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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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Greed infects the gentleman's game

SPORT

Hector Welgampola



The media scene is awash with off-the-pitch games played in the name of cricket. Meanwhile, technology and media have begun to further fast-track the game, producing abridged versions of bonsai cricket.

Off and on during past months, things got rather ugly with racial overtones and ethnic snide during matches with visiting Asian teams. If the recurrence is ugly, it isn't quite a surprise. Slurry soundbites are not an unseemly pastime among equals, whether it be in a pub or parliament, except when backslapping turns to back-stabbing.

The same is true of the playfield, especially when the sporting spirit is overtaken by greed. Commercialised sports and sponsorship, the glare of the media spotlight and advertising hype have reduced one-time level playing fields to a new gladiatorial amphitheatre. And the recent increase of abuse, on and off screen, has been perceived as part of the arsenal in an Australia-India duel for world supremacy in cricket.

Yet a new type of match-making in the name of cricket seemed to momentarily deflect attention from the slur-slinging. The Indian Premier League's 20 February Mumbai auction of the world's best cricketers for some \$45 million brought together lions and lambs.

By design or accident, players who strode high in the snide game won the highest bids in the auction. Dozens of the elite players of world cricket were auctioned to the highest bidders in a new form of bonded labour.

While a letter in India's *Hindustan Times* said economists suggest the same system be adopted to select CEOs, an editorial in Sri Lanka's *Daily News* asked whether cricket would come to be regulated on the stock market of the world.

Most believe the IPL, which pools teams worldwide, will change the face of world cricket forever. Speculating on how eight franchises will battle for millions in prize money, an editorial in India's *Asian Age* swooned, predicting that the IPL will make India the cricket capital of the world. Not everyone was so optimistic. Pakistan's *Dawn* quoted coach Geoff Lawson asking where these leagues will be in two or three years' time.

As of now, millionairing has creamed world cricket in the gamble for bigger bucks. Of course, cricket has not always been altogether a gentleman's game. Scandals such as match

fixing, doping, secret commissions and money laundering have plagued cricket just as the greed games swindled other sports including baseball, basketball, football, rugby, tennis or cycling all the way to the Olympics.

Last November, presenting a paper on corruption in sports, Jens Weinreich told the Play the Game conference in Iceland that the fight against corruption has to be one of the main topics at next year's Olympic Congress in Copenhagen. Such probes could as well begin with this year's Beijing Olympics and the backdoor games already underway behind a smooth façade of benign business and sleek diplomacy.

Indeed there was a time when sports played a proxy role as diplomacy. The Beijing Olympics will be an appropriate occasion to recall the role of US-China ping pong diplomacy of the 1970s. The Olympic diplomacy between North and South Korea in the 1980s, India-Pakistan cricket diplomacy from the 1980s onward, as well as US-Cuba basketball diplomacy of the 1990s had the capacity for international bridge-building beyond mere competitive play.

In 2005, the Vatican's first-ever international conference on sports explored ways to further promote values in sports and athletics. The theme is due to be followed up at a similar event next September.

Like all sports, cricket has the potential to promote healthy competition and good will. Particularly as the premier sport of Commonwealth nations, cricket has a morale-boosting role vis-a-vis that international family's cherished democratic traditions. Fair play has always been the soul of the sporting world and if cricketers are able to look beyond the lure of the millionairing game, they can continue as ambassadors of genuine humanism.

Owning responsibility with honest answers

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton

Telly crime shows often feature a prematurely greyhaired man, handsome, kind, articulate, who stands up for his family against the cynical cops. Late in the show, he is revealed to be the guilty one. Instantly, his gentleness falls away, his Dracula teeth appear, and his motivation is seen to be slaving self-interest. Guilty, he is now a monster.



Who wants to be guilty? Especially when guilt is associated with court trials, judgement, punishment and humiliation. In prayers, it is a stain, a burden or a curse. Christian theology speaks of the guilt we inherit through Adam, even though we were not involved personally in his action. Guilt is heavy stuff.

But even if we don't want to mention guilt, we still need some words to explore our involvement in wrongdoing. After all, we spend much of our lives acting badly or dealing with the consequences when others have acted badly.

For example, I may have committed the most heinous crime of knocking down a cyclist when I was talking on my mobile phone. And, coincidentally, I may have inherited the wealth of my great-grandfather who built up his estate by murdering his neighbours and bribing the judges. I am involved in both these events. What am I to make of the different forms of involvement?

Rather than speaking of guilt, I would prefer to explore our responsibility in the face of wrongdoing. To be responsible is to be prepared to respond, to answer the variety of questions that these actions address to us.

We are called first to answer to the reality of what has happened. It may be tempting to believe our 4WD has bumped over a wombat, but this theory does not answer to the reality of twisted metal and something softer than wombat flesh. Similarly, we might like to believe our great-grandfather was an upright man, unjustly maligned. But the evidence may persuade us otherwise.

Once we have acknowledged what has happened, we are then called to answer to the reality of our personal involvement. This means acknowledging that I was driving the car when it hit the cyclist and that I was driving dangerously. It also means acknowledging that I was not personally involved in what my great-grandfather did.

At a deeper level these events invite us to ask who and what we are. I see what I am capable of. I may also see the evasions and compromises that led me to drive dangerously, and note that my first response was to ring my slick lawyer. I ask whether these actions, or the easily decent person I see in the mirror, represent my true image. When I reflect on my family's fierce attachment to the land and scorn for the descendents of its earlier owners, I may wonder how deeply our own capacity to see and respond to reality, and so our own humanity, has been weakened.

Finally, we are called to answer to the consequences of wrongdoing. I recognise that life is permanently changed for the cyclist I have hurt, and also for her husband, children and friends. I may also see that my great-grandfather's criminally acquired wealth has benefited me with wealth, education and opportunity. It has also diminished the lives and opportunities of the dispossessed family.

To recognise the consequences of wrongdoing in which I have been involved as actor or as beneficiary is only a first step. We are also called to answer to the people whom these actions have hurt. That means first seeing them as human beings like myself, meeting them, and entering into conversation about how the hurt they have been caused can be set right.

The concept of responsibility is a useful tool with which to analyse our involvement in wrongdoing, whether that be personal or as beneficiaries of past sins. It offers more flexibility than the concept of guilt.

But it does not replace the concept of guilt. Classical tragedies explore guilt by demonstrating how the effects of wrongdoing can systematically poison relationships within societies and remove any possibility of happiness. They suggest that if we confine our attention to individual responsibility we will be superficial in both the analysis we make and the remedies we bring.

Guilt is not the mark of being a monster. It is the mark of living in a world that can be twisted monstrously out of shape by what ordinary people do wrong individually. It can be mended only by what they do together.

The changing face of Kevin 24/7

POLITICS

John Warhurst



Kevin Rudd has grown enormously over the past three years. But a mystery remains. Either we never knew the real Kevin or he has changed significantly.

Public office carries with it enormous possibilities for personal growth. It can bring it the confidence that can transform any personality. It can bring the media publicity that shows some personal qualities to the world as well as the media spin that hides others.

With growth comes change. Rudd appears to have changed as his status has changed. If not we are coming to know the real Kevin as he emerges into the limelight. It is worth recalling how far he has come in so short a time.

He was relatively unknown as Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. He was ambitious, but still far from the leadership. He had withdrawn from the contest against Kim Beazley in early 2005, after Mark Latham had resigned, because he had so few supporters.

Rudd had a profile that needed building, but he was already known as a media tart willing to take part in any media interview. He was already Kevin 24/7.

One area in which he began to build an independent profile was on matters of religion. He came out publicly as an Anglican believer in the ABC *Compass* program 'Kevin Rudd and the God Factor' early in 2005. This put flesh on the bones of the technocrat. In October 2006 he published his now famous article 'Faith in Politics' in *The Monthly* magazine, naming Dietrich Bonhoeffer as his hero.

Rudd was still regarded primarily as a policy wonk and bureaucrat. But he was growing. He decided to become a regular on *Sunrise*, the Channel Seven breakfast program, and was a great success in that relaxed, jokey environment.

The next step was beating Kim Beazley in December 2006. He still had fewer supporters than Julia Gillard. But he was electable whereas Gillard, from the Left and a woman to boot, was not. So Rudd claimed the top spot.

Few thought that Rudd was any more than promising. But by the first opinion poll he was a mile in front and stayed there. The Kevin 07 phenomenon had arrived.

Rudd the Opposition Leader generated biographies which filled in important gaps about his family, academic and diplomatic background. However there was still a lot more to know about him.

Some said he lacked warmth. That is why one response to the strip club affair in New York was that it would humanise him.

Rudd the campaigner was sure-footed and articulate under pressure. He was also incredibly disciplined and organised.

But Kevin 07 ended his campaign with a wooden and self-absorbed election-night speech. Supporters took a deep breath and hoped 2008 would be better. And so far it has been.

Kevin 08 is almost a different man.

He has allowed his new ministers room to move. He has taken some holidays. He didn't interfere when Stephen Smith and Wayne Swan had responsibilities to undertake on foreign affairs and the economy respectively. Reporters even criticised him for his low profile. He went to Bali and he's just flown again to East Timor and now to Papua New Guinea. But others have had a chance. Gillard has taken advantage of several opportunities to be Acting Prime Minister.

