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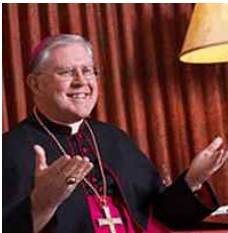
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There's always something to learn about leadership

EDITORIAL



When he was installed last week, Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Canberra-Goulburn reflected on the relationship between leaders and those who are led. 'It can't be left to the leader to have all the bright ideas and to make all the best suggestions,' he said, pointing out that he has always done best in situations where others have 'bombarded' him with ideas and suggestions.

After ten years, John Howard is still learning this lesson, with members of the Coalition forced to rebel when it appeared he had not properly listened to them on the proposed amendments to the Immigration Act, a matter of fundamental importance to the nation. Since then, he has performed a about-face in his decision to allow a conscience vote on embryonic stem cell research.

Perhaps this shows a leader finally prepared to listen to the suggestions of those he's leading. Alternatively, it could be just another reading of the political writing on the wall. For there's no doubt he's aware, as Francis Sullivan of Catholic Health Australia points out, that the appeal of the 'well cashed up' science lobby is very emotional.

In this issue of *Eureka Street*, Brendan Long asks what's become of the enormous confidence of a man in his tenth year of office with a comfortable majority. As Howard grabs the lectern nervously, he knows that no matter what the polls say, the government is hurting over the pain to families from record petrol prices.

In our feature essay, Brian McCoy suggests that Aboriginal Australians make white settler Australians a bit nervous. He says that Aboriginal people remind the rest of us that we have not yet come to fully settle within this land, and that a part of us really wants to live elsewhere—an idea [Mark Byrne](#) also posed a number of months ago on these pages. Dr McCoy says this 'unsettlement' explains our irritation with the original inhabitants, who show no desire to live anywhere but here.

In other writing in this issue, Phil Glendening of the Edmund Rice Centre focuses on the immigration issue that has been the source of such vexation for Mr Howard in his tenth year, and examines the human cost of 'sending them home.' Jack Waterford looks at another issue which Mr Howard has explored in the last week, that of what kind of history is being taught in our schools. But Jack



raises the question of the history of our near neighbours.

Dr Mihal Greener of Monash University turns her attention to Lebanon, wondering how long the peace may last there, with the combatants still at cross-purposes and a divided international community taking the first steps towards sending a peace-keeping force.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Eureka Street. We thank our old print faithful who have stayed with us, and those who have come onboard in recent months.

Is Asylum seeker dumping Usury?

COLUMNS



The Australian dumping of asylum seekers on Nauru has always seemed abusive. But a recent interview given by the new Vatican Secretary of State provides grounds for believing that it might also amount to usury.

Cardinal Bertone described loans by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to impoverished nations as usury. His reasons were that these funds insisted on such conditions as closing Catholic schools or forced sterilisation. He went on to say that loans should encourage economic creativity and must contribute to the good of all the people.

The lines of connection between usury and, for example, forcibly closing Catholic schools are by no means clear. Usury has traditionally been defined as charging interest—any interest or excessive interest—on loans. At first glance, it is hard to see how the conditions imposed by the World Bank and the IMF amount to interest. And even if they did so, why they should constitute usury in a world that considers other interest-bearing loans as unexceptionable.

What Cardinal Bertone meant when he made these connections remains obscure, but reflection on the history of usury suggests the shape of a possible argument.

In the Old Testament and early Christian world, charging interest on loans was attacked. But the context was salient. In the early books of the Old Testament, the practice was condemned only when Jews lent money to Jews. Loans 'in the family' must not be interest bearing. The New Testament is silent about lending money with interest; early Christian writers denounce money lenders who extort money from the poor. Loans to people who need money to survive must be gratuitous. Clergy were regularly forbidden to charge interest on loans.

Later, opposition to lending at interest hardened. The Koran stipulated that interest may not be charged on loans, and this prohibition remains in force in Islamic countries. In medieval Christendom, it was also forbidden to lend money at interest. Thomas Aquinas supported the ban on interest by arguing that it was unjust to make people pay both for the money loaned and for the use of the money. This was double dipping. His objection assumed that the loan was without cost to the lender. If the loan carried administrative costs, they could be passed on. Venture lending, in which the lender shared the risks carried by the borrower, could also carry interest.

As economies became more complex, churches gradually came to accept the charging of interest on loans. Usury became redefined as the charging of exorbitant interest. Theologians evolved complex arguments to reconcile this tolerance with earlier condemnations. Economists defended the charging of interest on the grounds that it was part of a contract freely entered by individuals, and that it was necessary to ensure that investment was directed to profitable enterprises.



In the restricted condemnation of usury, two aspects are seen to make it unacceptable. The interest charged on the loan is out of proportion to its personal and financial cost to the lender, and the borrowers' circumstances leave them with no other option than to borrow money. The loan is taken out, not for productive investment, nor for discretionary buying, but for necessary consumption.

Usury is morally unacceptable because it denies human solidarity, in which all human transactions and possessions must take into account the good of all. Property rights are not absolute but have a social link; transactions must respect the dignity of the parties involved. So where someone is in extreme poverty, we may not exact interest on a loan, because in our use of money we are responsible to that person. Cardinal Bertone leans on this notion of solidarity when he argues that international loans should encourage economic creativity and be for the good of all. Economic creativity implies more than economic prosperity. It looks to the ways in which economic activity enhances human dignity, not simply to the way in which it creates wealth.

This connection between money lending and human dignity may explain the logic underlying the Cardinal's criticism of the IMF and World Bank. His remarks are consistent with, but go further than, the common criticism that these institutional loans diminish the living conditions of the poor while expanding the wealth of the rich. Their conditions diminish human dignity and weaken solidarity. Cardinal Bertone may take a broader view of human dignity: its conditions include not only economic relations, but respect for religious belief and respect for human life. He can then argue that it is usury to impose as a condition of a loan to poor peoples conditions that contravene human dignity in any way.

If this is indeed his logic, it is interesting because it situates economic activity firmly within its broader human and cultural context, and is prepared to develop a moral language that criticises economic arrangements that fail to respect human dignity.

The examples he gives of usurious conditions are ones that most people would easily identify as 'Catholic' issues, in that they have to do with life and Catholic education. But if it is usurious to impose on penurious nations conditions that abuse human dignity, the patent connection between Australian economic assistance for Nauru and that nation's participation in Australian abuse of asylum seekers is also a

prima facie case of usury.

Four butchers and a writer

COLUMNS

By the way

It is 7.15 on a recent freezing midwinter morning. With hands deep in my pockets, where they compete for room with a thick spiral notebook and a random selection of pens, and with the collar up round my ears against the nip of the morning, I enter the butchers shop by the side door. It is an historic moment. I am the first writer in residence at a butchers shop. The residence period will only be one day, which may strain the definition, but let's not be too pedantic.



It happened like this. Acting on instructions from a higher power, I had recently gone to the butchers shop for stewing steak diced into 'approximately five centimetre pieces'. I was embarrassed to have to make this outrageous demand and relieved when the young man behind the counter suggested that something from the window display would be about the right size.

Of course, it was wrong. If you're going to slow-cook, you need sizeable chunks. Stephanie Alexander is categorical on this, as I now know. In the sometimes hilarious discussions that ensued on the following day, my wife explained to the butchers what five centimetre pieces looked like (they found a ruler in the office and verified her estimate) and why they should never give me the option of 'near enough'. From this exchange they learned in passing that she was an editor and I was a writer. 'Send him down,' said Steve, the chief butcher. 'He can write about us.'

When I arrive, the four butchers are strapping on their aprons, belts and knives. I now formally discover that they are Steve, Jason, Jim and Mick. They have worked in this shop for about five years, and they're like the cast of a comedy who have been together since opening night and know all the punchlines in advance.

