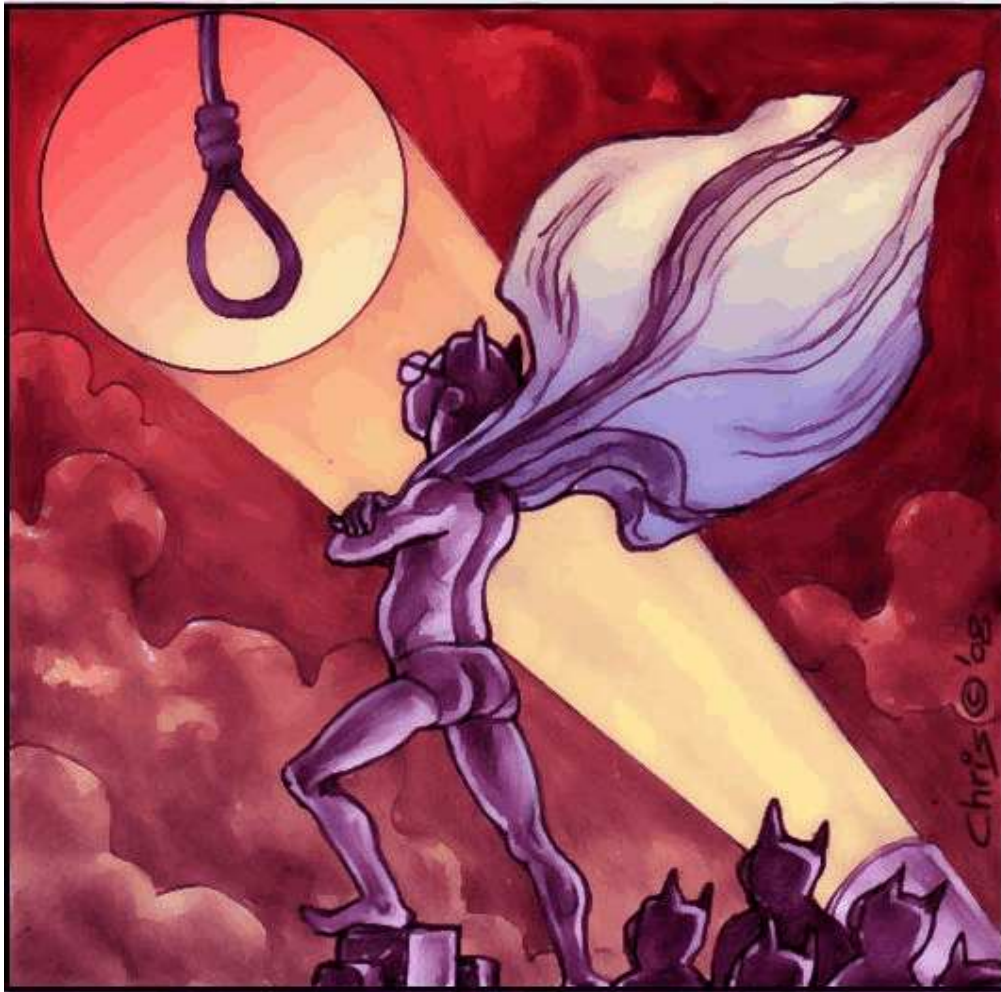


Book of the week: Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking <i>John Bartlett</i>	1
Welcome workers from 'bipolar' Pacific <i>Jonathan Ritchie</i>	3
Religious devotion meets popular culture <i>Andrew Hamilton</i>	5
Film of the week: Not Quite Hollywood <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	7
'Agnostic' priest's social inclusion scepticism <i>Frank Brennan</i>	9
Killing Lady Bountiful <i>Maddy Oliver</i>	11
The feminist eunuch <i>Various</i>	15
The provocative folly of Poland missile defence <i>Tony Kevin</i>	20
Matters of life and deaf <i>Gillian Bouras</i>	22
Dignity the question for 'dirt poor' islanders <i>Michael Mullins</i>	25
Protesters not to blame for Viet vets neglect <i>Tony Smith</i>	27
Book of the week: Bone by Bone <i>Jen Vuk</i>	29
Film of the week: Son of a Lion, Persepolis <i>Tim Kroenert</i>	31
Suited polluters assess climate change risk <i>Les Coleman</i>	33
Life after politics is often hollow <i>John Warhurst</i>	35
Books survive the orgasm of closure <i>Brian Matthews</i>	37
Mistakes make catchy riffs <i>Kevin Gillam</i>	39
US-backed Georgia pokes the Russian bear <i>Tony Kevin</i>	41
Aid worker deaths challenge NGO assistance model <i>Michael Mullins</i>	43
Amrozi: What would Batman do <i>Paul Mitchell</i>	45



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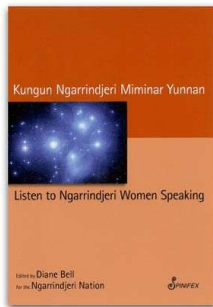
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Book of the week

BOOK FORUM

John Bartlett



Bell, Diane (ed.), *Kungun Ngarrindjeri Mimirar Yunnan (Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking)*. Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2008, RRP \$34.95, ISBN 9781876756697

In 2003 Elders of the Ngarrindjeri Nation, representing the indigenous people of the Lower Murray, the Lakes and the Coorong, presented 'the Proclamation of Ngarrindjeri Dominion' to the then South Australian Governor, emphasising that they had always occupied their traditional lands and never ceded or sold these lands or waters to others.

This same spirit of defiance is evident in *Kungun Ngarrindjeri Mimirar Yunnan (Listen to Ngarrindjeri Women Speaking)*, which chronicles the stories and aspirations of powerful Ngarrindjeri women.

The proclamation was intended to remind the government of the original Letters Patent of 1836 issued to Governor Hindmarsh in London by the Crown of the United Kingdom, which expressly provided for the rights of the indigenous inhabitants. In this book there is a continuity of that same spirit of feisty resistance which has survived from those earlier times until the present.

This link to the past is symbolised too by the circular weaving of baskets and mats which is still a feature of Ngarrindjeri enterprise. 'The past constitutes who we are today' is a recurring theme in this book and ancient stories help to weave together a people separated by historical, non-indigenous interventions.

From its opening prologue *Kungun Ngarrindjeri Mimirar Yunnan* adopts a 'take-no-prisoners' attitude as its authors grapple with a number of contemporary issues. These are women who 'have had enough of this system of things' and are 'tired of always having to explain our existence and to prove our Aboriginality'.

Although the book does contain traditional stories handed down from earlier generations (such as the 'Story of the Seven Sisters'), this 'army of motherhood' chooses to confront current issues like the Northern Territory Intervention, care for land (in the face of impending catastrophe in the Lower Murray), economic development and appropriate methods of governance.

The book was fashioned through a painstaking series of workshops, facilitated by editor and anthropologist Diane Bell, and this process reveals an extraordinary spirit of cooperation. Conversations and negotiations took seven months, with young, old, female and male

Ngarrindjeri contributing.

The launch took place in Murray Bridge, directly opposite the cemetery where my great-grandparents are buried. My great-grandfather in the 19th century felled trees and cut stone in quarries on Ngarrindjeri land to supply the nearby expanding city of Adelaide. It was inspiring to see the Ngarrindjeri women on the other side of the road surviving, strong, determined and still 'on the warpath'.

Welcome workers from 'bipolar' Pacific

MULTICULTURALISM

Jonathan Ritchie

Before the Australian Government's Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme was even formally announced, it had attracted comments in Australia that ranged from carping to congratulatory.

The inclusion of Papua New Guinea, in particular, has drawn attention to questions of governance, education, health and other social indicators in that country.



For example, the latest report in the Centre for Independent Studies' Issues Analysis series, *The Bipolar Pacific* (No. 98, by Helen Hughes and Gaurav Sodhi), paints a particularly dismal picture, and concludes that 'guest worker schemes' — even those far more comprehensive than the Pilot Scheme currently envisages — 'would not help the employment problems' in PNG and the other countries included.

The scheme's focus has also been questioned by Opposition Leader Dr Brendan Nelson, who recently explained to Neil Mitchell on radio 3AW his concern about 'health checks, security checks, compliance — how do we make sure that they're going to go back?'.

The guest worker issue thus provides yet another demonstration of the way that Papua New Guinea, and more broadly the Pacific, intrudes into political discourse in this country.

Separating rhetoric from reality, however, we have little idea of the ways that ordinary people in Papua New Guinea live their lives. Our understanding is shaped by catchwords and phrases such as 'raskols', 'corruption', and 'arc of instability'. We ignore, if we ever learned it, the history we have shared with the people of Papua New Guinea; a history about which, conversely, many Papua New Guineans are profoundly familiar.