There have also been chances to see a more relaxed Rudd. He has moved into the Lodge with his family. He and Therese Rein have attended St John's Anglican Church in casual mode. The successful parliamentary Apology was accompanied by lots of stylish, friendly gestures to his guests. He is a good mixer and the 'Hello, I'm Kevin' approach works well.

There is still more to learn about Rudd. Is the person we are getting to know the same one his colleagues rejected out of hand three years ago, or has he grown that much in such a short time?

On the night of the fireworks

STORY

Paddy O'Reilly

On the night of the fireworks he rests his hand on the back of my neck as we walk. His hand is heavy and tanned brown. I can picture the hand lying dark against my pink, sunburnt neck, the fingers stretched enough to curl around my neck where it meets my shoulder, to cup the rosy hot skin burned by the sun of the summer festival.



We are part of a crowd walking slowly down to the river bank to watch the fireworks. People smile at me as they pass. They smile because I am not one of them, but I have come to watch anyway. I can appreciate this part of their culture, even though I am a foreigner. I can be a part of this event. We will all be a part of this event together, it is for sharing, and we will come away happy and tired and then I will go home. Home to my own country. Tomorrow I will board a plane and go home and one day soon I will share this pleasure with my own people by showing them photographs and telling them about my adventures, and we will all understand each other better. That, I think, is what they believe.

The weight of the brown hand resting on the back of my neck lifts, and Hiroshi points to a stall by the side of the road selling dinner boxes packed with noodles and dumplings and other small delicacies with rice. The stall is lit up by bare bulbs. Plastic flags in red and white stripes hang in an arc from the poles at each corner. The flags flutter in the evening breeze. The breeze and the moving flags make it seem like it should be cool, but it is still hot, the air is dank with humidity, and Hiroshi's warm hand has left a moist print on the back of my neck.

He reaches around my waist and guides me toward the stall, where the stallholder is shouting a welcome and waving his tongs over the range of his merchandise. I am wearing a black rayon dress that hangs from two thin straps at my shoulders. Hiroshi's hand is hot through the rayon of my black dress as though we were skin to skin.

Irasshai! the stallholder shouts. Welcome, hello! Hello Miss America!

He has a row of golden teeth along the bottom of his jaw that gleam in the light of the bare bulbs. At the stall next door, a man is selling goldfish to children. His stall is a series of plastic blue and white pools teeming with fish. The children have to scoop up a fish in a tiny net, then they are given their catch in a plastic bag filled with water. The fish man waves a scooping net at me, Hello, fish here, hello. The golden-toothed stallholder makes a joke in a low voice to the fish man and they both laugh before turning away from me and Hiroshi.

What did they say? I ask Hiroshi, and he looks at me. I can see his lips moving as he tries to form the translation in his mouth, but his mouth is all slow and sticky from the heat and he cannot make the English from the Japanese.

About fish, Hiroshi says, and shrugs. Translating is too much trouble — it is too hot.

A small child wearing a Japanese happi coat and tiny wooden sandals runs past and touches my sleeve on the way. Hallo, hallo, sensei, she calls before her mother puts a hand on the small of her back and pushes her forward. I know this child, although I can't remember her name. Hallo, I call back. Goodbye. She came to my class a few times, my class of toddlers and young children who repeated English words after me so accurately that I could hear my own Australian accent in their voices. To die is choose die. What will we do to die? The mother looks back over her shoulder and nods her head slightly as she smiles to me.

Further along the road, a few stalls selling grilled chicken skewers have set up. The fat from the chicken drips and sizzles on the charcoals and the aroma wafts along the street past us. Two businessmen, their ties loosened and their sleeves rolled up, sit on low stools in front of the closest stall drinking from big mugs of beer.

We pass the local supermarket with its bargain bins of socks and cabbages, then the futon shop. Fluffy futons are stacked five high on palettes out the front while the old man who owns the shop sits drinking tea on tatami matting inside the window. He stares at me and Hiroshi as we stroll by, as if he thinks the window makes him invisible. Further along the road the pottery shop owner pulls down her shutter, locks it, then joins the crowd moving toward the river. Watching her brush streaks of clay dust from her shirt as she walks, I realise that the sights on this walk are souvenirs I should be collecting.

Hiroshi is swinging the plastic bag with our dinner boxes backwards and forwards in time with our steps. He leans over and takes my hand in his, then lifts it to his mouth and blows cool air into my palm.

Hot night, he says, then laughs. Hot August night.

At home, August is the month where we have lost patience with the cold and the dark. We long for nights like this.

As we round a corner on the road we see the riverbank laid out before us like a woodblock print. Many hundreds of people are gathered to watch the fireworks. They sit in groups, their brightly coloured cotton kimonos glowing in the dusk light. Each group has its own patchwork of groundsheets and blankets, and pairs of shoes and sandals are lined up neatly at the edge of each group's territory. Paper lanterns sway on the decks of flat-bottomed boats cruising up and down the river, and down by the dock a man with a megaphone tries to organise a group of unruly elderly citizens.

I feel a rush of panic for what I am about to lose. I stop for a moment and breathe in deeply,

trying to capture the complicated scent that is Tokyo on a hot summer night.

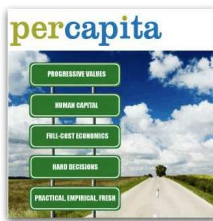
We pick our way among the parties on the riverbank and find a small spot to spread our plastic sheet. I slip off my sandals and step onto the plastic. Hiroshi passes me the dinner boxes and I hold them while he unlaces his shoes and pulls off his socks, then steps onto the sheet beside me. As I look down I glimpse where my dress strap has slipped. The white skin where I was protected by the dress stands out in stark contrast to my pink shoulders and arms, as though this day, this festival, this country has burned its impression on to my body.

Just as we have opened our boxes and lifted salty pickled plums to our mouths, the first firework explodes above us. Then another and another and for half an hour we all stare upwards at the brilliant light of the sky, and at the climax the whole sky burns bright until suddenly there is only darkness and the smell of the burned powder and empty bottles and dinner boxes and children asleep on their parents' shoulders and it is over.

What a progressive economic policy looks like

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Thackrah



Earlier this month, *The Weekend Australian* reported that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd 'had no interest in debating whether the private sector should be contracted to deliver government services'. In fixing problems in indigenous communities and elsewhere, the newspaper told us, Rudd was more interested in the quality of services than the 'delivery mechanism'.

Rudd's comments leave unanswered a key question: what does a progressive economic policy look like?

Despite the fact that one of our biggest challenges (tackling climate change) has resulted from the failures of free markets, Rudd and other Australian policy makers continue to remain uncertain about how, and to what extent, governments should intervene in the operations of the capitalist system.

To develop an understanding of what a progressive economic policy may look like it is necessary to take a realistic perspective on the extent to which governments can shape the economic circumstances that affect the people they represent.

As the economist Andrew Charlton pointed out in his book *Ozonomics*, given the international nature of the movement of money and capital, issues relating to interest rates and the general health of the resource-dependent Australian economy must be examined in the context of the global economy, rather than simply domestic political policies.

So, in an era of (mostly) global (mostly) free trade, how can policy makers develop an economic agenda that both seeks to harness the benefits of capitalism yet also, in a principled and consistent manner, draws a line in the sand and restricts the market in recognition of the environmental, aesthetic and social harms that it can inflict? The foundations of such a progressive economic programme can be built on a few key policies.

Firstly, at the level of domestic economic policy, governments need to recognise that they have a powerful information-gathering role to play. It needs to be acknowledged that to intervene with the running of a capitalist system on a principled (rather than merely pragmatic) basis, evidence-based policies are needed.

All governments would be served well by a national centre for social and environmental policy analysis that draws on existing talent within the private and public sectors. Uncritical

supporters of the free market advance complex technical arguments as to why the slightest government intervention in the private sector erases the benefits of the capitalist system. The advocates of a new progressive economic policy need to develop an equally technical (yet more enlightening) scale by which the results of all public policies are measured.

The Australian based think tank Per Capita is just one group encouraging the Rudd Government to become a champion of so-called 'full cost economics' and work on new ways of examining risk and the mixture of public and private involvement in the economy.

The complexities of developing carbon targets to counteract climate change serve as a reminder that the major public policy issues of our time require detailed and technical analysis. To truly counteract the negative effects that capitalism can have upon the built and physical environments, Australian governments should embrace 'full-cost economics' and develop budgets that take into account the total economic, social and environmental costs of policy decisions. Governments must work with the private sector to encourage them to adopt a similar approach.

On the global stage, Australia must resort to working on a multilateral basis to encourage rapidly developing countries to accurately and fully calculate the true costs of their economic policy decisions. Australia should strive to lead the world in social and environmental policy analysis and direct its domestic political, diplomatic and private sectors towards this goal. Only when there is an international commitment to examining the full costs of policy decisions or inaction will governments be in a position to intervene in market processes in a considered and sensible way.

The political left must critically engage the economic right with a view to altering current commonsense understandings of what counts as policy success. Once Australian policy makers have taken the first step towards advancing a progressive economic agenda — the adoption of the full costing of policies — the development of a broader policy terrain may be considered.