They go about their various duties with the certainty of long familiarity, but despite their focus on the task at hand, the banter and chat is constant. Jim wants to discuss the use of a full stop after abbreviations and somehow this gets us on to apostrophes. I congratulate them for not having the ubiquitous redundant apostrophe on their blackboard sign at the front of the shop:

'Special — Snitzels \$8 kg'. But shouldn't it be 'schnitzels'?

'Depends who's got the chalk,' says Jim. 'Keep it simple, I say.'

'I'm learning so much so fast my head's exploding,' says Jason. He has a wicked glint in his eye and an easily provoked sardonic grin.



'Is that a good jumper you're wearing?' he says. 'It'll get terribly mucky when you start shifting the hindquarters of beef. That's why you're here isn't it?'

When the beef and lamb are due, they give me a cap like theirs, a clip board, and detailed instructions on how I am to greet the bloke who brings the meat. Posing as an inspector, I manage to keep up the pretence long enough to cause him the intense discomfort they think he deserves. He's doing nothing wrong—though he can't find his cap. When all is revealed, he roundly abuses all four butchers and shakes my hand with a hint of relief.

When Jason has to take an order up to the bakehouse, he says, 'You're in charge, Brian' and Jim remarks that if I'm filling in for Jason I'll have bugger all to do. Steve introduces me to 'Snow', a very venerable customer: 'This is Brian, Snow. He's thinking of buying the business,' and Snow mutters, 'Good God almighty', which seems to cover all possible nuances of surprise and disapproval.

Meanwhile, Mick hangs his excellent tomato and basil sausages in festoons from hooks, Jim batters and crumbs the 'snitzels', Steve shows me with a few laconic flicks of a murderously sharp knife how racks are 'frenched', Jason makes cordons bleu and customers come and go and are served with courtesy and humour. My presence is serially explained, each version outdoing the last for outlandishness.

At morning 'smoko' they regale me with the traps of their trade. Like helpfully reminding a wife that her husband has already bought the chops only to find that the pair separated acrimoniously a month ago. Or enquiring after a spouse who turns out to have recently dropped dead.

It's a privilege to be among them because behind the irony and the sardonic veneer is a wonderful professionalism and pride in work. These are 'the Australian people' that our politicians glibly cite but never get near.

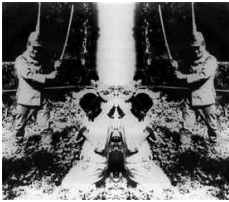


Do they like the work? 'Love it,' says Steve. 'Wouldn't do anything else,' says Jim. 'Couldn't do anything else,' says Jason. 'I'd write books if I could,' says Mick. Jason glances at me. 'That's not as easy as it looks,' he says. 'For a start, you have to visit butchers shops.'

Teaching history of our region is also important

COLUMNS

Capital letter



John Howard probably doesn't deserve the general cynicism he is attracting from his usual critics over his efforts to get history back into the curriculum, or for his view that it ought to focus rather more on facts and narrative than on themes and flights of fancy. But he, or Australia, has much more to worry about than the future world view of young Australians. He would be doing just as well by looking at how history and local world views are shaping the regional and international environment in which we live.

Next year will mark the 70th anniversary of the Rape of Nanking, a calculated act of Japanese Army mayhem and havoc after its troops took over the town from the retreating Chinese Army in December 1937. Over the next few weeks an orgy of killing and raping of the mostly civilian population occurred — probably 350,000 people were murdered. It is often said that there was, at first, little Japanese embarrassment at the systematic slaughter, since it was hoped and expected that it would create such terror as to make China think that resistance to Japanese might was useless and would only intensify horror.

Though one would have to be 80 or more to have any personal memory of the events, the Rape of Nanking is a continuing powerful point of tension between China and Japan — indeed between North and South East Asia and Japan. It surfaces every August, as it did last week, when senior Japanese figures, commemorating the end of World War II visit shrines for Japanese war dead, including shrines to some of Japan's war criminals. And it also comes to a head regularly with the publication of fresh Japanese history texts which gloss over or completely ignore Japan's role in the war, which began for China in 1937.

It's not quite the argument about an apology — an essentially sterile one. Japan has apologised, in all manner of ways, to almost everyone. Nor is it a matter of blaming the present population of Japan. Rather the argument is about acknowledgement, and fervent belief that the Japanese should never forget the barbarity, the brutality, the conscious cruelty and the dishonour which it visited upon the Chinese, the Filipinos, Allied prisoners of war and others during that terrible decade which began 69 years ago.

John Howard, probably, would not say, 'Get over it', because he, while well sensible about the difference between modern Japan and its present leadership, grew up under a shadow cast by the war against Japan. And his belief that people should know their history, and in an ordered, narrative form, rather than disorganised and unintegrated set of themes, is perfectly sincere, and, so far as I

am concerned, quite convincing. He is right too in fearing not only the guff that passes for history but the fact that fewer and fewer young Australians are studying any history, guff or good, at all.

But the problem is wider than that. Just as we have a national interest in having our citizens — young and old, new and old — know our history, we have an increasingly important interest in having our neighbours know ours — and their own. It's not just Japan which is suspected or misunderstood because it fails to appreciate what it has done or how it is perceived; Australia is in much the same position so far as most of the nations of Asia are concerned.

In many cases that is even when we have a reasonable story to tell — certainly one that is better than the vaguely held theories about us. In other cases, once we are more conscious of how our own actions have affected people, or how they have been perceived, there might even be room for a bit more explanation, perhaps even self-criticism.



How come, for example, we have made a cult of the deaths of Australian prisoners of war in Changi and the Burma railroad, and the sufferings of survivors (including my father) and simply do not know or include in our histories that the capture of Singapore was immediately followed by the massacre of perhaps 20,000 local Chinese?

If John Howard is serious about history, he should be devoting as much time to having us understand the senses of history of our neighbours, and having our neighbours understand our sense of our own. It's mostly virgin territory. It could sponsor, for example, the development in Australia of a great centre of study for ourselves and our neighbours focused not only on explaining our broad liberal culture, history and sense of ourselves but on helping us understand rather better the culture, history and story of our neighbours.

[Click here](#) to read a longer version of this article.

Drilling into *Eureka Street*

CORRESPONDENCE

'What do you think of the new *Eureka Street* that I can't read?' my dentist asks.

He always asks curly questions when I am defenceless with a mouthful of wadding. I don't think it's a power thing because he is a gentleman in every sense. That's why I've gone to see him, voluntarily, at least twice in the last ten years.

'Whad d'yer mean yer cawn readid?'

We are old hands at diverting conversations. He knows they help me unlatch my fingernails from the palms of my hands. His hands are unscarred and he has a deft touch with his battery of instruments. He also knows it helps to show the instruments to this incorrigibly curious patient so that she can, like Galileo, have her moment of tortured anticipation to allay the guilt about having only come twice in the last ten years. I suspect that the ritual brandishing is also his way of tacit reproach, but he is such a gentleman I can't be sure.

But I am sure he wants an answer to his question because he extracts the cotton wool from between my clenched jaws.

Spit, gargle, spit.

'What do you mean? You prefer reading *Eureka Street* in the old hard copy, so you can papier-mâché it in the bath or take it to bed with you?'

'Yep.'

'And you haven't got grandchildren who can drag you into the 21st century?'



We digress for a few minutes. He was the father of young children when I first took my pre-fluoride dentition to him, a few years before *Eureka Street* began publication. I used to trip over his youngest son asleep on the choir-loft floor of Canberra's St Christopher's Cathedral. Lucky I didn't break his baby teeth. We've sung complicated fugues and church-militant recessionals together. Belting out 'We Stand for God' together makes for wry mateship.

I offer to send over some of mine (grandchildren, not battle hymns) to initiate him. After all, I inveigled him into his first *Eureka Street* subscription. He thinks that's just boasting about who has grandchildren etc. It probably is, but the generic usefulness of grandchildren as a spur to technological uptake is undeniable, so we spar on for a few minutes more as I attempt to shame him into exploring online and remind him of his obligations to say in touch with the next generation.

