylum seeker detention centres, which are run by multinationals such as the British firm Serco.

Manus Island locals enjoying an economic windfall from the detention centre is hardly a serious manifestation of disaster capitalism. But it does represent a small-scale example of the increasing global phenomenon of business profiting from human misery.

What is worse is that it is at the heart of the Australian Government's pitch to the PNG Government, at least implicitly. The desire to stop people smuggling is not the reason that PNG has agreed to the facility. If there was no economic benefit, it would have declined to proceed.

The Australian Government might argue that PNG's motivation is a matter for PNG. But in going ahead with the Manus solution, we are complicit in the exploitation of the suffering of

asylum seekers for financial gain. Not only are we providing the opportunity for this to occur, we are condoning it. If PNG looks to Australia for moral leadership in the treatment of asylum seekers, they are misguided.

Myths of wartime good and evil

POLITICS

Zac Alstin

The Luftwaffe bombing campaign over England claimed more than 40,000 lives, yet the Allied campaign over Germany and occupied Europe is believed to have killed at least ten times that number. Can we really say the Luftwaffe campaign was evil and a war crime, while quietly forgetting about the Allied action?

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are only the most visible, most memorable, and therefore most culturally significant of the bomb attacks on civilian targets that characterised the Second World War.

Both Axis and Allied powers took part in these almost unprecedented assaults on civilian targets. Both sides in that conflict defied the ethics and customs of warfare: that any use of force must distinguish between enemy combatants and the civilian/non-combatant population.

It is a weakness of human nature that we forgive in our friends what we despise in our enemies. How else could anyone offer in-principle support for the indiscriminate slaughter of non-combatants?

We remain conveniently ignorant of the destructive scale of conventional bombing over Europe and Japan, even though the terror of the London Blitz is ingrained in our cultural memory. But if the Blitz was wrong, then surely the bombing of German and Japanese cities was wrong too? If the suffering of English civilians was a travesty of justice, what of the tenfold suffering of German civilians?

If not for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we could excuse the crimes committed by the Allied powers as 'necessary'. But the atomic bombs can not be hidden, and we are forced into strenuous moral contortions in order to deny the undeniable. If Germany or Japan had achieved a nuclear weapon and launched it on an Allied city, our condemnation would be unrelenting.

An alternative can be found in the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War. They provided scenes of unmitigated slaughter, as military strategy dissolved into a war of attrition. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides were slaughtered without significant advances made.

But rather than blame Germany for the Allied deaths, or Britain and France for the German deaths, we now blame military commanders for their failure to adapt to the challenges of new defensive military technology. To knowingly commit one's soldiers to such pointless and deadly engagements is a serious breach of the ethics of warfare, and a betrayal of the duties of command.

This nuanced view of the First World War allows us to sympathise with the plight of the ordinary German soldier, despite the fact that Germany bore responsibility for launching its war of aggression in Western Europe. It allows us to blame British and French military commanders, despite the fact that Britain and France were justified in defending against German aggression.

We can pick apart the good and evil on both sides, instead of the neat but artificial allegiance to one side over the other.

The Second World War held a very different set of circumstances, but with an equally nuanced approach we might be able to reconcile our historic allegiances with our knowledge of what is obviously good and evil. Once we admit that the intentional killing of civilians is contrary to ethics of warfare, it is plain that both sides were guilty of this crime.

Indeed, the bombing of enemy cities was a new kind of 'attrition' tactic, with civilians taking the place of soldiers in the latest 'meat grinder' created by military technology. As Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, the Commander-in-Chief of Britain's bombing campaign over Europe, wrote:

the destruction of houses, public utilities, transport and lives, the creation of a refugee problem on an unprecedented scale, and the breakdown of morale both at home and at the battle fronts by fear of extended and intensified bombing, are accepted and intended aims of our bombing policy. They are not by-products of attempts to hit factories.

It is almost as though the targeting of enemy cities was, in part, an effort to make up for the betrayal of ordinary soldiers in the First World War; letting enemy civilians bear the cost of the war instead. Harris famously wrote, 'I do not personally regard the whole of the remaining cities of Germany as worth the bones of one British Grenadier.'

But blaming civilians for the wars waged by their governments is like blaming soldiers of the First World War for following orders. Rightly or wrongly, those soldiers believed in their country and their duty; at the very least they knew the kind of punishment faced by deserters. It is even less realistic to expect the unarmed, disorganised citizens of authoritarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan or the Soviet Union to bear responsibility for their governments' actions.

This is our saving grace: that responsibility for the crimes of both Allies and Axis lies with a ruling minority, not the population as a whole. We do not have to taint whole peoples with the crimes of a few, even when those crimes are as senseless and cruel as those of Imperial Japan, as perverse and far-reaching as those of Nazi Germany, as ruthless and stubborn as those of the Allied nations.

As we look deeper into the history of that war, it becomes painfully clear that the battleline between good and evil does not coincide with the battlelines drawn between the warring

nations. What remains for us is the choice to either love the good and hate the evil wherever they lie, or to cling to a one-eyed fantasy in which the obliteration of whole cities is considered simply 'necessary'.