With government enhancing its role as the level-headed, evidence-based identifier of risks, it will be possible to convince sceptics that sensible (yet increased) public spending is required to counteract disasters such as global warming.

With the assistance of full-cost economics, political decision-making will come to be viewed in a new light. Indeed, in time, the people of Australia, and their fellow citizens of the world, will demand the adoption of a more progressive economic policy.

Rational climate change response requires moral focus

GUEST EDITORIAL

Michael Kelly

Do we treat the environment as a public good in which we all share? Does our pattern of resource use allow others to achieve adequate health and wellbeing? Does it pressure others, particularly the poor, to adopt environmentally damaging economic practices?



These questions are derived from the work of US Jesuit Fr John Coleman, who has proposed ten commandments for environmentally responsible living.

We inhabit a culture where scientists propose previously unthinkable outcomes that can now be achieved. These include modifying food, changing the direction of river flows, and adjusting the genetic makeup of human beings. The assumption is that if it can be done, it should be done.

In our world, such rationality has achieved a great deal. Energy resources have been harnessed, and labour saving devices have been developed. We have vaccines, which enable us to use nature against itself to preserve life. The list is indefinite, but frightening.

I'm not proposing the abandonment of reason. I'm simply suggesting that its use should be clearly focused, in a way in which the hippocratic oath, for example, might challenge doctors in ambiguous circumstances.

The exercise of rationality occurs in a universe where human relationships, and values, provide the context of its application. Disastrous, albeit unintended, consequences are a distinct possibility.

The only sustainable way forward is to put rational activity firmly in the context of moral values.

Ethical reflection in general, and Catholic social teaching in particular, is moving rapidly to find ways of harnessing ethical reflection to aid human flourishing and the enhancement of our environment. This is our hope for the survival of ecological entities such as the Murray-Darling River system.

Many are well aware of the Catholic Church's advocacy of the Common Good as the object and desired outcome of social economic and political life. This was reinforced during the

Pontificate of John Paul II with an emphasis on human solidarity as a way of proceeding in attempts to take care of the planet.

Christian believers are asked to foster the balanced preservation of the world as a healthy growing organism. The proper response of grateful receivers of God's gifts is to care for the gifts. This is called stewardship, and it recognises that we are not passive subjects of the devastation being wrought by climate change. We have the capacity to make a difference.

Jewish West Bank Settlements a bad but reversible mistake

INTERNATIONAL

Philip Mendes



For more than 25 years, I have supported two states as the only solution that would potentially meet both the minimum security needs of Israel and the minimum national aspirations of the Palestinians.

For me, this has always meant the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign Jewish state within roughly the pre-1967 Green Line borders, and equally the right of the Palestinians to an independent state within the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This means no coerced Jewish settlements within Palestinian territory, and equally no coerced return of Palestinian refugees within Green Line Israel.

In recent years, since the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada, I have become more critical of Palestinian beliefs and actions. Palestinian violence and extremism, as reflected in constant attacks on Israeli civilians via Qassam rockets and suicide bombings, and the growing power of the religious fundamentalist group Hamas, stand as significant barriers to any conflict resolution.

Nevertheless, I have not changed my fundamental opposition to the Jewish settlements. In my opinion, they remain a significant obstacle to peace and reconciliation irrespective of anything the Palestinians say or do. This is not to deny that Israel has legitimate military and security concerns in the Territories unless or until a lasting peace settlement is negotiated.

Over the years, many simplistic arguments have been advanced in an attempt to justify the West Bank settlement project. These arguments were dominant when I first entered the public debate in the Australian Jewish community in the late 1980s, but are perhaps less so today.

Some of the more common arguments included: Israel has a right to expand its territory due to having fought the 1967 Six Day War in self-defence; Jews have a religious duty to establish colonies in the 'liberated' Biblical heartland; Jews have the same right as any other people to settle anywhere in the world; Jewish settlements do not dispossess Palestinians; Palestinians do not constitute a real nation; and dismantling settlements would only strengthen Palestinian hostility.

None of these arguments had any substance in the 1980s, and they have even less validity now. But unfortunately their influence both within Israel and the Jewish Diaspora served to obscure the dire consequences of the settlement project.

Why the settlements are wrong

There are overwhelming political, legal, moral, ethical, economic, demographic, military and public relations arguments against the settlements. They include the following:

Political: Many of the settlements were deliberately established in or near densely populated Palestinian areas in order to foreclose the very possibility of creating a viable Palestinian State, and hence the prospect of a peaceful two-state solution. Their presence has provoked constant conflict and violence between Palestinians and the Israeli army, and caused much unnecessary loss of life on both sides.

According to Shlomo Gazit, the former Israeli coordinator of activities in the Territories, the settlements were planned to 'safeguard the Greater Israel vision. Therefore, as many settlements as possible had to be built. They had to be spread throughout the land, leaving no space or possibility of establishing autonomous Palestinian territorial units ... They became the main stumbling block on the way to an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.' The former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami labelled this practice 'the most absurd march of folly that the State of Israel has ever embarked on'.



The American Jewish political theorist Michael Walzer controversially argues that the settlers are the 'functional equivalent' of the Palestinian terrorist groups. He acknowledges that 'they are not the moral equivalent. The settlers are not murderers, even if there are a small number of terrorists among them.

'But the message of settler activity to the Palestinians is very much like the message of terrorism to the Israelis: We want you to leave, or we want you to accept a radically subordinate position in your own country.'

Legal: The settlements are arguably illegal since they contravene Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which precludes an occupying power from settling its own citizens in territory taken by military force. According to Israeli journalist Tom Segev, this interpretation was confirmed by the Israeli Foreign Minister's own legal counsel, Theodor Meron, as early as September 1967.

The settlements also violate the legal sovereign right of the Palestinians to determine the population of their own territory.

Moral and Ethical: The extensive confiscation of private Palestinian land to build settlements involves a second dispossession for the Palestinians, many of whom had previously fled or been forced to leave their original homes inside Israel in 1948.

Further, the settlers regard themselves as the true owners of the territories, and make no attempt to seek the good will of the local population, or to recognise Palestinian national or political rights.

A significant minority of settler extremists engage in vigilante behaviour involving verbal and physical abuse of the Palestinian civilian population. This includes the destruction and theft of olive trees and other property, and some instances of violent assault and murder.

Most prominent were the Gush Emunim underground in the early 1980s who murdered a number of Palestinian civilians, and the Kiryat Arba resident Baruch Goldstein who slaughtered 29 Muslim worshippers in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs in 1994.

According to the respected Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem, from late September 2000 to the end of 2004, settlers killed 34 Palestinians in the Territories. In some of these cases, the Israelis acted in life-threatening situations. In many cases, however, they did not act in self-defence.

Economic: The settlements are economically disastrous since they divert resources badly needed by Jews (including many poor Jews) living inside the borders of sovereign Israel. Settlers are provided with a range of financial incentives including a 7 per cent income tax break, large housing grants, subsidised mortgages, free schooling from age three, and grants for business industry, agriculture and tourism.

Funds are also directed through political parties such as the National Religious Party, and private cultural and religious organisations. Buying or building a home in the settlements is much cheaper than purchasing a home inside Israel.

According to a 2003 report by Haaretz and a more recent study by Israeli Ynetnews, the annual expense is about 2.5 billion shekels amounting to 50 billion since 1967. The government spends about ten times more money on settlers (an average of 8,600 shekels per year) than on the other 97 per cent of Israeli citizens living inside the borders of Israel.

Prior to the withdrawal from Gaza, the government was even spending an estimated quarter of a million dollars per family to protect residents of the two isolated settlements in the middle of the Gaza Strip.

Demographic: The annexation of the West Bank including the settlements would mean Jews becoming a minority in their own country. This would leave Israel with two equally bad choices: either a Greater Israel which is likely to become a pariah state due to denying national and civil rights to the Palestinians despite their demographic majority, or one unified or bi-national state which would inevitably become a Greater Palestine due to the higher Palestinian birthrate.

The demographic threat is recognised by the current Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert who argued in a November 2007 interview with Ha'aretz that Israel was 'finished' if it forced the Palestinians into a South African-style struggle for democracy and equal voting rights.

Military: The settlements are arguably a military burden rather than an asset. Huge numbers of troops have to be deployed to defend residents. The Israeli political scientist

Menachem Klein has estimated that Israel employs 100,000 armed personnel to defend the 100,000 women and children in the settlements.

Public relations: The continued existence of the settlements is a public relations disaster for Israel. Numerous anti-Zionist propagandists point to the settlements as evidence of Israel's alleged quest for territorial expansion and ethnic domination, rather than its stated preference for territorial compromise and a negotiated peace. The settlements also provide a convenient excuse for the rationalisation of Palestinian violence and extremism.

Today's reality: is it reversible?

The number of West Bank settlers has steadily grown since the mid 1970s — from 3,000 in 1976, to 48,000 in 1984, to 108,000 in 1992, to 218,000 by 2002.