Then—forget proselytising—we start serious drilling. I focus on wave patterns, bird noises, wall textures, snatches of memorable cinema. But they're treacherous.

'Did you know Doc Holliday was a dentist?' I ask, the minute he takes the metal out of my mouth.

'No. What made you think of that?'

I am too embarrassed to go through the stream of consciousness: Tombstone town, tombstone teeth, sharp shooting with sixguns, holes in the O.K. Corral.

My dentist reaches for his drill holster.

I counter: 'Did you know Wyatt Earp called him the nerviest, fastest, deadliest man with a sixgun he ever saw?'

I'm buying time. Distract him further by telling him that John Henry 'Doc' Holliday also wrote a thesis on diseases of the teeth, but he gets in first with another question while he rams in more cotton wool and brings on the heavy machinery.

'So did you read that in *Eureka Street*?'

'Naw, bud oi cudve...|'

'What?'

'Can'd dork.'

'I know,' says my dentist and looks, for the moment, wicked.

He goes on looking delighted with himself, in his gentlemanly way (he and Doc Holliday share a certain politesse) until he finishes the grinding and polishing and finally brings the chair upright.



I'm not in best condition for spirited discussion now. A bit woozy. Maybe this is how the Clantons felt. But I do tell my smiling dentist about the only other dentist I could abide: the one who had a grainy photograph of Doc Holliday taped to the ceiling directly above his torture chair. But he tired of dentistry in the 1980s and took up philosophy instead.

'Don't you dare do that,' I say.

At home I print out the pdf file of the latest *Eureka Street*. I take it with me into the surgery next time, as bait. And, feathering the lure, I make a few concessions. No, I don't like reading online either (true) but I like to know what's what, and he needs to know what's what too. How else will he be able to talk to his patients?

We have six more appointments. I'll bring paper printouts for the first three. For four and five I'll come armed with my laptop and flourish the links to past *Eureka Streets* and to other dandy sites. I can show him the instruments too.

After appointment six I'm sending in the granddaughters.

Morag Fraser edited Eureka Street 1991 — 2003.

Lessons for Church in the new Ireland

INTERNATIONAL



Recent years have seen a number of events commemorating the activities in Ireland of John Henry Cardinal Newman, who was invited to the country in 1851 by the Irish bishops to assist in the establishment of a Catholic university.

The controversy and opposition that Newman dealt with in those years may seem best forgotten, but might have some insight to offer the current challenges to the Irish Catholic church.

At the time of Newman's visits, Ireland was in the throes of the 'Devotional Revolution.' Popular home-based observances, local saints and places, and vernacular prayers were being replaced by church-centred, priest-led Mediterranean practices, as parish missions, novenas, sodalities and regular masses were introduced as the norm of what would become thought of as 'Irish Catholicism.' The Catholic church in Ireland was gradually brought into the Roman line of Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin. Recent years have tested the Irish church on many fronts and challenge it to re-imagine its place in Irish life.

The 1979 visit of John Paul II to Ireland was a significant moment in Ireland's religious history. Almost every reference to the event includes a depiction of the pope accompanied by Eamon Casey or Michael Clery. The bishop and the priest were two of the most accessible and popular commentators at the time, but are remembered now less because of their charismatic personalities, than because of later revelations; both had secret relationships and children of which the public knew nothing.

The disclosure of their relationships caused great confusion among supporters of the church and much speculation and derision among others. Many see their departure from the public eye as marking the beginning of a slide for the church in Ireland, a slide that would continue with deepening awareness of sexual scandals, inept management and a failure to recognise the mood of public disquiet. The resignation of the once-popular Bishop Brendan Comiskey in 2002, and the later publication of the results of a government enquiry into the administration of his diocese, deepened the questions about the church and its place in Irish society.

Ironically, the loss of each prominent spokesman left no-one to answer the questions that arose. The media became the forum for discussion and was responsible for forming much of the public attitude. The church became quieter, being at best circumspect, but often 'unavailable for comment' as questions multiplied.



Some church figures construed the media atmosphere as being hostile to them. Having become unused to dialogue in the church, they were not disposed to engage in it 'outside' where exactly an opposite expectation was growing. No longer among the poorest nations in Europe, an educated and confident public was ready for discussion.

Something in the national psyche was changing as Ireland adapted to being destination for economic migrants. The success of the economy meant that more people arrived in the country than had previously left it in comparable periods. Irish people have found that their views of the world and of themselves have changed, as one person in ten has been born outside of the state.



The economic boom has been enjoyed also, of course, by the locals. Growing numbers live in urban areas or in the 'rural sprawl' and infrastructure struggles to cope with the increasing requirements for better hospitals, schools, roads and facilities. It is not only demand that is rising; expectations are getting higher too. As with other public bodies, the church is queried about its standards and values as terms like 'accountability' and 'transparency' challenge older ways of working.

Suspicion of prescriptive authority increases with a growing emphasis on personal choice and freedom, but does not imply that people are not amenable to the concerns of religion. Despite the decline in participation in voluntary and community activities, the Irish public responds well to meaningful celebrations and events such as the Special Olympics in 2003 or the welcoming of the new European member states in 2004. Church initiatives have recognised the new stresses brought by modernisation, and have sought to help those affected by high rates of borrowing, inordinate house prices, significant alcohol-abuse and climbing suicide-rates.

This may be the crux for the Catholic church in Ireland: how to move from a being a clerical institution to engage with the developing pluralism. The signs are that the time of the clerical church, predicated on hierarchical obedience, is over. That way of being church, which could function well when priests and religious were numerous, seems bemused and mystified by modern Ireland. The media—brokers of modern values—often portray the hierarchy as something of an anachronism, unfit for today's realities. Members of each group have enjoyed their influence and power and have chosen pronouncement over dialogue. The best way ahead is as unlikely to lie with media-shy bishops as it is with pontificating journalists.



History shows how Irish people have relied on the church in coping with adversity. The 'official' church may now choose to follow where the people have led, into an Ireland that is more diverse, urban and secular than ever before.

Bottom photo: Temple Bar, Dublin (credit: [David Hewitt](#))

Victory eludes both Israel and Hezbollah

INTERNATIONAL

Politics



Vindicated, vilified and lauded, few countries prompt so much scrutiny and heated debate as Israel. Shaped by a confluence of geography, politics and religion, Israel has always generated an intensity that is disproportionate to its size or influence.

For its critics, Israel is readily categorised as an aggressive colonizer, flexing its military muscle and oppressing the weak. For the six million people within its borders, this perception of strength is contrasted with an understanding of their homeland as a young, small nation surrounded by large and populous neighbours vigorously calling for its destruction; neighbours who find little to unite them apart from a shared loathing of the Jewish state. Israeli insecurity is perhaps incomprehensible to those of us living in lands with hundreds of years of history, where the question whether our country will remain in existence for our lifetime does not even cross our minds.

This understanding of the threat that has always faced Israel throughout its short existence has motivated much of the support for Israel in its campaign against Hezbollah. It is not that supporters do not share the outrage at lives lost in the conflict. It is a consequence of a passionately held belief that, despite the devastation being inflicted on children, women and men across both sides of the border, it is critical to combat the threat Hezbollah poses to the safety of Israel's civilians.

There is no longer anyone who can argue with conviction that Israel will be able to rid the world, or the region, of Hezbollah. But Israel does have the burden to cripple them, to counter the resources and strength that Hezbollah have so evidently built up since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. While Israel may have received international approval for withdrawing from Lebanon, six years later as Hezbollah launched up to 200 rockets a day into northern Israel and showed no signs of running out, the extent to which Hezbollah had taken advantage of the absence of Israeli troops to replenish its weapons supply became evident.