Many would also agree that the small numbers of people to be included in the pilot scheme will make only an insignificant difference to the problems of under- and unemployment with which they are faced. But they see the symbolism of being, or not being, included in schemes of this sort and they warmly applaud the Australian Government's proposal to rule them in.

Earlier this month I visited Port Moresby to attend the Waigani Seminar held at the University of Papua New Guinea. This year's seminar is the first since 1997, and its welcome return to the country's intellectual public life was widely applauded.

Its theme was 'Living History and Evolving Democracy' and, along with the two-day symposium that preceded it on books and writing, 'Book2Buk', it drew an impressive array of speakers. It received much attention in the Papua New Guinean media and attracted crowds

of interested and enthusiastic attendees.

One of these was a young man, a graduate of the Pacific Adventist University, who told me over lunch one day of his concern that the Australian Prime Minister would leave Papua New Guinea off the list of participating countries.

‘Mr Rudd,’ he said, ‘Papua New Guineans are good workers. There is no need to worry that we won’t return home at the end of our stay in Australia — all Papua New Guineans have land and want to return to it!’

His comments were repeated, in one form or another, by many of the people I met during the seminar, who know far more about Australia than we Australians do about their country.

In Port Moresby, Papua New Guineans see Australian television, read Australian newspapers, and play Australian sports like rugby league and increasingly AFL. They throw themselves behind their Olympic athletes like the butterfly swimmer Ryan Pini, but share an enthusiasm for the Australian competitors who they see so much of.

They have a deep and abiding regard for Australia, a knowledge of the shared history we have, and a very understandable desire to make the best of their situation.

They are not, by and large, raskols (any more than Australians are members of criminal gangs). They are greatly concerned about the spread of HIV-AIDS and are doing something about it, especially the young educated people. They aspire to material wellbeing and a good standard of living. They want to get on with their great and powerful neighbour to the south.

The Government’s decision to implement the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme will be welcomed by Papua New Guineans, and others in the region, for the strong message it sends.

The problems and challenges faced in the Pacific, as outlined most recently by Professor Hughes and Mr Sodhi, are profound, with obvious implications for Australia, which has embarked on a policy of re-engagement with the region on the security, aid, and diplomatic fronts.

The introduction of the guest worker scheme sends a message to the Pacific of trust and respect and for this reason alone, it should be supported.

Religious devotion meets popular culture

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



Popular culture does some aspects of Catholicism reasonably well. Other aspects it does badly, none worse than Catholic devotional practice.

Soapies treat religious devotion as a humorous cultural appendage or depict it with dreadful solemnity. People praying express extraordinary anguish, extraordinary concentration or extraordinary connection with the image of Jesus or Mary before which they pray. What people experience as a normal and everyday part of their imaginative life is played as melodrama.

The awkwardness in handling devotions may be symptomatic of a broader cultural suspicion of a rich imaginative life. The attitude to people whose inner life and whose kitchen wall are decorated with images of saints is similar to the take on people who speak to themselves or are hooked on soapies.

If we allow the characters of *Neighbours* or *The Bill* to colonise our minds, if we are interested in their relationships and treasure memorabilia associated with them, even more if we engage them in inner dialogue, we may be seen as harmless, but will surely be regarded as somewhat lacking. A bit aesthetically and culturally dim. We will be assigned to a primitive stage of cultural development.

People whose religious imagination expresses itself in exuberant devotional practices are seen in the same way.

These attitudes are partly rooted in religious history. All the Abrahamic religions have had problems with religious images. In the Christian churches the suspicion that images will lead people to worship the world rather than its maker have led periodically to the destruction of images.

The controversy over religious images in the Reformation influenced a more general suspicion of devotional display even among those who had moved far from religious faith.

Religious traditions have also been ambivalent about the imagination. Some Buddhist and Christian theorists have seen the imagination as an obstacle to deep contemplation. Because God and ultimate reality lie beyond imagining, contemplation also needs to find a still place beyond imagination. Devotions that are fed by the imagination are an early stage in prayer that we are invited to transcend. The imagination belongs to popular religion; a deeper and more austere form of faith may lead us into the mystery of God.

These beliefs feed an unspoken prejudice that devotions nourished by a lively imagination

suit simple and uneducated people, whereas the better educated will arrive at a better thought-out, rational faith that will be more soberly expressed.

In the Catholic and Orthodox churches this presumption has been resisted. It sits uneasily with the central Christian belief that the Son of God has taken visible and tangible form in Jesus Christ.

If God's plan involves becoming accessible to the visual imagination, it is hard to find grounds for depreciating its role in faith. Although they recognise that there are many forms of prayer, Catholics have generally resisted the conclusion that prayer without images is systematically superior to prayer that involves the imagination.

Within the Catholic view of faith, too, the imagination plays a central role. It is the chapel where faith is married to contemporary events, images, music, words and gestures. Football and petty ailments can be brought into the conversation with God.

The stories of the Gospels and their characters are heard, not as stories of long ago, but as stories for today. Mary can wear make-up, the disciples can wear Socceroo colours, the angels can sing like Missy Higgins, and the condemned Jesus can wear Muslim dress.

Devotion makes faith contemporary. Ironically, one reason why devotion sometimes gets bad press is that there is necessarily a time gap between the devotional images found in churches and the way in which people express their faith through images.

Mary, for example, is usually represented in devotional art through a dress and a demeanour that reflect the place of women in past cultures. This iconography is then taken to be normative. There may be fierce resistance to images that depict Mary in the dress and body language characteristic of modern society.

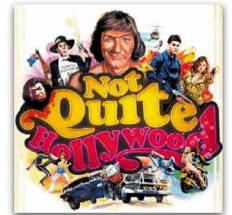
Devotion is inherently anarchic. Within Catholicism it is important because it resists the freezing of faith in a narrow rational ice tray.

Film of the week: Not Quite Hollywood

FILM FORUM

Tim Kroenert

Not Quite Hollywood: 103 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Mark Hartley. Starring: Brian Trenchard-Smith, Russel Mulcahy, Quentin Tarantino, Philip Adams, Barry Humphries et al.



During the 1970s, Australian cinema experienced what many now regard as its golden age. Filmmakers such as Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*) and Gillian Armstrong (*My Brilliant Career*) were turning out the kind of 'culturally important' films with popular appeal that see a film industry excel on the world stage.

Gleefully scuffing up the flipside of that glittering coin were a raft of filmmakers creating the kind of cinema that was tailor-made for the drive-in set. These were Australia's answer to US and European 'exploitation' movies; low-budget genre flicks that exploit violent, sexualised or other lowbrow content for sheer entertainment value.

The most famous (or infamous) products of the 'Ozploitation' boom include *Mad Max* and *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*. Other notable mentions include the killer pig horror of *Razorback* (think *Jaws* in the outback), the 'nature fights back' thrills of *The Long Weekend*, and the abysmally bad but oh-so-fun antics of *Turkey Shoot* — which has the distinction of being Phillip Adams' least favourite film.

All of these, and many others, are bounced around like thrill-busting piñatas by director Mark Hartley in *Not Quite Hollywood*. Obviously a fan, Hartley crams plenty of excerpted footage into this irreverent but reverential documentary. It's a larrikin celebration of the best of bad Aussie cinema.

The complementary interviews are both plethoric and downright fascinating. Ozploitation brand-name directors Brian Trenchard-Smith and Russel Mulcahy relive their glory days. Cultural commentators Adams and Barry Humphries deride the genre and its proponents. Actors recall the indignity (or otherwise) of getting their kit off for the camera. Crewmembers relate the very real danger of being involved with amateur stunt work.

All marvel at the maverick and pioneering efforts of filmmakers determined to push the envelope despite working with limited resources and against the grain of cultural acceptability.

Quentin Tarantino, himself a great lover of cinema and self-schooled expert on exploitation films, dedicated the Sydney premier of his film *Kill Bill* to Trenchard-Smith. The fact that he features prominently as a *Not Quite Hollywood* talking-head, gushing like a fanboy on sherbert

about his Ozploitation favourites, is a boon for Hartley and a tribute to just how well these filmmakers knew their stuff.

The documentary is exuberantly packaged, frank and unashamedly celebratory. You may not harbour much respect for these decidedly unrespectable films, but *Not Quite Hollywood* is much more than the sum of its parts. It's a solidly crafted account of the Australian film scene at its cheekiest and most outlandish. A must for film buffs and budding cultural critics alike.