This included massive growth following the signing of the Oslo Peace Accord in September 1993, despite the widespread expectation that Israel would evacuate many if not most of the settlements. This expansion seems to have occurred in part because the Peace Accord contained no specific clause freezing the construction of new settlements.



Today, the Peace Now Settlement Watch Report refers to 121 Israeli settlements and 260,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank (not counting East Jerusalem) including large cities such as Ariel and Ma'ale Adunim, which have populations of more than 15,000 people.

In addition, there are 105 illegal outposts populated by 3,000 settlers. Eighty per cent of the settlements and outposts sit (fully or partially) on private Palestinian-owned land.

Anti-Zionist authors such as Virginia Tilley and Ali Abunimah claim that the settlements are irreversible. For example, Tilley claims that it is inconceivable that any Israeli government would have the political will to dismantle the settlements.

She argues that the settlements have prospered because they have enjoyed the ongoing patronage of Jewish national institutions such as the Jewish National Fund and all Israeli governments, whatever their political persuasion.

This support also reflects the dependence of Israel on the key water aquifers in the West Bank, and the power of the settler movement, which threatens to respond to any pullback by shattering the unity of Jews both inside and outside Israel. Others note that any threat of forced evacuation may provoke an armed uprising from militant settlers leading potentially to a civil war.

However, the withdrawal of 8000 settlers from Gaza in 2005 suggests that significant evacuation is possible, and that the settlement process can be reversed. The Gaza withdrawal also demonstrated that a strong Israeli government can overcome resistance from hardline settlers.

Possible solutions

Ideally, most if not all of the West Bank settlements would be dismantled. However, most Israelis and even many leading Palestinians concede that this objective may be unrealistic. The political challenge is prohibitive, and the cost of evacuating all the settlers is estimated at more than 250 billion shekels.

The best outcome that can probably be hoped for is a two-state solution which involves the evacuation of many settlers, and the permanent retention of the larger settlement blocs within Israeli territory in exchange for land inside Green Line Israel. The final adjusted borders would need to ensure the creation of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State, and should be accompanied by an explicit amendment to the Israeli Law of Return designating that it does not apply to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In the current context, these plans may seem like a pipe dream, but they have already been discussed at length in previous peace negotiations. For example, during the January 2001 discussions at Taba, Israel proposed to annex the suburbs of Jerusalem, the Etzion Bloc and the town of Ariel, and evacuate 75,000 settlers.

Similarly, the unofficial 2003 Geneva Peace Accord stipulated an Israeli annexation of 2.2 per cent of the West Bank including 21 settlements and 140,000 settlers close to the Green Line. All other 100 plus settlements including the city of Ariel and about half the settlers were to be evacuated.

It is also significant that the amended security fence line (as per February 2005) annexes 8.6 per cent of the West Bank including 49 settlements and 190,000 settlers. That leaves over 70 settlements and about 70,000 settlers on the eastern Palestinian side of the fence who may be ripe for evacuation.

There are currently a number of political initiatives in Israel to encourage those settlers east of the fence to return home. For example, a number of public figures established an NGO called One Home to lobby for a fair evacuation compensation law to encourage the evacuation of settlers.

An associated parliamentary bill drafted by Knesset members Abshalom Vilan of Meretz and Labor's Collette Avital would buy the properties of settlers located east of the security fence for around \$200,000 each. Vilan commissioned a poll which showed that half the 80,000 settlers on the Palestinian side of the fence would return if offered adequate compensation.

The bill has the support of both Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, and Deputy Prime Minister Haim Ramon of Kadima. Only time will tell whether such measures are successful.

Civil disobedience a democratic safeguard

POLITICS

Frank Brennan

In 1952, the Commonwealth Parliament passed the Defence (Special Undertakings) Act which made it an offence to enter, without government approval, a place used for a special defence undertaking. Such an undertaking was defined as one for the defence of Australia or 'some other country associated with Australia in resisting or preparing to resist international aggression'.



A convicted person could be sent to jail for up to seven years. Before Philip Ruddock became Attorney-General no one had ever been charged under this law.

In 1966 the Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap outside Alice Springs was established under an agreement between the Australian and US governments. It is a ground control and processing station for satellites collecting signals intelligence around the globe. It is probably classifiable as a 'special defence undertaking'.

At various times, Australian citizens have travelled to central Australia and protested the presence of this US base on Australian soil. When arrested and charged, these protesters have been dealt with by an Alice Springs magistrate for lesser offences such as trespass and wilful damage to property. Rarely, if ever, have the protesters received prison terms. They have been fined or put on good behaviour bonds and urged to go back south.

In 1998, the Howard Government had to renew the Pine Gap agreement. By then, unlike in 1952, there was a law requiring the Parliament to consider the terms of any international agreement. Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Treaties reported on the unsatisfactory situation with the Pine Gap treaty.

Politicians from both sides of the aisle reported that 'the Department of Defence has sought to limit unnecessarily the information provided to us about the purpose and operation of the Joint Defence Facility to less than is already available on the public record; and to deny the Treaties Committee access to the Joint Defence Facility while at the same time acquiescing in the right of certain members of the US Congress to visit the Facility'.

Those protesting the Iraq War and Australia's participation in the Coalition of the Willing had good grounds for claiming that Pine Gap was integral to the US war effort.

On 9 December 2005 four Christian peace activists including Donna Mulhearn, who had

travelled to Baghdad as one of the human shields decried by Alexander Downer, succeeded in breaking through the security fence at Pine Gap to conduct a 'citizens' inspection'. This was an act of civil disobedience — the deliberate breaking of a law in order to protest some other law or policy.

Civil disobedience can be justified when citizens have tried all lawful means to reverse the offending law or policy, when they do not threaten the health or safety of others, when they are prepared to pay just compensation for any property damage caused, and when they are willing to pay the penalty justly imposed by any court. Civil disobedience can be an honourable means of political protest.

Mr Ruddock decided to take firm action against these protesters and for the first time in history authorised prosecution under the 1952 law. The trial judge, facing the same obstacle to information about the nature of Pine Gap as confronted the Australian parliamentary committee, thought she could avoid the problem simply by taking note of the government's certification that Pine Gap was a special defence undertaking, refusing the defence any right to inform the jury about the nature of the Pine Gap operation.

During the trial the four accused ran a blog and their supporters protested outside the court. During the weekend adjournment, they all went to protest again at Pine Gap. Donna broadcast her evidence on the blog complaining that the prosecutor kept her on a tight rein:

'I did my best to point out that my action at Pine Gap was a direct response to my experience of war in Iraq. I held up pictures of my boys at the shelter, of Baby Noura and the other children at the orphanage. I named their names and explained that these are the people I am defending. I talked about the other influences on my action such as my faith, the tradition of non-violent direct action and the fact that I made a promise to the Iraqi people to speak the truth and it was my responsibility to do something.'

The jury convicted the four but the trial judge refused to impose prison terms observing that they were 'very genuine in the cause they sought to espouse'. She imposed fines observing that 'their actions — no matter for what cause — cannot justify the breaking of the law'.

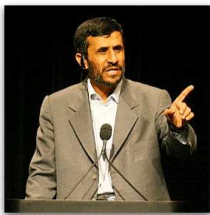
The Commonwealth then appealed against the leniency of the fines, and the accused appealed the convictions because they had not been able to lead evidence about the nature of the operation at Pine Gap. The Court of Criminal Appeal has now quashed their convictions and indicated that no purpose is to be served by a retrial.

Mr Ruddock was hoisted by his own petard. If he had wanted these civilly disobedient protesters to go to jail, he would have needed to provide the judge and jury with details about the purposes of Pine Gap. Parliamentary committees, juries and the citizen's ultimate right to civil disobedience are necessary safeguards for liberty when government is tempted to use the legal sledgehammer to crack the nut of political dissent.

Ideology not Iran's main game

INTERNATIONAL

Shahram Akbarzadeh



The neo-conservative lobby in Washington DC is working hard to convince President George W. Bush to attack Iran in 2008. There is a consensus among observers in the United States that a Democratic president in the White House would not have the guts to take this step. So the pressure is on to commit George W. Bush to an air strike before he leaves office.

In the February 2008 issue of the pro-Israeli magazine *Commentary*, Norman Podhoretz placed the responsibility squarely at Bush's feet. Podhoretz argues that Bush should not leave this decision for his successor. Moreover, he insists that air strikes against Iranian targets are best carried out by the United States, not by an Israeli proxy.

The neo-conservative lobby is unrelenting and has a track record in steering US foreign policy in the past decade. Podhoretz was among the original founders of the New American Century think-tank arguing for the supremacy of the United States in the wake of the Soviet collapse, and an ardent advocate of military action against Iraq in 2003. That the US invasion of Iraq prompted a bloody civil war and a complete breakdown of civil structures do not seem to have dampened Podhoretz's resolution.

The neo-conservatives have insisted on the inherent ideological foundations that prevent the Iranian regime from responding to the international 'carrot and stick' approach. Podhoretz argues that 'religious and/or ideological passions' in Iran do not allow for a 'cost-benefit approach'. In other words, the Iranian regime is bent on the destruction of Israel and the United States, and no amount of positive incentives, or threats of negative consequences, would deter it. In this perspective, Iran is presented as an irrational actor, blinded by fanatical rage against the United States and its allies.