As the world observed the outbreak of war, reports circling in the media criticised Israel's response as 'disproportionate'. Indeed, the term was thrown about as if there existed a tacit understanding of what would have been a justified response; an invisible equation that stood in judgment over Israel's actions. The concept of proportionate and disproportionate sits uneasily with the chaos of the fog of war and gives an erroneous sense that there is something quantifiable in war. How many Hezbollah deaths would have been proportionate? How many Lebanese civilian deaths? How many lives are two kidnapped Israeli soldiers worth? What is the equal response to each Katyusha rocket being fired into northern Israel? How does one respond to a leader calling for the destruction of their state? What is the

appropriate strategy when facing combatants using civilians as human shields?

In this situation nothing is quantifiable, and even internationally agreed-upon rules of war do not apply because this is not a traditional conflict between nation states. Hezbollah's proportionality in launching Katyushas and targeting civilians does not seem to raise ire, or prompt discussion, perhaps because there is no expectation that a terrorist group should play by the rules of war.



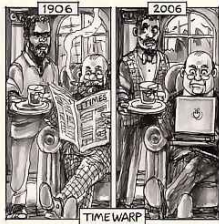
From the Israeli point of view, action against Hezbollah had to be taken, and by extension, against the powerful states of Iran and Syria that stand behind it. It needed to do so for the security of its citizens, those who have spent the past month heeding the warnings of air raid sirens and cowering in bomb shelters. It needed to do so also, it argued, because in a civilian army, where nearly every family sends its sons and daughters to compulsory military service, the kidnapping of two soldiers from Israeli territory does matter. It needed to, because the permanency and longevity of the state of Israel can not be a matter for debate.

Despite the need to respond to Hezbollah with force, this war has not brought victory to either side. Lebanon and its people have suffered incomprehensible devastation and Israel has shown its enemies that it could not effectively combat an enemy as elusive as Hezbollah. Hezbollah has been weakened, but to what extent remains unclear, as does the question of how long it might take them to regroup.

Not even the most strident of optimists can convincingly claim that this cautious ceasefire signals the end to hostilities. The mutual loathing the opposing sides feel is too deeply rooted to disappear, and there are other, shadowy forces at work—puppeteering behind the scenes that could lead to a wider conflagration. Amidst this devastation, the long term outcome which may prove the most tragic is the pervading sense of inevitability that this conflict will erupt again, with only the question of whether it will be in weeks, months or years.

Why change Aborigines into images of ourselves?

AUSTRALIA



There are times when we draw a line in the sand and say, 'enough is enough'. I was reminded of this recently at a public meeting held in Perth on the 17th of July. Enough is Enough! In Defence of Aboriginal Culture, it was called. A large and spirited group gathered at Curtin University to address media portrayals of, and political responses to, Aboriginal people. And, if that wasn't enough, I then saw the Channel 9 Sunday program on the 30th of July, 'Inside the Gangs of Wadeye', a community they described as 'one of the country's largest and most dysfunctional Aboriginal communities'.

It has been one thing for some of our politicians to reveal they clearly misunderstand and respect so little about Aboriginal people and their culture. It is quite another thing when a reporter goes to live in a community for ten days and thinks she got the measure of 'the cultural and social issues at play'. Both events have caused me to reflect on our non-Aboriginal attitudes towards Aboriginal people.

In the Perth meeting, some people suggested that recent government and media portrayals reflected a conspiracy. It seemed far too coincidental that a growing line of government ministers, including the Prime Minister, were following a similar track of negative opinion about Aboriginal culture, well supported by particular media and their often superficial and negative representations.

Personally, I am not sure there is a conspiracy. However, I do believe these recent statements reflect something about us 'white' people. I believe they disclose very persistent and dangerous values that have been part of our Australian psyche since the beginning of colonisation. On my good days I like to think we addressed them and put them to bed a long time ago. I like to hope we have moved on and are now more mature about 'difference' and 'culture'. On bad days, however, I fear we are in the process of repeating an old conversation, allowing past attitudes and a violent contact history to repeat itself. As we dredge up ancient stereotypes and justify our latest response to Aboriginal expressions of culture, we find that we are repeating and reliving our fear of difference. Our desire to exert dominance and take control of Aboriginal people's lives reasserts itself once again. As such, it brings shame upon our leaders and our nation.

Last year, a senior government minister referred to small, remote communities as 'cultural museums'. Her agenda was clear: it was time to stop treating Aboriginal people as being different from other Australians, and it was time to stop funding those communities. In her opinion there was no future for people who wanted to live in small, remote communities. They needed, 'for their own good', to be assimilated into the larger values of Australian culture.

This old, self-justifying approach to the assimilation of Aboriginal people has reappeared in different guises in the past few months. This approach has sought to vindicate the demonising of Aboriginal culture because of the behaviour of some of the men. The media appeared happy to promote stereotypes, depicting men as violent, abusive and even members of paedophile gangs. Town camps in Alice Springs were labelled as dysfunctional. One government minister criticised Aboriginal people for spending more time grieving than working. Another minister asked: 'Why do we make special efforts for Aboriginal Australians?'

The negative view of Aboriginal culture continued. Voices rose to propose that culture should not form part of Aboriginal education, nor that customary law be taken into account when sentencing. Here was a culture that was deficient and lacking. The evidence was so obvious that there wasn't even a need for dialogue or discussion with Aboriginal people. Once again, the dominant culture knew what was best. 'We have to nourish a greater sense of self-reliance and self-empowerment in indigenous communities', said the Prime Minister. Obviously, cultural values around kinship, communal living and public expressions of grief were outdated for a society that valued individualism and competition, and now enjoyed the privileges that came from being 'white' in this country. Not surprisingly, the government has now moved to dismantle native title legislation in the Northern Territory in favour of individual property rights.



I remember growing up in a Catholic culture and education system that was often described as marginal and deficient. That it supported a whole range of Catholic social and religious values was considered by some to be divisive and even dangerous. However, many of the privileges that we as Catholic people now experience in this country today came from that education system and those values. And it was not just education. Catholics utilised a whole range of social relationships and structures that reinforced culture: from Irish social clubs to the Brothers sporting teams, from the Hibernian society to the Knights of the Southern Cross, from the Medical Guild of St Luke to the Catholic Lawyers Association. Catholic schools and University Colleges gathered, strengthened and guided the passage of young people into mainstream culture. These institutions were believed to support particular Catholic values against a dominant culture, often perceived to be different and sometimes experienced to be hostile.

"DIFFERENCE" AND "AUTONOMY" THEN AND NOW: FOUR DECADES OF CHANGE IN A WESTERN DESERT SOCIETY
 Robert Tonkinson
I begin by acknowledging the Indigenous people in whose ancestral lands we meet today. I also sincerely thank the Northern Territory for sponsoring me with its invitation to be this year's Wentworth Lecture. Bill Stanner with whom I've long corresponded as a great Australian and especially as the historian whose determination and persistence brought to life a national Australian culture for the presentation of Aboriginal studies to Britain. It was a long and tough struggle, one that you will eventually be able to learn much more about when Jacques Carbet completes his current research.
 My talk revolves around two interrelated themes: the status of cultural difference and the exercise of autonomy, and concerns the Martu.

Hence, I found it refreshing to recently hear the words of someone who has lived at that interface of Aboriginal culture and difference over many years. In June, Professor Robert Tonkinson gave the 2006 Wentworth lecture: "'Difference" and "Autonomy" Then and Now: Four Decades of Change in a Western Desert Society'. He provided careful and insightful comments on a relationship he has shared with the Western Desert people of the East Pilbara region of Western Australia over more than four decades. His lecture expanded on this relationship, and how he understood the Martu response to colonisation. While the

desert people could see and accept white people as being different, this attitude had not been reciprocated. 'Difference', he noted, 'is a two-edged concept, which has been employed by whites both to exclude Aboriginal people and to justify their assimilation'.