'Agnostic' priest's social inclusion scepticism

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



The Rudd Government's Social Inclusion Board has now commenced work. As a citizen who has never worked for government, I come to the topic of 'social inclusion' with an initial suspicion that it could simply be the novel catch-all phrase used by a new government to mimic recent initiatives in New Zealand, the UK and Ireland.

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard's broad panoply of ministerial portfolios — Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations, Education and Social Inclusion — may hold a clue: social inclusion is everything on the social agenda except or complementary to employment, workplace relations, and education.

The government commitment to social inclusion includes giving all Australians the opportunity to secure a job, access services, connect with family, friends, work and their local community, deal with crises, and have their voices heard. These are laudable objectives. But presumably they are to be delivered to the most disadvantaged at some cost to others.

Social inclusion is to be delivered by a new government after more than a decade of non-change. For the first time in three years, the government does not control the Senate. That increases the prospect of deliberative debate in the public square about policy questions.

The new government is also keen to engage with the non-government sector. Those of us from that sector had a sense with the previous government that we were perceived to have little to contribute to real policy formation.

In the area of policy and law, social inclusion will need to be assessed against the backdrop of the ongoing debate about the desirability of a national bill of rights. Recently the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gave an insightful [address](#) at the London School of Economics pointing out that rights and utility are the two concepts that resonate most readily in the public square today.

The problem is that we need concepts to set limits on rights when they interfere with the common good, the public interest or, dare I say it, public morality — the concepts used by the UN when first formulating and limiting human rights 60 years ago. We also need concepts to set limits on utility when it interferes with the dignity of the most vulnerable and the liberty of the most despised in our community.

It may be in this grey area between rights and utility that social inclusion has work to do.

In the legal academy there is presently a great evangelical fervour for bills of rights. This

fervour manifests itself in florid espousals of the virtues of weak statutory bills of rights together with the assurance that one need not be afraid because such bills do not really change anything.

It is a pleasant change for me to be cast in the role of the sceptical agnostic, insisting that the promised parousia of enhanced human rights protection be backed by hard evidence of tangibly different outcomes.

Those of us with a pragmatic, evidentiary approach to the question are now well positioned, given that two of Australia's nine jurisdictions have now enacted such bills of rights with the double assurance that nothing has really changed and that things can now only get better.

It will be interesting to hear an assessment of the socially inclusionary benefits of a bill of rights which provides lawyers and judges with greater access to the realm of policy and service delivery.

There will presumably still be winners and losers under a policy of social inclusion. If we are to show a greater preference for the most disadvantaged, I presume that for every person on the bottom of the social ladder going through the social inclusionary program there will be ten persons slightly higher up who will be neglected.

The work of Professor Tony Vinson on the geographic distribution of social disadvantage in Australia, published by Jesuit Social Services under the title [*Dropping Off the Edge*](#), has been pivotal in assisting the government to articulate its position on social inclusion.

In debating whether social inclusion is to be achieved by giving preference to geographically disadvantaged postcodes rather than to disadvantaged persons regardless of where they live, there will be a need to consider the double political impact. The places of greatest need will be safe Labor seats and thus there will be no short term political advantage in giving them preference, and there will be some flak for such preferential targeting.

When we move from law and policy to program implementation, there is the risk that social inclusion becomes the umbrella for every silo interest to push its barrow.

Provided 'social inclusion' does not become a buzzword to cloud discussion or close down argument about policy development and service delivery, it could be a useful, dignified and rightful means for enhancing the human flourishing and potential of even the most disadvantaged Australians, whether or not we have a bill of rights.

Killing Lady Bountiful

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

Maddy Oliver

A newly-trained volunteer and I chatted with a young Liberian woman who'd been referred to us. Bright young kids lounged on a three-piece suite that almost abutted the TV, alternately watching cartoons and listening in to us. Then, in a pause, the volunteer blurted 'Isn't it marvellous — you've paid off your loan to come to Australia already!'

Our client assumed a neutral expression and transferred her gaze elsewhere. She breathed carefully. Panicked, I plunged into another track; did she need help finding a job, now that she'd finished her training? No, she was okay. I got us out of there fast.

On the way to the car, the volunteer said 'Maybe if we find her a new place, she can improve her housekeeping.' What? The flat was as tidy as a small place with young children can be. I realised our well-heeled volunteer was in culture shock.

I swore it wouldn't happen again. From now on I would tell volunteers to keep their mouths shut during the first meeting. But they were supposed to be making a connection with families they were assigned to help over weeks or months. What was going wrong?

It's difficult to articulate something so subtle. On the face of it, the volunteer was complimenting the client. But her words revealed how little she thought of her. Because the circumstances of the loan were confined to the briefing notes (the client hadn't mentioned it) the volunteer breached the client's privacy by mentioning it.

Even worse, her comment hinted that she assumed the client might be unable or even unwilling to pay debts, or simply that wealthy white ladies are qualified to pass judgement on poor refugees.

Oversensitive? Maybe. But refugees often have to suffer incursions on their privacy and self-respect. They can spot these threats a mile off.

In my mind, I called it the 'Lady Bountiful' effect. The inescapable power differential between the helpers and the helped works insidiously. Naïve volunteers assume that because they know more, families should take their advice. They are hurt and frustrated when families continue to look after their own interests in their own way.

When visiting their personal friends, volunteers wouldn't dream of checking the fridge to be sure there was enough food for the weekend, or insisting their friends enrol in language classes, or knocking on the door for half an hour if they thought their friends were hiding



inside. All these things happened in our service. How could we teach volunteers to behave as guests?

One part of the training that we revised for each intake, hoping to fix the problem, was cross-cultural skills. Cross-cultural skills should lessen the panic-inducing culture shock volunteers can experience in visiting an African or Asian household for the first time.

In middle-class Australian culture, we have fixed ideas about the value of eating vegetables, of children having their own beds, and of 'integrating' into the dominant culture through language, among other things. It can be difficult to let go of these values, and naïve volunteers regard cultural differences as urgent problems.

But 'Australian values' are not on the radar to people trying to find lost family in war zones, or send money back to a camp. There was little we could do in 18 hours' training to prepare volunteers for the flesh-and-blood experience of difference.

Culture shock wore off as volunteers got to know their families personally. Lady Bountiful's influence was more persistent. Lady Bountiful tells us that means justify the ends; that if we think it's good for the family then the family must do it. Moreover, she enjoys helping the family so much that she's sure they can't do without her.

But I came to see we couldn't do worse for families than to undermine their self-determination by either telling them what to do, or doing everything for them. We talked empowerment, but did we walk it?

The ideal of pure charity that Lady Bountiful draws on is powerfully seductive, and our naïve volunteers and I had all signed up for it. Giving to others without thought of return is the best, the highest; sanctioned by major religions. But like all ideals, it is poisonous. It gives you a licence to boss people around.

The seduction of pure charity lies in how it transgresses our social reality of reciprocity. Pure charity transcends grubby commerce and the dreary exchange of gifts at Christmas. We know very well that there's no such thing as a free lunch; and yet, in a perfect world...

But trying to realise the perfect world in this imperfect one can mean that returns won't be recognised, because you're not supposed to be getting any. I wanted to help our volunteers see what they were getting, as a way of avoiding the resentment and burn-out that follows efforts to practise 'pure' charity. And to get Lady Bountiful to butt out as well.

Instead of being paid, volunteers do 'rewarding' work. These intangible rewards are of different kinds. One question was whether we were getting what we hoped for when we offered to do the work. (I include myself because I was so poorly paid that I was practically volunteering.)

When we interviewed candidates for training we asked what they hoped to get out of

volunteering with us. They were surprisingly uninformative for a university-educated crowd. They 'just wanted to help people.'

All the same, the sacrifices involved suggest they have solid motivations they can't articulate. Self-awareness training was the answer, I thought. But I was reluctant to question trainees in a public forum as if it were a murder investigation. Instead, I asked them to write it down and keep it secret, so they could be honest.

Interrogating myself, then, it's obvious why I balked at asking trainees to tell, because my own motives are entirely self-serving. As a teenager I wanted to 'help people'. I had never helped people and knew nothing about it, but I did know that helping people is both feminine and beyond reproach, a rare combination. It's nice to be right, as well as good.

Helping people also promises authority, at least over the unfortunates needing help. And beggars can't be choosers, so I'd be safe from criticism from them, as well.

There might have even been a secret bargain with fate that I could claim help in turn if I needed it; insurance. Most shamefully, my parents don't go in for charitable work, so it was a chance to be better than them. No wonder I never asked myself these dusty questions before.

And working for refugees promises even more 'rewards'. Poor things, fleeing from cruel regimes across the globe. Helping them saves the world by proxy. I could go on, but even this short list shows I got plenty out of my ill-paid job.