This is a gross misreading of the Iranian regime and its objectives. Contrary to assumptions regarding the supremacy of ideology in Iranian foreign policy making, Iran has been quite careful not to jeopardise its geo-strategic interests for the sake of ideology. When its two northern neighbours Armenia and Azerbaijan went to war (1988-1994), Iran supported the Christian state of Armenia against the Muslim state of Azerbaijan, despite extensive cultural, linguistic and, of course, religious links between Iran and Azerbaijan. Tehran feared that an Azeri victory would boost separatist sentiments among Iran's large Azeri ethnic minority who

predominantly live in the Azerbaijan province of Iran.

Similarly, Iran refused to be drawn into the civil war of Tajikistan (1992-97) fought between the Islamic Renaissance Party and its allies against the former Communist regime. Instead, Iran worked with Russia and the United Nations to resolve the conflict. Tehran now maintains warm relations with the government of Tajikistan which is dominated by former Communists, while the Islamist party languishes in opposition.

When the United States moved to remove the Taliban in Afghanistan (2001), Iran surprised observers by not objecting to the enormous military campaign on its door step. The Taliban were a constant threat to Iran's border security and it served Iranian geo-strategic interests to have them removed.

None of the above suggests that Iran ignores the rational 'cost-benefit' calculations that govern other states. This is true of Iran's relations with the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency. In fact, the latest US National Intelligence Estimate (December 2007) reported a halt in the Iranian nuclear weapons program in 2003 as a result of international pressure.

Iran is not an exceptional state. Geo-strategic factors govern foreign policy making in Tehran, just as they do in other states. It is important to bear this in mind in the current debate on sanctions.

National pride revives Russian soul

INTERNATIONAL

Ben Coleridge

For a newly arrived Australian volunteer in a Russian regional city, it is startling to be labelled an 'American agent' by an animated local. That is what happened to me midway through my time in Russia, after a casual political discussion with some Russian friends.



I was reminded of this conversation by some of the emphases in former president Vladimir Putin's recent State of the Nation address, made on the eve of his departure from the presidency. It reiterated a theme that was broadcast across the airwaves repeatedly during the months I spent in Russia: the negative influence of 'foreigners'.

On any morning at the University of Novgorod the students were all concern for my wellbeing and happiness. At home with my host family it was no different. But this welcome was interlaced with a wariness or sensitivity that occasionally bubbled to the surface.

I wondered why. After all, in Russian people's everyday lives, foreign influence is often positive. My students made extensive use of the American library in town. The Dutch businessman down the road from my family, who was investigating expanding business activity to the region, epitomised the promises of foreign investment. My own appearance in Novgorod was a symbol of positive foreign interest. So why the sensitivity towards a foreign presence?

The former president's speech offers a partial explanation. Its central theme was the growth of Russia into an economic and military powerhouse, 'a country that others heed and that can stand up for itself'. Interestingly, within this theme of national unity and 'stable development', Putin made a point of referring to the need for transparent democracy and pluralism.

He knows well that, historically, Russian attempts at pluralism have been set against the backdrop of social and economic crises such as during the term of the Provisional Government in 1917 and more recently during the Yeltsin years. So in many Russian minds 'unity' and 'stability' only arrive in counterpoint to pluralism through centralised government.

By linking in his speech the representatives of pluralism — opposition leaders — with 'attempts to divide society' and, importantly, 'foreign help', Putin implied that both those who oppose his administration and critical foreigners have the same goal: the destabilisation of

Russia. Russians had seen, he said, 'how the lofty slogans of freedom and an open society are sometimes used to destroy the sovereignty of a country'.

Following the political pattern, the Russian Orthodox Church, instead of fostering dialogue and openness, seems more concerned with articulating an identity that can be interpreted as an expression of nationalistic pride. It seems that there is a symbiosis between the Russian Orthodox leadership's understanding of the Church and Vladimir Putin's own strategies.

The relationship is an interesting one. In one issue of the St Petersburg *Times*, the front page featured a large picture of Putin praying, hands covering his face. Putin and I had crossed paths it seems, as the photo had been taken as he celebrated Orthodox Christmas in a Novgorod Church — and Novgorod, with its tenth century churches and its extraordinary icon tradition, calls up elemental Russia.

This kind of imagery plays a role in the President's casting of himself as the 'authentic Russian'. I cannot help thinking the Russian Orthodox Church is being appropriated. Certainly Putin's relationship with it strengthens his appeal. His displays of respect for the Orthodox Church and for Patriarch Alexei appeal to most Russians, religious or not.

The Russians I met had a strong sense of patriotism. After the embarrassment of the Yeltsin period, Putin has sought to revive Russians' pride in their nation's achievements.

But although Putin's brand of nationalism is new, nationalism in Russia has a long and complex history. Before the 19th century emancipation of the serfs — the majority of the population — nationalism belonged to the sensibilities of the higher classes. Now Putin is extending to all the ownership of Russian cultural pride. He draws on the great span of Russian history, not only the recent Soviet past, appealing to the renowned 'spirit of the Russian people'. This is something that, by implication, no foreigner is capable of understanding. I could not possibly know the 'Russian soul' that apparently moves all Russians, Putin included.

A chorus of voices urged Russians to vote in the presidential election, for a strong turnout would mean an appearance of legitimacy. On the other hand, independent election monitoring was effectively discouraged. For the Kremlin, internal recognition is what matters. Foreign approbation is not an essential ingredient, either politically or culturally. But as demonstrated in Putin's State of the Nation Address, this is fed more by angry resentment at Russia's sidelining post perestroika. And at the level of my Novgorod neighbours, a deep hurt at the conditions in which they find themselves.

So when it comes to political debate, being a foreigner can be difficult. The Kremlin's message of distrust, of 'us and them', has an effect. As a non Russian, I understand, I was disconnected from the insights and experience that made Russian particularity comprehensible.

Lifelong cyclist's test of faith

ES CLASSIC

Andrew Hamilton



Every journey leads you into a story as well as to a place. Journeys become memorable when you find that you have been deceived about the story which you enter. So Odysseus, the master of journeys, was led to believe that he was a fringe character in the story of a brief war, only to find that the gods had conned him and that he was scripted for the lead role in an odyssey.

My least forgettable journey took place on a Saturday many years ago. Stan and I had decided to go by bike to Mount Donnabuang. We had thought that, like Tobit's journey, this would be a pastoral journey through valleys and hills, that the way there would be safe and the return untroubled. Instead, we found ourselves trapped within the narrative of Job ...

The trip out was uneventful, with only one portent that the valley of the shadow of death may have lain ahead. At the Burke Road lights my brakes proved totally ineffective: a swerve on to the footpath and into a hedge, however, met this crisis adequately. The problem did not recur, for those days what few traffic lights there were between Kew and the township of Lilydale were all on the flat.

By the time we headed out of Healesville up the Mt Donnabuang road, it was quite hot, and on the climb we became thirsty. Fortunately, there were small streams running down the gutters, fed presumably by the snow melting on the mountaintop. Pollution seemed no problem; we drank plentifully.

When we reached the top of Mt Donnabuang, the late winter sun was still slanting on to the snow, but it was beginning to get cold. Stan barracked for St Kilda who were playing in the semi final, so we waited by a car radio until the game was finished. If it thundered out of the clear sky as we so blatantly dallied with strange gods on the high places, we did not hear it. We left the mountain top just before dark.

When you are coming down a mountain at dusk, brakes are useful, but where they are not given they can be improvised. Early on, there was no problem: if the bike was gathering speed, I just allowed it to run off into the banks of snow by the side of the road. The bike jarred as it landed on the left pedal, but it was brought effectively to a halt.

Further down the mountain I simply used my sandshoe against the front tyre. It was all rough but effective, and got us uneventfully to the outskirts of Healesville. Then my left-pedal snapped off, perhaps weakened by my earlier creative styles of braking.

Not realising what story we had entered, we continued to put our trust in horses and ingenuity. We door-knocked around Healesville asking if the householders had a spare left pedal or an old bike from which we could cannibalise it, and eventually met a generous donor.

It was at that point, we later concurred, that we erred. But in what our error consisted, on that we could not agree. I came to realise that it was in not recognising and playing submissively our part in the story in which we had been placed. Stan, who, as this history will relate, ultimately failed in his time of testing, continued to maintain that we were mistaken in taking with us only the left pedal and in leaving behind the chain drive and axle.

Anyway, after we had gone happily some miles along the starlit Yarra Glen road, disaster struck ... my right pedal-arm cracked and became detached from the axle, so that the bike could no longer be pedalled. At the same time, the salts in the mountain water I had drunk earlier took their effect, and in one of my frequent diversions from the the road I lost my belt.

Necessity, of course, is the mother of invention, and as anyone knows who has ridden under the stars and steered by the white posts on an unlighted country road, the mind is never more focused or creative than on such occasions, nor the capacity to overlook mere physical frailty ever more highly developed.

So we scoured the edges of the road until we found a rope which supplied for belt and towrope. We took it in turns to tow one another on the flat and up the slight rises, while we walked the steeper hills, and simply enjoyed the long down-hill run through the Christmas Hills to Watsons Creek.