Not surprisingly, our health minister has felt no anxiety in calling for the introduction of 'a new paternalism'. Whatever the rationalisation, his was to be a paternalism 'based on competence, not on race'. Clearly, he could not see that he was resuming a colonial approach where paternalistic behaviour was race-based and justified by perceived lack and deficiency in the 'other'. Nor did the Minister for Indigenous Affairs realise his own regression into the past when he recently suggested that young Aboriginal people could be 'taken' to the cities to work at our five-star hotels, because that is what tourists wanted to see. The scandal of this idea, that Aboriginal people existed as a spectacle for non-Aboriginal people, never seemed to dawn upon him.

This minister, as revealed by the Channel 9 program on Wadeye, has his own fixed views about what constitutes Aboriginal culture. That young men presently take an interest in heavy metal music did not fit this understanding, nor those underlying reasons that reveal why some young men might take an interest in the dress or mannerisms associated with this particular form of music, as they have for some decades. For the minister, the Wadeye community has become a test, not just about his ability to effect social change and improve life for the people there, but also it has become a test of his narrow and outmoded views of culture. As his flying visit frustrated the local people, it became obvious that his intention was to lecture and bully, as if the solutions were as obvious to him as the people were obtuse. I would be surprised if anything much improves under these conditions.



Forced assimilation has not worked here nor elsewhere in the past. Partly, this is because those of us in power generally don't appreciate how resilient and resistant Aboriginal people can be. Nor do we seem to understand that some values are prized and considered by Aboriginal people to hold more life and vitality than many of our own. Culture, whether it be Aboriginal or Catholic, has this ability to change but also hold on to what is important and treasured. Without respecting another's culture, and without engaging the positive forces of change within that culture, we risk repeating older and failed forms of colonisation. If we do not engage people and form trusting relationships around the key elements of their life, we will simply miss those critically important opportunities to build on the joy, life and hope that is there.



One final thing. In recent weeks, as the war between Israel and Lebanon has engaged our nation, we have become aware of Australians holding dual passports. In ways that vary across and within families, and even from the same country of origin, people have been seen to belong to another country, apart from Australia.

I can understand that, and I can sympathise with our country reaching out to help them when in need. But I am struck by the irony. We want to be helpful and understanding towards those people who live part, sometimes a significant part, of their lives in another country. We even want to rescue them when their lives are at risk. We are supportive of those who wish to recognise and maintain links with their culture of origin, while also claiming Australian citizenship. At the same time, we seem to be quite unhelpful and less understanding of those whose ancestral roots and culture go back much further than our own.

I wonder if, deep down, Aboriginal people remind us that we have not yet come to fully settle within this land. Part of us wants to live elsewhere. Why else our irritation with the original inhabitants who show no desire to live anywhere but here? Why our desire to change them into images of ourselves? When will we learn that it was by protecting and supporting our own cultural and religious values that we have become so powerful and privileged? When are we going to get over our colonial hangover and allow Aboriginal people to live and express their own values? When are we going to allow difference to be the source of our Australian richness and diversity, not the excuse for fear, control and domination?

Shake, rattle and roll with John Howard

AUSTRALIA

He might be surprised at the description but at the moment he is jiving to the rock lyrics: shake, rattle and roll. The Prime Minister shaking, how? Well he is shaking his head on petrol prices, and says that record fuel prices are not his fault, it's the Saudi oil barons who are to blame.

But there is also a little bit of shaking in his wrists. When Mr Howard delivered a Ministerial statement to Parliament on Monday last week, a weird parliamentary manoeuvre for that time in cycle of the sitting, he was quite nervous.

Where is the enormous confidence of a man in his tenth year of office with a comfortable majority? He grabbed the lectern at the dispatch box a bit too tightly and strove to make eye contact with the cameras as his staff had duly instructed him to. His nervousness in fact flows from his astute political instinct: no matter what the polls say he knows the government is hurting over the pain to families from record petrol prices.

What about the rattle? He reverted to his standard successful strategy if things get tough: rattle the money jar. The policy to offer \$2000 grants to convert old cars to LPG, and \$1000 for new cars, is targeted at making people think the Government will give them a handout to escape the spiralling petrol price cycle. But we punters might find it hard to get our fingers into this money jar with a long wait to book in the conversion and finally get back that Reserve Bank cheque.

And the good news story of the LPG grants program was successfully torpedoed by Labor. (Although I should admit a bias here, as the author who wrote the questions to the poor unsuspecting Minister of State fell into a bear trap in spectacular fashion: pure parliamentary theatre.)



But there are also rattles in the machinery of government. There was the rebellion on the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, the debacle of the Nationals/Liberals aborted merger in Queensland and the dramatic decision to withdraw the migration bill on offshore processing of illegal entrants. The Howard political family wagon is not cruising smoothly, but rattling a lot with an engine not quite in tune.

Yet we should not underestimate the man. Part of his ongoing success is that he also knows when to roll. The migration decision showed that he will take the body blow to move on to the next issue. On the surface, it appears the loss might hurt his standing as he invested a fair amount of political capital in the bill. There is another hypothesis: maybe he always intended to roll on this one. Perhaps he knew the bill was a stretch and might in the end go down. By pushing it hard, he has something to show the Indonesian President after the outrage over the West

Papuan asylum seeker decision. But when the political opposition heated up he showed his pragmatism and withdrew it. In the end this might have been a fight it was safer to lose.



The decision to allow a free vote on therapeutic cloning is another example that Howard knows when to roll. The social conservatives do not have the numbers in the Liberal party room. The party room could have demanded the conscience vote itself, so why not make a virtue of necessity. Although this latest roll may be good politics for Howard, it means that the cross-party faction of ethical utilitarians are likely to win the day. Howard's pragmatism here will open the door to a change that means human embryos (human beings) are created to be killed in a medical laboratory.

Immigration amendments rejection a win for human rights

AUSTRALIA

The decision by the Government to withdraw its amendments to the Immigration Act marks an important stage in the rehabilitation of Australia's record, and international reputation, on human rights. This has been a remarkable battle that has crossed the partisan lines of politics. Members of both major parties have lobbied from within, working with a significant people's movement that has mobilised to change broader public opinion. Given the political climate in the 2001 federal election, the turn around is truly remarkable.



However, it is important to realise that this latest victory simply maintains the status quo. Asylum seekers remain on Nauru, indeed eight more people have been sent to the island nation for processing in the past week. The withdrawal of the latest Bill ensures the gains won by dissident backbenchers last year remain in place. The Pacific Solution (or Pacific Strategy as the Government calls it), the system of processing asylum seekers who do not reach the mainland on other countries, remains in place.

This system is not sustainable, nor defensible. Findings released last week by the Edmund Rice Centre demonstrate the very grave problems associated with the Pacific Solution, and the need for Australia to take a more proactive role in monitoring the fate of those asylum seekers we turn away.

The Centre's research has identified nine asylum seekers and three children of asylum seekers who have been killed on their return to Afghanistan. While visiting Afghanistan we were able to speak directly to two of the families of asylum seekers who have since been killed, and to two other asylum seekers whose children had been killed in attacks on their homes.

One afternoon in Kabul we met with the fathers who had been returned from Nauru whose children were killed. Abdul spent 16 months on Nauru and was the son of a Minister in the Najibullah Government. He was initially accepted as a refugee on Christmas Island only to have that offer rescinded after the arrival of the Tampa. He told authorities on Nauru that he was regarded as a communist in Afghanistan and that he had made a love marriage across religious lines. He said if he went back he and his family would be targeted. He was nevertheless returned and three months later a bomb was placed under his house. His nine year old daughter Yolanda was killed and his mother permanently brain damaged. Six weeks later his other child Rona, aged 6, also died as a result of the bombing. Newspaper reports verify the bombing.



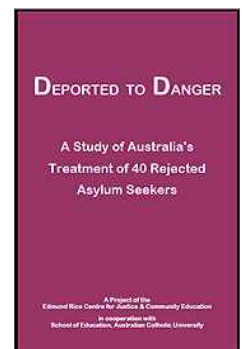
In addition to interviewing asylum seekers and their families about their experiences, our team also did background document research. We identified newspaper reports of attacks on those killed. We also did other background checks to verify that the stories we were being told were credible. We met with NGO's, international agencies and church and health professionals with over 30 years experience on the ground. Moreover, the lead researcher on this project for the ERC was awarded an Order of Australia by the Government in 2004 for her service to the nation in the field of research.