These aren't the 'rewards' people mean. But to deny them is to draw the line in the wrong place, so you end up being the one who gives too much, and is therefore within her rights to demand compliance. Lady Bountiful, who wants the credit of giving without thought of return, but can't help counting her sacrifices.

Our experienced volunteers didn't drop clangers that revealed underlying contempt. They made light of their own work, listened calmly and had fun. Their families adored them. But there weren't enough to go around. How could we prepare naïve volunteers for the challenges that faced them?

I had great hopes of a training session where working volunteers came to share their real-life experience with the newbies. I watched the trainees' faces as they listened to a disaster story involving efforts to save a family from themselves. Messy real life. But the trainees were thinking 'That'll never happen to me. I'm not like her.'

But it did, and they were. None of the new training we devised matched experience for a teacher. Our volunteers entered the dark wood, as before. A few weeks after they were placed with their family, they would call to find out why their family didn't trust them or take their advice. Only then could we link their experience with what we'd harped on about in training; setting boundaries, respect for the clients' autonomy and realistic expectations.

We had no choice but to place naïve volunteers with real refugee families and watch them walk the familiar path. In the end, our client families taught volunteers the humility needed to help people and learn new things.

I was ashamed that the poor, the sick and the unlucky were called on to teach the prosperous and seemingly powerful, but maybe that's my own helper's arrogance. I timidly hoped our families enjoyed the role, and weren't tired of a long line of charity workers needing the same lesson.

Ultimately, only face-to-face experience with real families could kill the Lady Bountiful in us — and only after her demise could we count our blessings and continue with the work.

The feminist eunuch

POETRY

Various

Crown of Thorns

Euphorbia spenden

Out from white bricks of the church
at the junction of orange clay
and a neglected border garden
its spines strike
into the blue hot afternoon
and where the leaves fall away
insignificant but showy bracts
of small red flowers
like an irritation of blood spots
on an altogether
almost perfect autumn afternoon.

—*Jeff Guess*

overcast

the blanket grey
overcast frayed ends
with a little light
to bring the sun
through thin threads
as a sewing needle
would patch up
the whole of the sky
before the next storm

while a village of washing
is hung out to dry

—*Rory Harris*

Wouldn't write about it

They say I didn't write them
Didn't put quill to parchment
Neither poem nor play
Just played the occasional
Small role, a bit of business
Here, a marriage there
Yet remembered forever as
A literary genius
Wouldn't write about it

—*Bruce Shearer*

denied sap and sun

denied sap and sun
puckered skin in puddle
winter's orange

—*Kevin Gillam*

rainy, hail, thirteen

rainy, hail, thirteen
— Flinders Street under the clocks —
six missing persons

—*Ann Healey*

Caress

My vision is intense
Sometimes frightening

But also as soft
As pale blue lightning
Which touches your lids
In an ultimate caress
Of sorrow
And wonder
—*James Waller*

Layers

My head in the tutu
inserting layers
of purple between white.
A Degas
or a bridal fitting.
Layers.
A daughter,
a mother,
a mother just gone,
metres of tulle,
pins in my mouth.
I remember how
at times of tulle and dreams,
pinned to our roles,
we rub scars into each other.
How words prick.
Tears fall into the tulle.
Without a word
she holds me.

—*Josephine A. Clarke*

The Feminist Eunuch

What is Germaine to her personality?
Her Catholic childhood I fear,
The Virgin Mary.

—*James Morris*

The Professor and the Pentecostal

The Professor and the Pentecostal,
Who was right and who was wrong?
One was a sceptic, the other an apostle,
One wrote essays, the other sang songs.
The Atheist and the Believer,
Who was sane and who was mad?
One was honest, the other a deceiver,
One was joyful, the other was sad.
The Artist and the Accountant,
Who was fake and who was real?
One was employed, the other redundant,
One crushed snakes, the other bit heels.

—*Damian Balassone*

Arvo Part

This is the music ice makes
as it thaws and trickles
coldness bumping coldness
that gives away such needlepoints
of light

so that after all
the winter dark can be fathomed
and climbed from

a music that accumulates
builds out of air
until finally
inevitably
nothing else is there.

—*Shane McCauley*

The provocative folly of Poland missile defence

POLITICS

Tony Kevin



Triggered by events in Georgia, the US and Polish governments have agreed that Poland will host an American base for ten interceptor missiles designed to shoot down a limited number of ballistic missiles that, the US claims, might one day be launched against NATO Europe by a future 'rogue state' adversary such as Iran.

The system, on Poland's Baltic coast (and Russia's doorstep), to be manned by 100 US military personnel, is expected to operate by 2012. The Czech government had previously agreed to host a complementary tracking radar system.

Separately, the US will provide Poland with advanced air defence systems, unrelated to the shooting down of ballistic missiles.

The US proposed giving Poland such a modest anti-missile system two years ago, but Poland hesitated in the face of strong opposition and retaliatory threats from Moscow, which from the beginning [believed](#) that it was the true target of the proposed system.

Such prototype systems — already being installed in some NATO countries — are politically and technically controversial. Democrat critics in the US Congress last year [condemned](#) such 'high-risk, immature programs'.

Ever since President Reagan's famous 'Star Wars' speech in 1983 advocating a total US strategic missile defence system against the Soviet Union, anti-ballistic missile defence research and development has been part of US defence spending.

George Monbiot last week [wrote](#) scathingly in *The Guardian* that in US defence budgets, missile defence is a vast corporate welfare program, 'the biggest pork barrel of all, the magic pudding that won't run out however much you eat ... because the system will never work'.

In real life, a serious attacker could overwhelm any ABM defence, using dummy missiles and stealth technologies. Yet Monbiot reports that since 1983 the US has poured between \$120-150 billion (billion!) dollars into ABM systems whose feasibility is yet to be demonstrated.

This profligate waste won't worry the US economy. According to authoritative SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) figures, US military spending accounted for an amazing 45 per cent of the world total in 2007, followed by the UK, China, France and Japan, with 4–5 per cent each. Since 2001 US military expenditure has increased by 59 per cent, and by 2007 was higher than at any time since World War II.

Seventeen years after the Cold War ended, the US remains a highly militarised economy in search of a plausible enemy. China is difficult: the relationship too risk-prone, with China now dangerously enmeshed as a US creditor and industrial supplier. And the Islamist threat is too diffuse, too inchoate, in traditional military terms.

Never mind that the Cold War is over: Putin's proudly recovered, self-sufficient Russia can again plausibly be framed in the role of the putative enemy at the gates of Western civilisation.

And the post-communist East European successor states, always viscerally afraid of Russia, have been keen to encourage US strategic advance into their region as 'protection' against possible future revived Russian threats. Neo-conservatives in the Bush administration have mischievously encouraged such misplaced fears and hopes.

A tragically unnecessary diplomatic and strategic re-polarisation is now taking place in Eastern Europe, already eerily reminiscent in some ways of years prior to WW1 and WW2. SIPRI reports that over the past ten years, Eastern Europe has been the region with the highest increase in military expenditure in the world.

Under pressure from American and Eastern European troublemakers, NATO Europe's post-Cold War relationship with Russia, which objectively had every reason to be balanced and cordial, assumes the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy of estrangement, as hostile rhetoric and commentary on both sides begins to ramp up. More sensible counsels in Paris and Bonn try to stem the tide, but recent trends are troubling.

This Polish-Czech missile defence system is strategically futile and diplomatically provocative to Russia. The insultingly implausible cover story that it is not directed against Russia but at 'rogue states' is a further taunt. It is all clumsily irresponsible, in the recognisable style of the ending Bush administration. This is dangerous baggage that Obama or McCain will now have to deal with.

By any rational calculus, this decision is a folly. But as historian Barbara Tuchman analysed in *The March of Folly*, great nations at times pursue national security strategies that in historical hindsight can only be thus understood. I fear this is the latest example.

Matters of life and deaf

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

My old Nan maintained that people were kind to the blind, but not to the deaf. She said observers could see the white stick or the guide dog and register the sightless gaze, and the uncertainty with which the blind negotiate the hazardous street.



But deafness, she considered, is a hidden affliction. 'Just imagine the horror of a completely silent world,' she said with a shudder.

Degrees of hearing loss occur for various reasons, some obvious, some not. My grandfather, who served in the Australian artillery during the First World War, became cripplingly deaf: no protection was provided, and the gunners simply had to cope with the damaging noise of bombardment.

Grandfather's was an injury-related deafness, which in today's Australia affects 1.5 per cent of the population and 12 times as many men as women. When the effects of ageing add to such deafness, 8 per cent of the population between the ages of 65 and 74 is affected. Over all, 11 per cent of Australians suffer from either partial or complete deafness.