We climbed to Kangaroo Ground and headed safely around Reilly's corner ... We were still in good spirits, confident of catching the last train at Eltham.

Then came the final disaster. The front tyre, rubbed raw by my sandshoe on the mountain descent, blew out noisily, spectacularly and decisively. There was nothing to do but walk. So we plodded the four or five miles to Eltham, arrived much too late to catch the train, and continued to walk the ten miles or so back to Kew.

By 3.30am our muscles were in spasm, our hearts low; we were thinking in lamentations, and had fallen prey to depression. Stan, I am ashamed to say, was already abjuring his cycling faith, cursing the true, two-wheeled, motorless way, and beginning to whore after four wheels, upholstered seats, engines, and all the meretricious charms of more modern gods ...

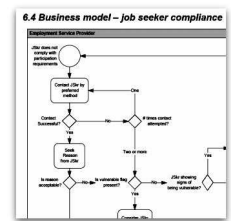
That day Stan turned from the true way, sacrificed to the automobile, secured a *libellusto* prove his new allegiance, and never touched a bike again. As for myself, having been tested and found faithful, I was eventually rewarded with a new bike which had effective brakes, thick tyres, two pedals, and-uncovenanted blessing-three gears.

Laziness wrong target for welfare reforms

AUSTRALIA

Susie Byers

Finding themselves flummoxed by the former Government's Northern Territory intervention, parts of Australia's progressive movements were unsure how to respond. In the rush to take a large step sideways from positions in which one might risk being labelled as indifferent to child abuse, an opportunity was lost to debate the methodologies and philosophies mobilised to achieve the former Government's stated aim to protect Aboriginal children.



The NT intervention legislation invited questions around what circumstances, if any, a government can claim moral legitimacy in stripping Aboriginal communities of rights that others take for granted.

By 'quarantining' Aborigines' welfare payments to ensure they could spend their money only on certain items, the Howard Government played at social engineering to an extraordinary degree, attempting to control even which shop people choose to buy their groceries from.

Aborigines in communities covered by the intervention lost the right to appeal Centrelink decisions regarding quarantining and 'income management' — although the connection between exercising your right to review government decisions and child abuse remains unclear.

In effect, the Howard Government saw welfare payments as contingent on recipients conforming to notions of 'acceptable citizenship' — those who abrogated their family and community responsibilities were denied basic living support.

The methodology of the intervention was made possible in part by an evolving conception of recipients of Centrelink payments as, at best, in need of the firm guiding hand of the bureaucracy and, at worst, as would-be (or actual) criminals taking the government and its ever-suffering taxpayers for a ride.

This attitude is manifested in a culture of punishment within Centrelink and its parent departments — particularly the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. An obvious example of this punitive approach appeared in the Welfare-to-Work legislation, according to which job-seekers can be left with no benefits for up to eight weeks for missing

appointments or turning down jobs.

The manner in which this legislation is being implemented was exposed in a series of newspaper stories. One man reportedly had his payment cancelled for missing an appointment with Centrelink. Apparently, he didn't have a 'reasonable excuse' for missing the appointment despite Centrelink being advised by paramedics that he had collapsed in the Centrelink queue and was being taken to hospital.

More recently, the *Sydney Morning Herald* exposed what welfare rights advocates had long been observing — that the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has been spending big running a legal campaign to recoup sometimes tiny amounts of money from unrepresented Centrelink clients.

The Howard Government's election promise to refuse welfare payments to people convicted of certain drug offences demonstrated the extent of the Government's agenda to reform recipients of social security payments into 'worthwhile' members of the community. The myth that government can so easily manipulate lifestyles is one which will need to be confronted by the Rudd Government if it aims to reform Australia's groaning social security system. It is based on unproven assumptions about the nature of job-seekers and pensioners.

Recent emphasis on penalties and payment suspensions for people who 'fail to participate' adequately in the labour market is indicative of a suspicious pessimism about the motivations and goals of those who are unemployed, raising children, or living with disabilities. Those who claim Centrelink payments expose themselves to invasions of privacy that would make the humblest aged pensioner feel like a criminal. In the name of thwarting 'welfare cheats' and 'Centrelink frauds', Australian citizens are exposed to large-scale bureaucratic busy-bodying.

Equally, recent welfare reforms assume governments have the capacity to change people's behaviour — to take unmotivated individuals and convert them into productive members of society — by forcing them to leap bureaucratic hurdles of appointments, interviews, job diaries, statements, forms and job capacity assessments.

There is no point in using the social security system in this way. It doesn't work. Participation obligations, far from making you feel the government's love and concern, can give the eerie sensation of having your local MP in bed with you. It can give the impression that the government assumes you will behave badly and, in so doing, possibly encourage the proverbial one-fingered salute through resistance to participation.

The underlying assumptions of the social security system need to change, with the focus shifted to assistance and empowerment rather than coercion and punishment. Reforms should be proposed with an eye to compassion, to providing real skills and training and to dealing with the underlying issues — racism, mental health, poverty, education — which have a far greater impact on workforce participation than bone laziness. In this way, better outcomes for individuals might be achieved.

'Being there and listening' could be Government policy

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Last week in *Eureka Street*, Brian McCoy [wrote](#) of a mind-set that uses coercion in an attempt to improve people's lives, on the basis that the end justifies the means.

'People enter Aboriginal communities with a set of ready-made answers around employment, health and education. I am reminded of a mind-set that seeks to change people's lives for the better, always 'for their own good'.'

He was alluding to the Howard Government's Northern Territory Intervention. He was comparing the former Government's heavy-handedness with that of the missionaries of the past. The missionaries believed that the removal of children 'for education' was both the good and only thing to do.

Often a particular course of action is good, not only for the intended beneficiaries, but also for those in charge. The motivation is mixed.

The Howard Government was seeking to score political points ahead of last year's Federal Election, by using part of the budget surplus to attempt to eliminate the greatest blight on Australia's social landscape.

For the church organisations, the desire to do good was mixed with their mission to convert the Aboriginal people to the Christian faith.

Brian McCoy's breakthrough technique was to go into communities which welcomed him, not necessarily to do anything much at all, except to listen. To his mind, this was the most important task of all. As one of our readers said last week in response to Brian's article: 'Nothing beats being there and listening. I wonder who cares enough to live with the communities?'

Brian would not be surprised that the Intervention has met with resistance, and its success is widely expected to be limited.

Meanwhile in *Eureka Street* tomorrow, Perth welfare rights advocate Susie Byers analyses the Federal Government's use of welfare payments to 'socially engineer' the lives of indigenous Australians. She refers to the Howard Government's welfare-to-work policy, and

its devastating impact on human dignity.

‘The underlying assumptions of the social security system need to change, with the focus shifted to assistance and empowerment rather than coercion and punishment.’

If the logic of last month’s Parliamentary Apology to the Stolen Generations is translated into Government policy and action, there is every hope that this shift will take place, and that ‘being there and listening’ could be adopted as an official strategy.

Towards a church apology for gay prejudice

THEOLOGY

Donal Godfrey

Some years ago I spent a year in Australia and presided at the Acceptance Mass from time to time. Acceptance is the Sydney gay Catholic caucus. Hence my interest in the 100Revs Statement of Apology to the gay community, the courageous initiative of Baptist pastor Mike Hercock and other Christian clergy. The Statement is carefully worded, and in line with Catholic teaching. It recognises that churches have not been places of welcome for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people.

Indeed churches have often been profoundly unloving toward the GLBT community. Many Catholics and other Christians long for their churches to be places of welcome for all people and commit themselves to pursuing this goal.

The 100 Revs Statement adds that signatories are *nottaking* a biblical position on gay and lesbian relationships. It is a pastoral document, rather than a teaching one. It brings together clergy who have very different views on the issue of gay relationships, who nonetheless recognise the value of a church apology to gay people.

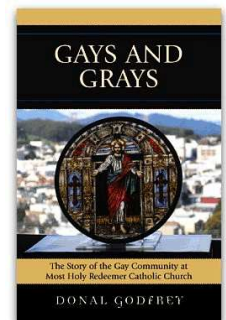
For some years, I have been associated with the Most Holy Redeemer Catholic parish in the Castro district of San Francisco. Approximately three quarters of the parishioners are openly gay. One — Patrick Mulcahey — spoke to me about his return to the Catholic Church, at Most Holy Redeemer, some years ago. He described the experience as ‘what any Catholic would feel after 20-odd years away’.

‘It was the church itself, in all its majesty and mystery and ordinary goodness; in the sturdy beauty of a well-wrought liturgy ... for the first time since I was old enough to understand myself as a sexual being, it was a church that wasn’t pushing me away.’

He suggested that any Catholic who’d been on a desert island for 20 years would have felt the same thing upon walking into a church where a decent priest was saying mass. But it was something he believed he could not have felt in any other church.

‘People don’t understand why gay men and lesbians migrate to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, cities all around the world that have flourishing gay ghettos,’ he said. ‘To be with ‘others of our own kind?’ To have wild sex and go to great parties?’

‘The truth is, mostly we come here to forget about being gay, to just drop that burden — to



just be human. For us, Most Holy Redeemer is the church where you can go and just be Catholic.'