Sadly, we continue to be shocked by what our findings reveal. They demonstrate a profound failure of our systems for assessing asylum claims. The people who were killed on their return to Afghanistan were sent back from Nauru. They returned after spending months or years in detention on that island. The Government claims these people went back voluntarily, with a cash payment of \$2,000. The stories detailed by asylum seekers in Afghanistan, and those from Nauru who were later found to be refugees and allowed to stay in Australia, are very different.

Even more disturbing, for those that did not give in to the pressure to return, and did stay in the camps, most were eventually found to be refugees, after having been rejected two or three times. We now also know that many of those sent back, went back to the very persecution they had feared. What this demonstrates is that the process for determining asylum claims on Nauru does not work. It runs the risk of sending genuine refugees back to the very situations they fled and for which they claimed asylum.

Nauru does not work because it is outside the system of checks and balances that ordinarily make the system work. While the Government claims that asylum seekers abuse the right to legal appeals, the evidence suggests that the high rate of appeals is a direct result of initial determinations being systematically flawed. Time after time, cases coming before the Refugee Review Tribunal and the courts turn up instances of injustice. One might even speculate that there is a culture of initially refusing virtually all claims, and a lack of understanding of the complexity of the political contexts people are fleeing from.

Now that the parliament has shown that it is no longer willing to play politics with these people's lives there is an opportunity for a genuine and mature debate. The policy of off shore processing, where Australia places people outside its legal system, beyond the reach of our courts, cannot continue. Those who fled from the Taliban are not, and were not, the Taliban. The absurdity of the Government's position was to deliberately suggest that those fleeing from terror were suspected terrorists. This has been proven to be untrue. It has led to people with genuine fears being sent back, and it has seen those very fears realized. This is a life or death issue. A debate that treats the issue with the maturity and gravity it deserves



is long overdue.

For the full text of this article, click [here](#).

Social message from knight in shiny overalls

ARTS



Australian film has had its share of working class icons. One of our most famous exports, *Crocodile Dundee*, although an outback legend, was essentially a working class bloke. And Darryl Kerrigan, Michael Caton's character in *The Castle*, is another whose good Aussie blokeisms like 'How's the serenity?' entered the vernacular.

'Kenny Smyth', from the recently released feature film *Kenny*, is the latest blue collar, purple heart hero to hit Australia's big screen. Shane Jacobson plays Kenny, a 38-year-old plumber who installs portaloos and throws a mean left hook (but only in self-defence). A career comic, Shane is, with his brother Clayton, one half of the team that produced, shot and directed *Kenny*.

While *The Castle* had Australians talking about moving the Commodore to get to the Kingswood, Kenny Smyth's sayings might take a bit longer to enter common parlance. Take for example his thoughts on divorce proceedings:

'I reckon we need to cut out the middle-man. Just find someone you hate and give her a house.'

Whether it's sticking his head into a poo tank and remarking that it's a smell set to outlast religion, or fishing an unappreciative woman's engagement ring from the top of a dung heap, Kenny is the archetypal down-to-earth tradesman, always there with a helping hand outstretched and some hard-won advice.

While sometimes laugh-out-loud funny, *Kenny* also has a strong social critique. The movie is dedicated to those who do menial jobs and are often overlooked—and even sometimes scorned by their fellow Australians—as a consequence. During the speeches at the conclusion of the film's pre-release cast and crew screening, the Jacobson brothers called for a group of people in the third row to stand up and take a bow. Reluctantly, they responded and Shane announced that these guys, the Splashdown staff, were the real heroes and that they would be back at it for real tomorrow morning.

It would be interesting to get a sense of how Shane became Kenny—to find out what he makes of Kenny for representing underpaid and under-appreciated Australian workers. But in a clever marketing ploy in the lead up to the film's general release—a ploy that publicist Deb Fryers said had been particularly effective in country Australia—the media can't get Shane's opinions. We can only get Kenny's. And, to use the character's vernacular, the boy's not short of a word.



He agrees when I put it to him that some politicians use the word 'battler' these days and shortchange the real ones. 'I'm not a very politically minded person, the only time I've been called a 'PM' is when I was called a "poo meister",' he says through his characteristic speech impediment. 'But I think you're right. Some people call small business people 'battlers', but what I call battlers are the women out there who are raising four kids on their own. If you go back generations, you had mothers who had their husbands and two of their sons at war while still raising two young kids. They were the battlers in my book.'



Current day Aussie farmers are also big stories in Kenny's book. They love *Kenny* in the bush, flocking to preview screenings. In fact, the film had its world premiere in a country town. Kenny was raised on a farm (he thought his Dad could lift tractors) and he brings his country wisdom and affability to the city. And though he was left with no choice one night but to pour a hoseful of poo into a rich bloke's sports car, Kenny sees himself as a man of peace. Just a bloke trying to get along with his mates. How it should be, he reckons, when it comes to workplace relations. 'It's about camaraderie. No secret,' Kenny says. 'The men at Gallipoli, they jumped out of a trench to their own deaths alongside guys... They didn't want to let their mates down. It's the same at work or in a family: You've got to be able to run out of the trenches and fight for them if you really believe in them. When the chips are down that's the day to tally up the votes.'

When the chips are down, when the poo is flung at the fan, Kenny—a knight in shiny overalls—will be there to clean it up.

Shifting sands in the online music marketplace

MEDIA

The video peer sharing network [YouTube](#) last week announced plans to allow its millions of users to download every music video ever made, free. YouTube's download service is bad news for Apple's successful iTunes site, which charges users \$3.39 to download videos to their iPods.



The rise of the internet has caused a revolution in the music industry. Sampling and purchase of music, the focal point of youth culture, has progressively shifted to the internet.

File-sharing programs like [Napster](#) and the Australian-based [Kazaa](#) allowed users to freely share their copies of copyrighted music without regard to rights holders. Court cases have seen these free services closed down.

The popularity of the MP3 file and Apple's now ubiquitous [iPod](#) has legitimised the Internet as a major source of music. Much of today's output is purchased and downloaded from the Internet from large music companies including Apple's own iTunes. Each of these sites allows the visitor to search by music genre, artist or song.

The physical music store is in serious decline as people buy and download online.

The internet is also used today as both a promotional and a distribution method for music. [MySpace](#), the youth social networking phenomenon, is providing the vehicle for many young wannabe and established artists to promote their songs.



Established international Australian rock group Jet used [MySpace Australia](#) to promote a 'secret' gig to their loyal fans just before the [ARIA Awards](#), which were held in Melbourne last week. Visitors to the music section of MySpace Australia were invited to a suburban Melbourne hotel.

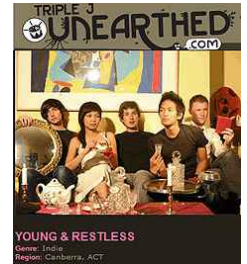
Within the Australian music section of MySpace, many established bands such as Perth's Eskimo Joe also have sites with music available to stream and publicity about forthcoming tours and concerts. The site also offers many promotional special features such as the ability to exclusively listen to a track 'Colour of a Carnival' from Australian artist [Kasey Chambers'](#) new album 'Carnival' prior to its commercial launch on 19 August.

Based around the English-Welsh border is a teenage band [Syren for Life](#), which is writing and recording well regarded, listenable music. Aged between 14 and 17, and all attending a school in Monmouth in Wales, Syren for Life has a fascinating website on MySpace. A very slick song with popular resonance titled 'A Mourn for the Lost' can be played and downloaded from MySpace. The band is currently

recording a four track EP which no doubt will be available from MySpace in the near future.

But, who will find them amidst the many musicians looking for their big break?