Genetics play their inexorable part. My mother wore hearing aids. Now my brother and I do. There may be a link between childbirth and deafness, so some obstetricians recommend vulnerable women bear only two children. Diseases and infections can also be responsible: middle-ear infections are notorious, and so are tumours.

Traumata sustained in accidents are another source of lasting damage, as is exposure to loud noise. My sons, thank goodness, have no experience of bombardments, but they will persist in going to nightclubs and exposing their genetically susceptible ears to hours of over-amplified music.

I live in a Greek village, but do not go to Easter services because of the blast of double-bungers, let off in order to drive the demons away. Alas, one Easter Day, I went walking, and two little boys lit double-bungers as I passed. Miraculously, my hearing loss has not deteriorated, and my ear-drums are quite intact, but I now have tinnitus, which makes me feel as if I am sitting inside a continuously humming refrigerator.

Those who suffer from creeping deafness may be slow to realise it, and to accept it, for communication is of such vital importance to work, social situations and personal

relationships. I long refused to accept my own hearing loss, upbraiding myself for lack of concentration, and telling myself good hearing was a matter of willpower.

Hearing loss is a blow to self-esteem. It leads to a strong temptation to become anti-social. It becomes too much of a strain to listen: hearing loss means stress. And sufferers do not like to think about, let alone hear, jokes about the deaf. Nor do we wish people to assume we are so deaf that we cannot hear personal remarks.

The exasperated reaction of those near and dear to the sufferer can be a problem. 'She's so deaf!' expostulated my father more than once, when my mother had misheard yet again. I didn't like his tone; my own hearing had started to fail by then, and so I bristled. 'Deafness is not a moral failing, Dad,' I yelled. To be fair, he took the point.

People with normal hearing often assume that hearing aids are a replacement. They are not, despite recent advances in digital technology. The brain has to retrain itself after hearing aids are fitted, and this process takes time. Hearing aids are also situation-specific, so that, for example, they are not very good in crowded restaurants or at Greek wedding parties: never wear a hearing-aid when a bouzouki is playing.

Strategies are called for. The person who has hearing loss accomplishes little if he/she merely says things like: 'Sorry?' 'Come again?'

The deaf person needs to make requests: 'Would you mind talking more slowly/facing me/raising your voice a little?' It is also helpful to issue a tactful reminder. 'Remember I'm aurally challenged, won't you?'

Lip-reading is a useful skill to acquire, and formal lessons are not usually necessary. Beards and moustaches can provide difficulty for lip-readers, however.

Kind friends and relations need to be conscious of the problems involved. Even people who are only partially deaf cannot hear round corners or through walls, nor can they hear when somebody is looking in a cupboard, rattling plates or banging cutlery. Music at a dinner-party can be a nightmare, and most sufferers need a telephone with a volume control.

Nor should people with normal hearing believe that not hearing is the same as mishearing; they should also understand that some people can be heard much better than others. In short, a general heightening of awareness is needed.

And part of this heightening of awareness is the knowledge of people who have not let hearing problems stand in the way of a full life and notable achievements.

Beethoven, who kept on composing despite tragic deafness, is possibly the most famous deaf person in history. Bill Clinton wears hearing-aids, as does prominent author and speaker John Julius Norwich. Sting and Sylvester Stallone both suffer from tinnitus. Musician Evelyn Glennie is deaf. Thomas Edison was. The list is very long.

Nobody wants hearing loss to happen, but far worse things can.

Dignity the question for 'dirt poor' islanders

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



The Federal Opposition opposes the Government's Pacific Guest Worker scheme while it considers that a range of important questions remain unanswered. There are indeed many questions, but the opposition appears to be missing those relating to the rights of the Pacific workers themselves.

The plan, which involves a three year trial, follows many requests from both Pacific nations and potential employers in Australia. Pacific leaders see such schemes as a key response to the urgent challenge posed by rising sea levels.

President Anote Tong of Kiribati visited the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney recently. He [described](#) labour access as 'one of the strategies that low-lying island nations are calling for, to help them prepare for the inevitable loss of land and livelihood that climate change is bringing them'.

Meanwhile federal member for Riverina Kay Hull, and other opposition MPs from rural areas, see the scheme as a welcome response to the acute shortage of willing workers available to the horticulture industry.

The usually compassionate opposition leader Brendan Nelson argued that Australia does not need 'dirt poor Pacific islanders'. Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister Andrew Robb and Shadow Immigration Minister Chris Ellison spelled out the position in a [statement](#) that insisted that Australia should not rush into such a scheme without asking questions.

But the questions they ask are the wrong ones. They stem from fears that the guest workers would outstay their welcome. Notably absent is anything specifying a strategy to ensure that the workers are subject to fair pay and conditions consistent with the standard enjoyed by resident Australian workers.

Nor is there recognition that the scheme could be linked to a climate change response. On the contrary, they appear as out of touch as their leader, in their disingenuous concern not to 'deplete the pool of necessary young workers in villages in these Pacific nations'.

While employers argue that it is more costly to bring workers from overseas, grateful Pacific islanders are likely to be willing to work for less than award wages under conditions that do not meet regulatory requirements. Trade unions rightly insist that support for the scheme requires strict compliance to relevant labour pay and safety regulations, to ensure the treatment of guest workers equals that of resident workers.

Although they are desperate to find solutions for their people in the face of the rising sea

level, Pacific island leaders expect nothing less. As President Tong said, 'We want to be able to move as dignified people ... to move wherever, if it should become necessary!'

It's one thing to ask questions, but another to ask the right questions.

Protesters not to blame for Viet vets neglect

COMMUNITY

Tony Smith

Commemorations in 2006 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan should have helped the rehabilitation of Australia's Vietnam veterans. No one doubts the courage of these mostly young men or the trauma they have experienced since their return. No one should deny that they have been treated badly.

One indication is that only now, 36 years after Australia's withdrawal from Vietnam, and coinciding with the 42nd anniversary of Long Tan, a [study](#) is to be held into the health outcomes of service for veterans and their families.

Several official ceremonies have honoured Vietnam veterans, including a Welcome Home Parade and the dedication of a memorial in Canberra.

But so far, the nation has failed to face the reality of the veterans' treatment. Too many speeches by politicians and veterans have given the impression that the rehabilitation process was undermined by opponents of the war. During the commemorations, a prominent image was the archival television footage of a lone protestor splashed with red paint at a welcome home parade for soldiers marching through a city street in their jungle greens.

When Prime Minister Howard apologised to Vietnam veterans for their treatment, there was an implication that the whole Australian community had failed veterans, and that the unpopularity of the war had been engineered by protestors.

But those who opposed the war do not bear the responsibility for the tragic decisions affecting the veterans' lives. If protestors were less than welcoming, that is hardly surprising. They conscientiously believed that the commitment brought shame upon Australia.

And while it is no reflection on the dedicated service of individual soldiers, the fact is that in hindsight, the protestors were correct. In reality, the greatest need for regret must be among those who sent the troops to this divisive war and the governments that have begrudged them adequate rehabilitation services ever since.

The divisive nature of the welcome home process is often overlooked. There were parades with ticker tape and cheering crowds, but this fact does not suit the faux history written by militarists. Historian Mark McKenna points out in Raimond Gaita's book on Iraq, *Why the War Was Wrong*, that the myth about failure to welcome troops home from Vietnam aims to discourage dissent about any war for fear of offending military personnel.



Parades for soldiers returning from Vietnam were easier to organise when large units travelled home on ships. Many soldiers, for one reason or another, flew home to an airport and disappeared into the crowds. It was not the opponents of the war who made such bad decisions about repatriation.

War opponents knew the soldiers were being exploited cynically. They had sympathy for individuals caught in the ethical nightmare of learning to kill. They did not tell troops they would be regarded as heroes, or promise them special home loans, pensions and health assistance. They did not expect the troops to produce some glorious victory in Vietnam.

It was not the opponents of the war who broke their promises but the war supporters, and they have been tragically silent since creating this moral disaster. They judged the troops as failing some mythical standards set by previous generations of warriors and disregarded Vietnam veterans' claims about special disability. The very need for, and some aspects of, the course of the Agent Orange inquiries illustrate this begrudging attitude.

While Long Tan remains symbolic, 500 Australians died elsewhere in the conflict, and hundreds have died since from physical and psychological wounds. Veterans live with their memories constantly, and the real test of government and community understanding and gratitude is how they are treated every day.

The company commander at Long Tan called for appropriate recognition in terms of medals, some naval personnel are still asking for their trips to Vietnam to be acknowledged and many other veterans found their support services inadequate.