Pastoral practices are changing in some places. Nonetheless parishes like Most Holy Redeemer remain the exception. At Acceptance and Most Holy Redeemer I constantly hear the stories of Gay Catholics who were pushed away through a mixture of hostility, ignorance and denial. Usually this homophobia adversely affected their relationship with God.

These Catholics are happy to have found a Catholic community that is safe and where the healing, liberating, and unconditional love of Jesus is understood as being for all people, regardless of sexual orientation.

Church teaching is generally condemnatory regarding homosexual acts. But the Catechism, following the practice of Jesus, says this concerning gay people: 'They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.' (2358)

The US Bishops echoed this back in 1976, when they said: 'Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community'.

Around the world gay people struggle to find a place at the table of our churches. In Christian faith, the challenge is to follow Jesus. This means being like him — a person who spent a lot of time with people the rest of society rejected.

The challenge in this case is for the church to be a community that confesses its own brokenness and reaches out to minister a healing reconciliation between the races, between the young and the old, between liberal and conservative, gay and straight, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. The 100Revs Statement is a commendable response to the alienation many gay Christians experience.

A truly prophetic Christian community can hold firm to the gospel, and at the same time embrace people regardless of difference. The prejudice gay people often experience in church parishes and congregations has nothing to do with the gospel of Jesus.

Sarajevo cellist's celebration of humanity

BOOK REVIEW

Andrena Jamieson

Steven Galloway, *The Cellist of Sarajevo*. Melbourne: Text Publishing 2008, ISBN 9781921351303, RRP 29.95

For 22 days Vedran Smailovic played the cello in the ruined Sarajevo market place. He honoured the 22 people killed there in mortar fire. The image is haunting. It was a symbol of hope, intimating that something might transcend the horror of the four year siege of the city. It inspired David Wilde's cello piece, 'The Cellist of Sarajevo'. It also inspires this moving short novel by the young Canadian novelist, Steven Galloway.



The central but wordless figure of the novel is the unnamed cellist. The three protagonists of the novel meet neither him nor one another, but respond to his music. They are linked by their common need to walk through the besieged city.

Dragan's wife and daughter fled to Italy before the siege began. He goes through the streets to work at a bakery where he can also eat. Each fourth day Kenan makes his way through the streets to gather water for his wife and children as well as for an acerbic old neighbour, Mrs Ristovski. Arrow is a sniper. She has taken her new name in order to forget her old life. She now must kill enemy soldiers on the hills opposite. She is then charged with protecting the cellist from an enemy sniper. Because she has lost fear she is at home in the streets, having no reason to live.

In the streets the fragility of flesh is undisguised. Those who walk are constantly and arbitrarily exposed to the snipers in the hills above the city. Each journey involves a multitude of small decisions laden with consequence — which road and bridge to take, when to cross exposed roads, whether to greet or turn away from neighbours, whether to go to the help of those shot or to stand in safety. The constant presence of death, the fear and the need to walk the streets day after day, and the daily compromises made in the name of safety, put everyone's humanity at risk.

Galloway's narrative follows each of the characters as they walk through the city. It is not about the characters — their background and relationships are sketched lightly. Rather it is about character as this is established and tested in the small decisions and encounters of each day. The narrative moves slowly, allowing the reader to feel the agoraphobia of a city where you look to the hills, not for relief but for death. Because this so clearly is the stuff of everyday

life in Sarajevo, the reader cannot but ask at each point, 'how would I have acted?'

The gesture of the cellist is both marginal and central to the story. As the characters are drawn into the music that he plays, they remember what they had forgotten — that life can be other. To Dragan, Kenan and Arrow he provides a moment of epiphany. After it they define their humanity in more expansive terms. The transformation is caught in the last words that Arrow speaks, 'My name is Alisa'.

Critical questions about such a powerful novel inevitably disclose more about the reviewer's ability to respond than about the book itself. Its registers of courage and compromise are for the most part conventionally masculine. Even Arrow has made herself hard and efficient in response to the siege. It would also be interesting to explore the modulations and the symbolic actions in which patient endurance expresses itself.

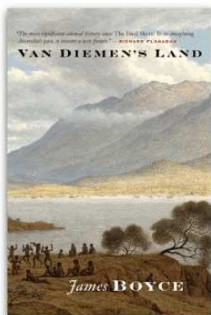
The affirmation of life made by each of the characters at the end of the novel is schematic and rhapsodic. It threatens to leave behind the grim, testing reality of the Sarajevo streets and the ever-pressing danger of the hills.

But even with these possible limitations, *The Cellist of Sarajevo* is a noble book. It explores and celebrates humanity in lives whose daily diet is inhumanity and loss.

Australians shaped by the spirit of place

BOOK REVIEW

Alexandra Coghlan



Boyce, James. *Van Diemen's Land*. Black Inc. Books, Melbourne, 2008. RRP \$49.95

'The floral mead — the pearly stream — the goodly grove, however they delight the eye or ravish the imagination — what are they all? — a worthless waste, until the genius and industry of man converts and fits them all for the welfare and enjoyment of his kind.' (David Burn, 'A Picture of Van Diemen's Land', the *Colonial Magazine*, 1840)

Landscape has long been acknowledged as central to the colonial history of Australia. Yet over centuries historians have reduced its significance to that of a passive canvass inscribed progressively with the actions of its peoples. In so doing they have continued to re-enact conceptually the very process that their histories so vehemently denounce.

James Boyce's *Van Diemen's Land*, which Boyce defines as an 'environmental history', seeks to redress this, focusing instead upon what Manning Clark has described as 'the influence of the spirit of place in the fashioning of Australians'.

While historians such as Clark and Tim Flannery have pioneered this focus on the reciprocal relationship between the colonisers and their environment, Boyce goes one stage further by stressing the diversity within the landscape, which renders generalised conclusions inadequate. Emphasising the geographical contrasts between Tasmania and other colonial sites in New South Wales, Boyce makes a compelling revisionist case not just for the origins of Tasmania itself, but for the way in which we write and conceive Australian history.

The history of Tasmania, Boyce argues, is characterised by a fundamental paradox arising from 'the tension produced by siting the principle goal of the empire in what proved to be a remarkable benevolent land'. In contrast to the harsh and often desperate conditions endured by settlers in Sydney Cove, those encountered by the Tasmanian convicts were of a 'veritable Eden' complete with fertile grasslands and plentiful food.

The abundant supply of kangaroo in particular, and the unfamiliarity of native animals with the swift European hunting dogs, meant that for the first time in the colonial history of Australia any individual equipped with such a dog could reasonably expect to survive outside

the restrictions of the penal colony. Even those within it might enjoy a quality of life vastly superior to the penury most had come from. This effectively destroyed the English vision of Australia as a prison without walls, and reinvented the landscape as a source of hope and sustainable life for its enforced inhabitants.

Boyce stresses the singularity of Tasmania's 'convict community'. Over 42% of convicts transported to Australia were brought to Tasmania. The majority of its original population were convicts and remained convict-descendants. While many histories have discounted the role of these undesirables, 'too often assumed to be without culture or enterprise', in shaping Tasmania, Boyce would have us embrace them. He argues that while free-settlers often viewed the land as a temporary source of wealth, the convicts were truly invested in its development, irrevocably connected as it was with their own survival.

It is notable in a book of Tasmanian history that discussion of the wars of 1827-38 is placed in the appendix rather than the body of the work, a decision that clearly articulates Boyce's unusual approach to his subject matter. While engaging with the ongoing debate of the 'history wars' and committed to overturning the theories of Windschuttle's ubiquitous *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Boyce characteristically reconstructs the debate on his own terms, arguing that while documentation of the official conflict has been exhaustive, what it has failed to take into account is the piecemeal destruction of the Aborigines that was taking place on a day-to-day basis with official government sanction. Such occurrences may not have been systematised, he argues, but when sustained over 20 years they did nevertheless constitute a program of ethnic cleansing.

What is striking above all in Boyce's compelling history is his account of the role played by individuals. Even the 'tainted nomenclature' of the state hints at the actions of the men that lay behind its development at every stage; portraits emerge of figures as diverse as the visionary Lieutenant Governor David Collins, 'ever more ready to pardon than to punish', who guided the settlement in its earliest stages, and outlaw bushranger Michael Howe, so powerful a dissenting force that the government was forced to negotiate with him.

On every side of the divisions of colour, gender, and creed, remarkable figures emerge. Boyce's work is no chest-beating self-mortifying exercise in public apology, but rather a sincere and enquiringly honest investigation into the history of a people whose very strength surely lies in the blights and challenges of their origins.

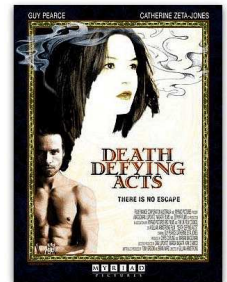
Childlike wonder redeems inscrutable Houdini

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

***Death Defying Acts*: 93 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: Gillian Armstrong. Starring: Catherine Zeta-Jones, Guy Pearce, Timothy Spall, Saoirse Ronan.**

The title is dramatic, and the opening sequence is equally so. The camera, immersed deep underwater, peers towards the distant surface. The glubs and gurgles of undulating H²O resonate all around.