Triple J in Australia has recently relaunched [Unearthed](#) as a massive site for music lovers to find new and unsigned artists who are encouraged to upload their songs. Uearthed has moved on from its origins in July 1995. Then it was a region by region competition for musicians and bands to send in demo tapes and CDs. Many existing big names in the Australian music industry such as Missy Higgins, Killing Heidi and Grinspoon started by being 'unearthed' and played on Triple J.



Uearthed has now morphed into a sophisticated website for musicians to upload songs. For lovers of music, there is a wealth of talent sorted by genre. Artists are encouraged to upload information about themselves. While there are thousands of songs already uploaded a couple of weeks since launch, only a handful have been played on Triple J. The music is described as 'fresh' with a range of genre on offer, from dance and punk to roots.



In terms of genre and music sound, a gateway into the new music of another country can be found with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's [New Music Canada](#) and [Roots Music Canada](#) , which are two specialised music services for new Canadian musicians to showcase their material, hopefully get spotted and played on the CBC's domestic radio stations. They are also used by the CBC's internet radio service, [Radio 3](#) , which is devoted to new music in Canada. Podcasts and blogs are also featured. Podcasts, streaming of audio and other additional information for music devotees can also be found on the Australian equivalent, the ABC's [Dig](#) music services, which include the three Dig internet radio streaming stations featuring jazz, country and many other genre not prominently featured on radio stations in Australia.

Music is now everywhere on the internet, allowing music lovers everywhere access to not just the commercial, popular and contemporary tracks that were previously on sale at the local 'record store', but the ability to tap into music being made anywhere.

Deep truths revealed with deceptive simplicity

BOOK REVIEW

Swallow the Air, by Tara June Winch. Published by University of Queensland Press in 2006. ISBN 0702235210, RRP \$28.

Authors reading their works before an audience can usually anticipate a couple of questions. They will likely be asked whether their characters are based on real people and whether the events in the plot are autobiographical.

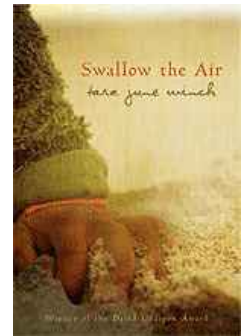
These questions are somewhat demeaning because they imply that the writer's creativity is severely constrained. There are limits to the author's imagination, and so older readers might wonder whether a young writer can adequately represent people and times that they have not experienced personally. On the other hand, the existence of the historical romance genre suggests that readers sometimes happily relax their scepticism.

Cross cultural creativity may be another matter, and some Australian critics appear to be determined to spot the next Demidenko. While critics might legitimately feel obliged to expose frauds, it would be limiting if not absurd to expect writers to establish some special authority to create characters. Recently, a reviewer in a newspaper expressed admiration for the courage of a middle aged white male author writing about the thoughts of a young indigenous woman. This was fair comment, but it reminds the reader that the current critical paradigm has some odd priorities. In fact, there is no guarantee that one middle-aged white male can realistically reproduce the mind of another, and no one fictional character should be considered as a prototype for every young indigenous woman.

Tara June Winch has no such problems, and neither will most of her readers. The stories in Winch's *Swallow the Air* are so personal that readers might wonder whether anything within is merely imaginative. Sometimes, it seems possible that such a young writer could have experienced the life extremes that Winch describes so vividly in her first person stories. Sometimes, you wish it were not so, because the mature reflections in this volume are so often sad, tragic and painful. In 'Territory' for example, narrator May Gibson fondly remembers her father fixing her mother's bike. 'He looks over to me and smiles. Perfect.' But then, watching a bare knuckle fight she remembers how her mother was 'a beaten person'.

'Mum's stories changed when he left. She became paranoid and afraid of a world that existed only in her head. Who was going to beat her mind?'

Her mother bottled it up 'until one day all those silent screams and tears came at once. And with such force that they took her away.'



This collection contains twenty stories, each of which demands admiration. Most of us would be proud to write even one as good. The stories are bound together sequentially as May's experiences and it is possible to think of them as a novel. Returning from the Territory, May goes to 'The Block' where life is intense.

'Growing up in the bloody Gong was nothing compared to a year living in the Block. I went in like a buttery cake and came out like a shotgun or a Monaro or a gaol sentence. Came out like a steel wall adorned in black tar.'



If anything stops you reading these stories at one sitting it will be their intensity. It is often difficult to cope with the deep truths they state in such deceptive simplicity. These stories are not just for indigenous people, nor even for those readers who have great empathy with indigenous people and their precarious social position. There are themes here of familial love, of curiosity about one's ancestry, of the quest for personal growth, of the gaining of knowledge about people and society, of the ways that we should relate to the environment, and of the despair felt when these yearnings are frustrated. These are universal and essential elements of the human condition.

While there is power in the way that Winch evinces such serious themes, humour is never far below the surface. Sometimes it erupts, free of self-consciousness, in that feast of enthusiasm that has assisted the survival of Australia's indigenous peoples despite the almost overwhelming pressures on their lives and culture. In 'Grab', Aunty wins the opportunity to fill shopping trolleys free for three minutes. Determined that they will have a turkey for Christmas, Aunty manages to fill three trolleys, two with frozen food. 'Aunty leant over the barricades to Billy and me to give us a big hug, clapping her hands together and laughing. We don't even own a bloody freezer.'

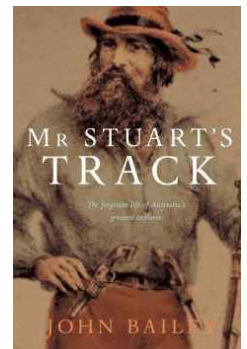
Reading Tara June Winch's *Swallow the Air*, expect to feel the warmth of sand between your toes, taste the ocean's salty water, smell the bushfires above the Illawarra scarp, breathe the passing air as a child pedals its bike and to cringe at the mould and desolation in the drug addict's squat. Most of all, you will marvel at how this young indigenous woman makes you remember the feelings of your home, your family, your losses and regrets, and yet makes you determined to continue. This is powerful prose indeed.

Explorer's physical and emotional torture

BOOK REVIEW

Mr Stuart's Track, by John Bailey. Published by Pan Macmillan in 2006. ISBN: 1 40503 730 3. RRP \$32.95, [website](#)

Most Australians carry a basic understanding of the challenging exploration of Australia by European settlers—characters like Burke and Wills live on in our minds for decades after we learn about them in our history lessons. John Bailey's new book, *Mr Stuart's Track*, both shatters and affirms the myths of our history and brings the harsh realities of the exploration of Australia to life. As an Australian, I had known that stories like this one existed somewhere—to read such a story in its detail and scope is delightful.



The subject of Bailey's book is John McDouall Stuart, a Scottish man with few career options who sailed to Adelaide in 1838 in search of a new life as a surveyor. He would eventually go on to cross the continent and in doing so reveal more of central Australia to the Europeans, than any other explorer.

Stuart is not a conventional hero. He was a self-destructive alcoholic and a lonesome man who knew nothing of social nicety or rhetorical political speech. Like many settlers in the new land, Stuart did not conform to the traditional values of English society, and when finished wandering the continent, he was quickly forgotten by those in power and left to an anonymous demise. The complexity of this imperfect character provides a perfect biographical subject of Australian history.

In the Australian bush Stuart found redemption and forged a new purpose for his life. His story is uniquely Australian. He was a 'working man' and a 'battler' who shamed richer gentleman explorers through his ability to achieve what they could not, with fewer resources. He did not seek acclaim, riches or political appointment but set out to explore the continent because of an undeniable personal obsession. In his courage, independence, strength and self-sacrifice, Stuart is a mythic Australian hero.

The book underlines the danger of the harsh Australian landscape; it breathes haunting images of the physical and emotional torture of exploring the centre of Australia. The men battle excruciating pain while walking 40, 50, sometimes 60km each day; once, fuelled by desperate thirst, a horse is killed in order to drink its blood. Stuart describes his own declining health and we read of a mouth so swollen with blisters there was no room for the tongue, stale breath that smelt like a rotting corpse and the bruised body racked with scurvy and leaking blood vessels. This is the painful experience of life in the bush, to which Stuart and his colleagues

returned time and again with open eyes.