Society's rhetoric demands that we start listening and responding to these requests. As the family study progresses, claims will be considered and not postponed pending final reports. This is appropriate, because by its completion in eight years, veterans will be at least 44 years from their service. Too many will have died.

History is a great teacher, but can be effective only when we listen to it. According to media reports, people inquiring about a military career and visiting recruiting websites are invited to play computerised war games. Our treatment of Vietnam veterans has also been based largely in fantasy.

Veterans of more recent campaigns and their families will be watching the Vietnam study closely. Already, there have been suicides among the veterans of recent commitments, although, thankfully, fewer than the 17 per day allegedly reached by US returnees.

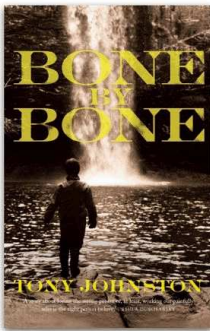
The rest of us should treat seriously the warnings from these experiences: the costs of sending military personnel abroad are extremely high. While the soldiers' tasks might seem straightforward, the responsibilities of those who deploy them are complex and seldom borne with integrity. We should honour our veterans but resist using the military except in times of genuine emergency.

Book of the week: **Bone by Bone**

BOOK FORUM

Jen Vuk

Johnston, Tony: *Bone by Bone*. Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2008. RRP \$22.95



Not long into Tony Johnston's fierce little tome *Bone By Bone* it becomes clear that ghosts are being laid to rest. In fact, you can fair hear the scrape of the nail against the wood grain.

As Johnston writes in the novella's introduction, her otherwise happy upbringing was soured by the unforgivable — a parent's xenophobia. She describes herself as 'haunted by my father'.

Bone by Bone isn't strictly autobiographical, however. It may be set in the 1950s, the era of Johnston's childhood, and in Tennessee where her father was born and raised, but this appears to be a shoring up of context rather than sentiment. Consolidating this, Johnston has a nine-year-old boy walk in her shoes.

David Church is a motherless boy who lives with his grandmother, great-grandmother and larger-than-life Daddy who rules the household with an iron fist. When David meets Malcolm, a local black child around his age, the attraction is immediate and prophetic. It was friendship at first sight,' says David. 'Malcolm, he was my heart-friend.'

In the manner of childhood friendships the two soon become inseparable. Not only are they a similar age, they share in a lively imagination as well as a passion for baseball. Both, too, can name each bone of the human body, thanks to the auxiliary third member of their gang — Fats— a 'birth' gift from David's father, a doctor.

'David honey,' Daddy said in a crouch next to my crib, 'meet Fats, your first playmate. You're gonna learn every one of his bones by heart. You, baby boy, are gonna be a doctor.'

My Mama newly dead, that fatherly gesture must have cost him. But maybe Daddy didn't link them, Mama and the skeleton.

Herein lies the schism in David's Daddy. The well-respected locum whose healing hands 'could coax radishes to becoming roses on their way up through the soil' was also a trigger-happy hunter and, in all likelihood, a paid-up member of the KKK. 'I'm laying down my Nigger Rule,' he tells David after the child challenges him on why his friend is not welcome in their home. 'Rule's simple: you ever let that nigger in, by God I'll shoot him.'

As David's friendship with Malcolm intensifies, and each drop of injustice congeals around them like a toxic puddle, it becomes more and more difficult for him to reconcile the father who patiently, lovingly, unravels the mysteries of each human bone, with the man whose

hatred is skin deep.

It's unfortunate, and distracting, that *Bone By Bone* treads what appears to be all-too familiar territory. In David's tale of discovery and loss it's near impossible not to be reminded by the US classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but to dismiss the novella as a poor imitation is to sell it undeniably short.

Having written more than 80 books in a career that's spanned some 40 years, Johnston is one of America's finest and most prolific children's novelists (*Bone* is her first crossover book). Little wonder then that each passage comes to the page brimming with confidence. It's as if the very act of conjuring words out of thin air is, for Johnston, as rudimentary as popping up to the shops for a litre of milk.

Despite the novel's confessional origins there's little evidence of the self-indulgent or self-serving. Instead, as Australian author Ursula Dubosarsky points out, *Bone By Bone* is about 'loving the wrong person or, at least, working out painfully who is the right person to love' — a timeless message that transcends genres and bestows upon the term 'bound by blood' a profound, disquieting meaning.

Film of the week: *Son of a Lion, Persepolis*

FILM FORUM

Tim Kroenert

***Son of a Lion*: 92 minutes. Rated: PG. Director: Benjamin Gilmour. Starring: Niaz Khan Shinwari, Sher Alam Miskeen Ustad**

***Persepolis*: 92 minutes. Rated: M. Directors: Marjane Satrapi, Vincent Paronnaud. Starring (the voices of): Chiara Mastroianni, Catherine Deneuve, Danielle Darrieux**

Sydney filmmaker Benjamin Gilmour put his life on the line to make *Son of a Lion*. Iranian-born Marjane Satrapi sketched her life onto paper for *Persepolis*. These are two very different films — the former a low-budget drama shot on digital video, the latter a slick, uber-stylised animation — yet each provides its own insight into growing up against a background of historical and present violence in the Middle East.



Son of a Lion is set and shot in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, in the tribal town Darra Adam Khel. Darra is arid and isolated, and is known for its Pashtun craftsmen who use reverse engineering to forge state of the art firearms from scrap metal.

Sher Alam Afridi (Ustad) is one such gun-maker, a widower determined that his young son, Niaz (Shinwari) will follow in his footsteps. But Niaz is not interested in the family trade. He wants to attend school and get an education like his peers in Peshawar.

This familial conflict makes for standard coming-of-age fodder. However it's the touches of authenticity that distinguish the film — the craggy beauty of the north-western Pakistan landscape, and Gilmour's attention to the minutiae of daily life in Darra.

The most remarkable thing about *Son of a Lion* is that it exists. Many of the inhabitants of the North West Frontier Province are distrustful of Western filmmakers. Even Morgan Spurlock, the maverick filmmaker brave enough to almost commit 'suicide by Maccas' in 2004's *Supersize Me*, deemed the region to be too dangerous for foreigners in his recent documentary *Where In The World Is Osama Bin Laden*.

Gilmour took the risk, but shot discreetly. His use of handheld digital video camera gives the film a guerilla feel. The actors are non-professionals — some, including Shinwari, are immediate family members of executive producer Hayat Khan Shinwari.

The director — an ambulance paramedic by trade — made *Son of a Lion* as a means to an end. He hoped to share the humanity of the Darra Pashtuns with an international audience of what he describes as 'Islamophobic' Westerners. The result stands as both empathetic homage, and an accomplished piece of 'shoestring' filmmaking.



The no-frills story and production values of *Son of a Lion* contrast with the visual and thematic eloquence of the animated feature *Persepolis*. And while the former tries to dim the ringing of the clash of cultures, said clash resonates throughout the latter.

Persepolis' writer/co-director Satrapi was born in Iran in 1969 and grew up in Tehran. She moved to Austria as a teenager, and to France as an adult, and so developed a distinctive, hybrid Western perspective of events in her home country.

Persepolis is based upon her eponymous memoir — in fact, a graphic novel. It portrays her initially as a precocious nine-year-old (voiced by Ebi Gabrielle Lopes) during the Islamic Revolution and the subsequent rise of fundamentalism in Iran.

It then charts a bittersweet trajectory as Satrapi (voiced as teenager and adult by Mastroianni) grows up and away — both corrupted and enlightened by Western culture, increasingly disillusioned with the violence and oppression that have become hallmarks of life in Tehran, yet striving to hold on to the values espoused by her parents and, especially, her grandmother (Darrieux), who embodies her idyllic view of Iran's past.

The black-and-white animation is faithful to the comic-strip style source material, and adds an abstract charm to the film. It also provides an efficient means of capturing the film's preoccupation with historical recollection as storytelling, allowing the past to be recast as the larger-than-life imaginings of a child, or the petulant revisionism of a disillusioned teenager.

Satrapi shares her story with both humour and pathos. *Persepolis* at once a deeply personal coming-of-age story and an ode to the evolution — and sometimes devolution — of culture. It is an unlikely but fitting companion piece to *Son of a Lion*.

Suited polluters assess climate change risk

ENVIRONMENT

Les Coleman

A riddle with climate change (and many other environmental issues) is the irreconcilable positions of well-informed and well-intentioned people who are firmly for and against remedial action. They share so few points of agreement that debate seems impractical. Let me propose a two-pronged explanation for this.



The first is that making policy for natural resources is — as Professor Ross Garnaut remarked in relation to climate change — a ‘diabolical political problem’. Natural resources such as climate, air and water are public goods, which suffer the ‘free-rider problem’, or ability of everyone to enjoy the good without paying the costs of its preservation.