All is foreboding serenity, until a human figure, shackled but calm, plunges into the dark depths. It is Harry Houdini (Pearce), the famed American escape artist and international celebrity. He performs his stunt, escaping his chains and returning to the surface, rising to the adoring applause of his multitudinous audience.

From such spectacular beginnings, *Death Defying Act*simmers down into an understated story about the nature of celebrity and the power of belief. It recaptures the splendour of those opening moments only sporadically. Australian director Armstrong has something other than spectacle in mind, and the result is somewhat lacklustre.

The primary viewpoint in *Death Defying Acts* is the worshipful gaze of young Houdini fan Benji McGarvie (Ronan). Benji is part of a double-act Scottish psychic swindle with her mother Mary (a firebrand Zeta-Jones), in which they employ prior research and a sense of showmanship to 'channel' audience members' deceased loved ones.

Sure, their behavior is exploitative. But tough times call for tough measures. The McGarvie women comprise a single-parent family in a male-dominated society, so you can hardly blame them for making a living the best way they can. They've found a successful formula and have made a comfortable living off their stage show.

When Houdini announces that he's coming to town with a \$10,000 reward for any psychic who can successfully contact his deceased mother, Mary and Benji think they've got the goods to take him. But Benji's hero-worship, and Mary's growing infatuation with the charming and charismatic performer, mean this can be no clean-cut con.

Houdini proves to be an enigmatic character. He's all charm and showmanship, but with hidden depths and dark secrets. His nearly obsessive sense of attachment to his late mother is unsettling. But the inscrutability of the character is ultimately to the film's detriment. You

never really glimpse the humanity behind Houdini's layered yet manufactured public persona. It's as if he never truly surfaced following that death-defying plunge during the film's opening scene.

The lack of chemistry between Pearce and Zeta-Jones is a nearly fatal problem. The somewhat detached love affair that evolves between them fails to drive home the film's decidedly trite message: that love is the 'magic' behind the mundane façade of reality.

The grand production of this period drama — the ornate recreation of 1920s Edinburgh — distracts from the deflated central story, but it's ultimately in the hands of the film's youngest cast member, 13-year-old Ronan, to make this film worthwhile.

Ronan infuses her every scene with much-needed energy and humour. More importantly, Benji, as narrator, provides the audience with a lens of childlike wonder through which to watch the events unfold. This lends a fantastical edge to an otherwise mediocre story.

Autism comedy strikes emotional equilibrium

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert



***The Black Balloon*: 93 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Elissa Down. Starring: Rhys Wakefield, Luke Ford, Toni Collette, Erik Thomson, Gemma Ward.**

Anyone who saw last year's Australian 'dramedy' *Clubland* may be struck by a sense of déjà vu when they come across *The Black Balloon*. Like its predecessor, *The Black Balloon* features a suburban teen hero looking for love and trying to live his own life, and variously helped and hindered by an overbearing mother and a brother with a disability.

But where *Clubland* suffered from a wavering tenor that saw it veer between slapstick and melodrama, *The Black Balloon* strikes a perfect emotional equilibrium. It is funnier, more heartbreaking, and ultimately more fulfilling than *Clubland*.

At its heart is the relationship between teenage brothers Thomas (Wakefield) and Charlie (Ford). Charlie is autistic, and with their obstinate, affectionate and heavily pregnant mother (Collette in full-blown mother-mode) largely bedridden, and military-man father (Mollison) hard at work, the demands of caring for him fall increasingly upon Thomas.

It's a frustrating way to spend one's teen-dom — after all, Thomas has his own life to live, and adolescent goals to pursue. Top of the list is local girl Jackie (Ward), who has taken a shine to the cherubic Thomas. The feeling is mutual, but Thomas is concerned that the particular challenges presented by Charlie might scare her off.

The Black Balloon demonstrates tremendous attention to detail. Anyone who was a teenager during the 1990s will feel pangs of recognition at the touches of period authenticity. It's a world where Ratcat is on the radio, and there are wooden clothes pegs on the Hills Hoist. Jackie's bicycle wheels clatter with spoke beads, and she wears a pink Stackhat. At one point, the Mollison family upgrades from a Commodore 64 to a Super Nintendo.

Such window dressing helps evoke Thomas and Charlie's world. The early '90s suburban locale is a tangible and familiar environment, where intolerance and ignorance brood beneath the surface. Thomas' obnoxious class mates, who hurl insults at the local 'special' bus, will make your stomach churn. Even the local adults regard Charlie as something distasteful or pitiable. Ward provides a counterpoint. Jackie is generous and gracious towards Charlie.

This is more than just an assured debut from writer/director Down. It is one of the great and memorable Australian films of recent times. The insight into the life of a family with an autistic child rings true — little surprise, given that Down grew up with an autistic brother. Often there is a weary sense of routine underlying their cheerful interactions with Charlie. Sometimes patience wears down to the nub and family members react in ways they will later regret. These scenes will break your heart, such is the empathy evoked.

Ford deserves awards for his performance. His mannerisms as Charlie are impeccable. He embodies the role so completely that you will laugh with him, be infuriated by him, and love him, sometimes within the space of a scene.

That said, this is unquestionably Wakefield's film. With the wrong actor, Thomas could have come across as a petulant and self-centred teen. But Wakefield wrings every skerrick of sympathy attendant on the character's burden of responsibilities and social awkwardness.

It's not just the difficulty of Thomas' particular situation. Wakefield embodies everything that it is to be a teenager on the brink of adulthood — facing challenges you think you'll never overcome, bearing responsibilities you feel you can't carry, and making mistakes you think you'll never recover from. Of course you do, can and will, and for Thomas, as with any good coming-of-age story, there is a bittersweet happy ending in store.

The diary of clean beginnings

POETRY

Kevin Gilliam

in the diary of clean beginnings

you make an entry
'let's see a planet as still knowledge'
then another
'it is a night to be stretched, a might of
just one mores'
on the lips of this evening, moon,
sold in press as an
eclipsed earthy brown, sits
blushing behind purple clouds
the turned-over jarrah spits,
smokes profusely upwards,
won't catch
'if I fell now, you'd be disappointed in
what you'd find in my cupboards'

wet brush

you lose your self, wake,
lose the lost. you've pangs
for the warmth of else,
a kind of prang in
a plot you won't know.

blurred now, sly work of

pills. they did tell you
that it won't be etch
or fine shades of H.
B. that will take you,
no. just the back/forth
of wet brush, slow touch,
an ache that births hue,
blood that dries to dust

—

Tourettic

my words are miscarriages,
the room mops the blood
as symptoms find their opening
she writes... 'the myth of locks',
asks me to read aloud... 'the moth of licks',
words as miscarriages
a duffle bag of tongue clicking,
whistling, floor tapping, rapid head turns,
symptoms finding their opening
the urge to shout in church,
vibrating inside on bones of pew,
my words as miscarriages
I keep my tongue wound in my teeth,
ignore the throbbing in the gullett
but symptoms find their opening
I reach for her, tap her shoulder,

let fly a staccato burst of caresses
then words as miscarriages,
symptoms finding their opening

The lowest of the low

POETRY

Mark O'Flynn

ON THE METRO

In Paris

a man follows his whiskers onto a train.

He holds out a cardboard cup and declares:

I have no money.

I have no job.

No one will hire me.

I am too old.

I have no family.

I have not eaten today.

I sleep in the gutter.

I have no other clothes than these.

I have done despicable things.

I stand here before you without shame

the lowest of the low.

Some of his audience turn the pages of their newspapers.

He moves through the carriage behind his empty cup

and when the train stops at the next platform

he steps out.

THE GRAVES AT SAINT-ROMAN

Thanks to it make known Saint-Roman to your relations and to your friends, thank you. - Visitors brochure

Atop the ancient Saint-Roman monolith
the Troglodyte monks have carved
their lives into stone.

The soaring altar and pulpit, the Bishop's seat,
the wine press, even their windowless cells
ground patiently from the heart of the mountain.

But especially on top of the cliff
with its strategic view of the river
and the factories of Beaucaire
the tombs chiseled from rock.

The Troglodyte monks must have been small men
for there are scores of them
gouged shoulder to shoulder
graves no bigger than a child's bath,
some filled with rain,
some with loose bones,
some empty but for the reminder
they offer the open sky.

HERONS AND THE ANGLE-GRINDER

Rowing on that peaceful lake
blue dragonflies investigate
pearls of light dripping from my oars.

Across the water workmen crank
up the angle-grinder, concocting doors
for the boat shed. The metallic shriek
tears the peace apart and three

grey herons launch into the air
arguing about which route to take.
They circle the lough forward, backward
orbiting in opposite directions
silhouetted against the sky like the cardboard
cut-outs of herons. All too aware
of my presence on the still water, the mice
of the rowlocks squeaking and knocking
with an ancient sound.
The grinder falls quiet. That shocking
incongruity dissipates and calm surrounds
the boat in the middle of the lake.
The herons find the reeds and enter
dusk on the far shore. I am wide awake
as rain begins to hiss in the trees.
In that softly rocking stillness ripples
circle outward from this sudden centre.