While it is centred on the personal story of Stuart, Bailey's book is broad in its historical scope. Importantly, it recognises that this era could not be written about without exploring the conflict between the Aborigines and European settlers. Here Bailey presents both perspectives: the danger and threat felt by the explorers, and the anger and confusion experienced by the traditional inhabitants of the land. The newly arrived white man disrespected sacred sites, stole water without trade and slaughtered friends and family. Bailey produces documents and descriptions which illustrate the racist, uncompromising and aggressive stance adopted by the settlers from the outset. He is also occasionally critical of Stuart's own dubious accounts of his run-ins with the Aborigines.

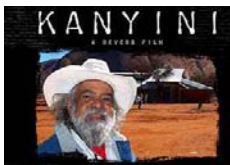
While he generally maintains a critical historical voice, Bailey is also a writer with considerable narrative skill—his book is fascinating and accessible. Recreated conversations based on Bailey's research are particularly illuminating for the characters and the challenges they faced. While the book covers a range of interesting historical subjects and entertaining anecdotes, Mr Stuart's track is essentially a tale of exploration in a new and mysterious land—a great Australian story.

Heartfelt account of life in Mutijulu

FILM REVIEW

Kanyini, Running Time: 53 minutes, Rating: PG

Director: Melanie Hogan, Starring: Bob Randall, [website](#)



Publicity material for this Australian doco quotes current affairs TV presenter George Negus, who says ‘anyone coming cold to the story of Australia’s indigenous disgrace will no longer be ignorant’. And it’s true: while there is little in the film not on the public record, it is nonetheless a deeply affecting and compelling account, largely because it’s related from—rather than on behalf of—the indigenous perspective.

Hogan initially travelled to Mutitjulu, an Aboriginal community near Uluru, to make an anti petrol-sniffing documentary on behalf of the Mutitjulu Community Health Clinic. Her subject took on greater proportions when she met community leader Bob Randall, a traditional owner of Uluru and former Indigenous Person of the Year. ‘Uncle’ Bob’s insightful and passionate commentary on indigenous Australia’s ‘black’ history quickly became the film’s focus.

This is not a carefully-crafted advocacy doco featuring an impassioned but concisely scripted auteur or celebrity sympathiser. Rather, it is one man’s heartfelt account of the systematic oppression of his people by white colonisers—from the genocide of early colonisation, through the Stolen Generation of the 20th century, up to the present day, where many indigenous Australians suffer extreme poverty, substance addiction and dependence on a seemingly uncaring welfare system.

Uncle Bob’s narration overlays black-and-white archival footage of Aborigines against the backdrop of the Australian outback, and grainy but evocative full-colour images of the central Australian landscape. Aided by this stirring imagery, Bob’s melodious tones draw the viewer deeply into his description of the indigenous concept, *Kanyini*—a holistic sense of ‘connectedness’ that encompasses one’s family, belief system, spirituality and relationship with the land.

His explanation of how white colonisation systematically broke these connections—leaving many Australian Aborigines alienated and marginalised within the land of their ancestors—will be nothing short of a revelation for white Australians who’ve struggled to appreciate the extent to which Aboriginal culture has been undermined.

At 53 minutes, *Kanyini* offers little in the way of solutions to Aboriginal Australia’s current predicament, or how White Australia can make amends for the wrongs of the past. What it does offer is a memorable catalyst to reflection, and the suggestion that by



learning from each other (Bob posits *Kanyini* as an antidote to self-absorbed, consumerist Western culture), we can move towards a more unified Australia. In this respect it is somewhat idealistic, and will most likely find its audience among those who are already sympathetic to the Aboriginal plight.

Screening with *Kanyini* is the short film *Mimi* (PG), directed by indigenous filmmaker Warwick Thornton and starring Sophie Lee, Aaron Pederson and David Gulpilil.

Jesuit premise fails but resilience of humanity proved

FILM REVIEW

49 Up. Running Time: 136 minutes, [website](#)

Director: Michael Apted. Starring: Bruce Balden, Jacqueline Bassett, Symon Basterfield, Andrew Brackfield, John Brisby, Suzanne Dewey, Charles Furneaux.



The entire premise of the *Seven Up* documentary series has been an alleged quote from St Ignatius Loyola, 'give me a boy until he is seven, and I will give you the man.' The problem with this premise is that an exhaustive study of St Ignatius' vast writings reveals he never wrote it. Much more importantly, as this fascinating film series develops, the principle is found to be increasingly untrue.

Shot over 42 years now, *49 Up* looks at how life is developing for 12 of the original 14 children whose parents or guardians agreed for them to be part of the first film in 1964. The two who have opted out did so many years ago. One is not mentioned at all now, the other's preference not to be part of it continues to be noted.

The stories of the remaining 12 people make for moving and fascinating cinema. We meet Neil who is managing his mental illness in the most courageous of ways. Tony, who wanted to be a jockey, is now a grandfather. Suzy, who wanted a nanny to raise her children, is a shy but happy mother. Symon who lived in a Barnardo home as a child is the father of six, and looking to be a foster father as well. Symon's boyhood friend Paul, who emigrated to Australia, has been through a dark night of the soul, but has emerged to a more peaceful place.

Nick, the lad from the Yorkshire dales, now a professor of nuclear physics in the USA, has had to rethink his future. Andrew who, at seven, liked reading *The Times*, still does. John who liked reading *The Observer* and *The Times* rightly continues to use the series to promote his humanitarian foundation in Bulgaria. Bruce, who was the most earnest of boys, is a relaxed parent of small children. And the last seven years have presented significant challenges for the original Eastend trio of Jackie, Lynn and Susan.



The biggest difference between *42 Up* and *49 Up* is how much more assertive these adults are about the intrusions this film series has made into their lives, and of director Michael Apted's intentions in the portraits of them he has drawn. It is to his great credit that he left some of these tense exchanges in the final cut of the film.

It does not matter if you have not seen any of the previous films. Apted gives

very good summaries of the previous highlights in each story.

49 Up may fail to prove that by seven years of age one's whole life is programmed. But what it does provide is a vivid scrapbook, as Nick calls it, of how resilient humanity can be.

Primary Colours

POETRY

Gold crayons for Christ's hair,
red for the fires of Hell—so Father O'Malley told us.
He was as tall as the policeman
who rode a black motorbike
and manned the crosswalk on Canning Highway,
where at least one kid every few years was hit.
The boy Walker survived, and then only came to sports days,
where he crouched under the judges' table, dribbling.
The rest of us ran in the hundred yard sprint,
for ribbons of red, blue, gold.
Gold, like the wild oat seeds dried sharp into perfect darts,
that stuck so well to the grey of school jumpers.
And for those waiting in line at the boys and girls taps,
the water drummed into concrete troughs—a tired silver,
like the two shilling piece ready every Friday,
for The Man From the Wales, who pressed a black stamp
firmly between the lines,
in that week's Book of Good Habits.

From the Welcome Mat

POETRY

A mother and son cram the threshold morning
with other children dressed for summer. Drone
of peak hour tails off four blocks away from
kindergarten, a world in miniature. There are
tremblers, gigglers, bolters and strutters. All
bar one make their way to available rectangles:
tables, books, puzzles, charts, paper on easels.
Movers get paintbrushes; shakers get jigsaws.
He stands on the welcome mat, not letting go
her hand. His foot scratches the back of his
other knee, one-legged stork unsure of delivery.
A car horn toots, he startles and turns behind.
Her grip tightens. She crouches down.
The teacher looks over but cannot hear what
the mother is saying. There is the slow nod
of a small head. 'Play' is pressed and music
begins. Sandals clack the shiny floorboards.
The teacher takes his other hand. He is a 'Y'
stretched between them. Past and future hanging
on the present. She who taught him first lets go.