Because individuals have no incentive to protect or preserve public resources they can become subject to debilitating neglect, extending to toxic pollution, and can be over-exploited, even to extinction.

Any policy that seeks to reverse damage and (say) lower concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere typically follows the principle of ‘polluter pays’ by imposing regulation such as emission controls or placing a tax on emissions. This concentrates the costs of reducing emissions on those who directly cause them, whereas the benefits are thinly-spread because the whole community is only slightly better off on average.

This gives strong motivation to the minority opposed to the environmental policy, but much weaker motivation to the majority who benefit. As a result, resources policy making tends to be paralysed or produces an inferior outcome, and those results that can be agreed tend to be blunt instruments that occasionally get it wrong.

Although opponents of environmental policies typically criticise their efficiency and claim adverse impacts on competitiveness, fortunately these are generally trivial because compliance costs tend to be offset by innovation and regeneration of plant and processes.

A comprehensive US study, for instance, showed that tough controls on environmental damage that have been introduced since the first Earth Day in 1970 have simply cleaned industry up, not closed it down.

The second source of dispute is risk propensity. Risks associated with climate change involve uncertainty in forecasts of future warming and its impacts, along with the possibility of high cost or downside scenarios. These latter include occurrence of a tipping point where climate change becomes uncontrollable and triggers an apocalyptic outcome.

Advocates of immediate action are termed 'risk averse'. They are most concerned about risks or possible losses. On the other hand, people opposed to immediate policy action are said to be 'risk neutral'. They do not incorporate uncertainty into their decision, but use the best forecasts of what will happen to project costs and benefits.

Risk averse people are motivated to achieve security and value safety. In particular they focus on worst case outcomes, which are the risks to be avoided, and seek insurance to avoid future regret.

Risk neutral people equally weight gains and losses. They rely on experts' advice and use standard economic decision techniques such as cost-benefit analysis. Thus debaters never see eye-to-eye because they are looking either at a tail of the distribution of possible outcomes or its centre.

There are other divisions between these groups. Research has shown, for instance, that white males, with better education and income have a significantly lower perception of the risk of any activity, probably because they have more direct involvement in it.

In similar vein, people with an egalitarian preference for equal sharing of wealth in society have a higher perception of the risk of a range of hazards, whereas people who prefer a hierarchical society with experts in control have lower perceptions of risk.

A more extreme split echoes Kantian philosophy whereby ethics should eschew self-interest, and so truly moral behaviour can only come at a cost: doing good must hurt. Those in favour of immediate mitigation can see climate change as sourced in excess consumption of fossil fuels, and so a moral solution should damage the economy. Opponents of mitigation require a positive outcome from policy.

Whatever causes divisions between protagonists in the climate change and other natural resources debates, an important element of policy making must be to develop a better understanding of the nature and possibility of catastrophic outcomes, and actively work for a more inclusive framework.

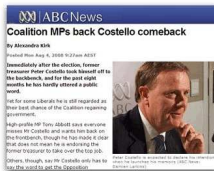
The upshot of all this is that those who threaten the integrity of natural resources have a strong incentive to oppose any controls, while members of the broader community who benefit have limited incentive to play a role.

Those who do become involved are either opponents of action who tend to be risk neutral and focus on most likely outcomes, or advocates of mitigation who are risk averse and focus on extreme outcomes such as environmental catastrophe. No wonder debates appear polarised.

Life after politics is often hollow

POLITICS

John Warhurst



For former political leaders life after politics can be hollow and unrewarding. That is the subtext behind Peter Costello's dilemma. Last November he confidently looked forward to a life in the commercial world. Now he is allowing the public to believe he is considering reversing his decision to walk away from politics.

He will be criticised whatever he chooses to do. Many critics condemned his failure to accept the Liberal leadership as proving his lack of the necessary fortitude.

But whatever his decision his dilemma allows an insight into the attraction of life in politics and the lack of rewarding alternatives for those who choose to walk away from it. This applies especially to those, defeated or retired, who are still in the prime of life. And Costello is, after all, the same age as Kevin Rudd.

Costello has spent his whole life in politics: student politics, industrial politics, parliamentary politics. That is what drives him. Academic and professional life has never held the same attraction. So changing gear to another life was never going to be easy.

Political life holds great attractions. Whether a politician is motivated by serving the community or by personal advancement, once politics is in your blood it is hard to shake off. The psychic rewards are enormous. For those who are attracted to it, nothing compares.

Other careers are rewarding in other ways. The business world offers greater financial rewards. Some say that means parliamentarians should be paid more so that better people will be attracted to politics. But that misses the point. The rewards are quite different and attract different types of individuals.

The life after politics of recent Australian political leaders indicates the difficulty Costello has faced in coming to terms with his future. Some appear to have been more successful than others in settling down after politics.

On the Labor side previous leaders like Paul Keating, Bob Hawke and Gough Whitlam have become jacks of all trades. Keating and Hawke have dabbled in commercial life as advisers and consultants, especially in Asia. Whitlam served as Ambassador to UNESCO and has taken up a variety of social and political causes, sometimes in harness with Malcolm Fraser. Each has had university connections at one time or another.

Fraser has taken a leading role in CARE International, and has served as an eminent person on the international stage. The charity NGO sector can be an important outlet for former

politicians.

Other Liberals like John Hewson and Andrew Peacock have pursued a variety of occupations. Hewson has combined journalism, academia and business consulting. Peacock was appointed Australian Ambassador to Washington before representing Boeing in Australia.

Lesser lights on both sides, including Michael Wooldridge, have dabbled in lobbying of various sorts both within Australia and internationally. Alexander Downer will combine lobbying with university and other commitments.

Those who have succeeded in remaking themselves include Gareth Evans, who left Australia to become CEO of the International Crisis Group.

Examples of a fully successful move into the business community are rare in recent Australian political life. Perhaps the most successful has been former NSW Premier Nick Greiner, who became a professional board member after leaving office in the early 1990s.

The overall picture is that finding something as fulfilling as politics is rarely easy. There are few examples of individuals who can completely remake themselves. Offers of government jobs can be very important but these are usually just temporary. Costello, like many others, will find it very difficult to get politics right out of his veins.

Books survive the orgasm of closure

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

For the time being, the idea that the book is dead seems to be in remission. Two decades have passed since we found ourselves suddenly living in an age of endings — the end of history, the death of God, the end of ideology, the demise of the novel, the bonfire of the vanities, the death of the book, and so on.



As if in agreement with these proposed finalities, seemingly impregnable communist regimes toppled. The Berlin wall, both as symbol and physical presence, came crashing down. And then not only the years but also the century and the whole bloody millennium ended.

It was an orgasm of closure, to use the word that then invaded the language like a virus.

With unseemly haste the death of the book was assumed to be part of this cascade of conclusion. The book was and remains self-evidently not dead. People are crowding bookshops. Week by week books are reviewed, cited, paraphrased, recommended, criticised, attacked, blamed for this, rewarded for that, compared here, convicted there, exonerated somewhere else.

Readers have no sense that they are dealing in moribund goods. They do not catch the whiff of lexicological death as they turn a page. Proponents of book death continue to forecast doom, but at the moment the book is down at the gym doing circuits and looking fit.

If the book does have a cast-iron future appointment on boot hill, what is to be its replacement? Answer: the e-book — for the moment on screen, but that will change.

Few people have read or are inclined to read whole books on screen. So where does the perfectly acceptable enthusiasm for the e-book come from? Not from people whose experience of e-book reading has convinced them of its superiority, because there are so far very few such people. And not from those who are hanging out to change over to e-books as soon as they can. No such anticipatory mood seems to exist.

The enthusiasm for the e-book and all its advantages comes from people who are already enthusiasts for something larger than the e-book, from people who have an umbrella enthusiasm under which e-publishing takes its place as only one of many marvels. This enthusiasm is for the technology itself.

Just as it was not mainly cricket lovers who espoused the technology that now suffuses the venerable game, so it has not been mainly book lovers and readers who have championed the

e-book. E-book enthusiasts are overwhelmingly computer buffs, not bookworms. They are convinced that the existence of highly sophisticated technology means it must be used and must and inevitably will supplant modes that do not use it.

Their assumption is that all change is progress and that all progress is of its nature not so much a good thing (which it probably is) as an exclusively good thing. But why should the very smart idea known as the e-book condemn the traditional book to death? They are two very different species.

The traditional published book, let's call it the p-book, represents a fusion of form and content. Words on serially arranged pages between covers and attached to a spine make a package: the book. Reference to the book can mean anything from that familiar physical object through to the imaginative complexities of *Crime and Punishment* or *Pride and Prejudice*.

E-book, however, refers to a file in which is contained 'the Work' (to use the standard contractual term). The form is technological software and hardware and is profoundly and thoroughly separated from the content. And that content can only be reached by a relatively sophisticated encounter with the form that contains it. If you don't happen to own or understand the technological form, the content is denied you.

There remain large numbers of readers for whom the book will continue to exercise a powerful atavistic attraction. And not merely atavistic: the book has brilliant mobility. It can be carried, pocketed, lent or borrowed. It can be read on trams, trains and beaches, in bed, at the cricket, covertly in church, easefully on the dunny.

And in offering these many desirable traits, it also offers a relationship. The complex intellectual, emotional and psychological relationship of the individual reader to that fused package of form and content constitutes a mix which even the most nimble technology cannot either match or counterfeit.

As with cricket, so with the book: there will always come that point where technology, for all its versatility, will run up against the infinite, maddening and mysterious workings of the human psyche, when even a plea to a third umpire will do nothing to unravel the mystery. At that point the book, like the batsman, will be given the benefit of the doubt and will live on to build a bigger innings.

Mistakes make catchy riffs

POETRY

Kevin Gillam

takes

shake the tree of doubt. bait
the hour with now. ache
is body song. notate
the talk of clouds. take
longer strides. equate?
yes, try to. mistakes
make catchy riffs. fate
won't hear you shout. spake
once then listened thrice.
create on steady decks.
slake sound like it feels.
weight of wonder? quake
is best left for gods.
exclamate! exclamate!

the bigger book

in the bigger book I bend the truth 'til
it forms a circle. in the bigger book I write with
singular purpose, like a snail crossing lawn
at night, I write in think, like balloons
released in sunlight, I write like skywriting. in the
bigger book I write and swim and wrim and swite and rhyme.
the bigger book, picture or word? call them
hieroglyphics, a blurring of etch,

brush and sense. by the final pages in the
bigger book I'm crooning through cadences
and denouement in the mode of be.
the bigger book, a hard-back, sits presigned
and ripe, always in new releases.
in the font of cumulus this bigger book
on a Sat.

we played out dreams. we
stole flames. we boiled snails.
we strafed ants' nests. we
singed our hair. we got
called in. we got told
off. we scrubbed our nails.
we had roast. we ate
our veg. we sang and
jigged and spun. we got
tucked in. we got told
tales. we felt hot breath.
we heard our prayers. we
shared the dark. we shed
fear. we dreamt of play

US-backed Georgia pokes the Russian bear

POLITICS

Tony Kevin



In diplomacy, it is usually a mistake to try to force resolution of a territorial dispute. The cure is often worse than the disease.

Such is the case with the Georgian crisis. Reckless provocation by the Bush administration and its pro-‘Rose Revolution’ anti-Russian Saakashvili government has led to a major realignment in the balance of power between post-communist Russia and the West.

It is the most important event in East-West relations since the fall of Soviet Communism in 1990. In Georgia, Russia took on US-led attempted Western strategic encirclement, and won. There will be consequences all along Russia’s western and southern borderlands.

Russia had given ample warning to Georgia that it would defend its interests in its ‘near abroad’. In Helsinki, the Finns understand that Russia expects bordering states — its security glacis — to be non-confrontational in their diplomacy and national security.

But, encouraged by the Bush administration, Saakashvili defied such prudence. Georgia imported US and Israeli weapons and US military advisers. It hosted a Western-financed oil pipeline designed to bypass Russia. It pursued NATO and EU membership, and ramped up pressure on South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the non-ethnic Georgian regions in Georgia that were under Russian nominal peacekeeping protection since 1991.

In response, Russia issued Russian passports to these non-ethnic Georgian citizens who wanted them as a security. The status of these territories was frozen — they were effectively fully autonomous regions.

Two weeks ago, under cover of the Olympic Games opening, Georgian forces mounted a surprise attack on South Ossetia, taking its main city Tskhinvali after major artillery bombardment that caused great destruction, civilian casualties and refugee outflows.

Russian forces moved in two days later, easily rolling back the Georgian army and advancing deep into Georgia proper, demonstrating their power to cut the country in two and take its capital if they wished. They bracketed the oil pipeline with targeted shells to either side of it.

European peace diplomacy kicked in, and a ceasefire was negotiated. A victorious Moscow said it expected the Georgian people to have the good sense to remove the reckless government that had led it to such disaster, and that South Ossetia and Abkhazia might never wish to become part of Georgia after this experience. Russians drew pointed parallels with

Western acceptance of Kosovo's right to independence after Serb brutality.

A spin campaign to present Georgia as victim of Russian aggression ran up against the hard facts that Saakashvili had initiated the armed conflict. Washington wheeled out old cold war rhetoric. It played well at home but badly in Paris and Bonn.



The war was a tragedy for Christian, Orthodox Georgia that has close cultural ties to Russia, its historical ally and protector against Turkish expansionism in the Caucasus. Now there will be deep hatred between these formerly friendly peoples. It did not have to happen like this.

The consequences on Russia's western rim of post-communist states are unpredictable. In Ukraine, Poland and the three Baltic states, there was an initial emotional display of sympathy for Georgia. The war triggered a Polish decision to instal a US-offered missile defence system that Moscow sees as anti-Russian. Fortunately, Poland has no Russian minority or border disputes with Russia.

The Baltic republics will know now that any violation of the human rights of the ethnic Russian communities in those countries will lead to forceful Russian intervention. Ukraine will be well advised to tread more softly with its bigger neighbour. The war has raised the bar of what Moscow expects of its 'near abroad'. Provocative encirclement strategies encouraged by the Bush administration and Washington neo-cons have had their day.

These facts are not well understood in the US. The viscerally anti-Russian US media reporting of the war feeds public opinion already so inclined.

The war thus favours Republican-style international truculence and ignoring of realities. Bush's jibe that Russia has failed the test of international civilised behaviour will help John McCain, and force Barack Obama to follow in his wake. Obama will be portrayed as weak if he does so, and as not to be trusted with national security if he does not.

Georgia poses a test for Kevin Rudd, too. Will he go with West European prudence and moderation, or echo Washington's more aggressive rhetoric? If he is serious about Australia's contribution to international security, and our future relations with an important world power, he will do the former.

Aid worker deaths challenge NGO assistance model

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Last Wednesday's killing of three foreign aid workers and their driver in Afghanistan marked a new low point for non government organisations.

The International Rescue Committee suspended its activity in the country after 20 years of assistance, following the murder of British-Canadian Dr Jacqueline Kirk, Canadian Shirley Case, Trinidadian-American Nicole Dial, and Afghan driver Mohammad Aimal.

The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the attack, describing the aid workers as foreign spies. Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told the Associated Press that the group 'were not working for the interests of Afghanistan'.

By definition, NGOs who conduct aid work overseas do not involve themselves in politics. They focus on the needs of the people, as determined by their own independent and experienced assessment teams. They prefer to use their own resources to distribute aid and mount development projects.

They are often better equipped than anybody else to engage in political commentary, but they keep their political views to themselves and limit their public communication to description of what they see.

The problem is that their actions invariably make governments and political oppositions look either good or bad. Different sides of politics are motivated to obstruct their operations, or perhaps offer overwhelming support that compromises their political independence.

The Taliban believes NGOs are propping up a government that is too weak to provide a range of social services including health care, education and development. By targeting NGOs, the Taliban hopes to gain advantage from the inability of the government to stand on its own.

Waliullah Rahmani of the Kabul Centre for Strategic Studies [told](#) the *Christian Science Monitor* that NGOs play an important role in strengthening the Afghan state and improving its public image.

'Without such agencies, the government becomes very weak, unable to provide basic services for its people — a situation that the Taliban will exploit readily.'

The Taliban is only too prepared to fill the vacuum created by departing NGOs. People need help and will accept it from whichever political or non-political group is able to offer it.

Afghanistan is just one country in which NGOs are finding it increasingly difficult to

operate. Sudan and Burma are two others. The NGO model of providing aid and development is one that has stood the test of time. It is important that NGOs lose neither heart nor the support of their constituencies in developed countries.

Amrozi: What would Batman do

HUMAN RIGHTS

Paul Mitchell

It's ironic that at a time when popular culture is dominated by a cartoon hero's moral stand against a sadistic and grinning killer, the Indonesian Government is less than a month away from doing what Batman refused to do in *The Dark Knight*. It will send the 'smiling assassin' Amrozi bin Nurhasyin and his cronies to death by firing squad for the 2002 Bali Bombings.



I'm sure enough people have now seen *The Dark Knight* for me to write, without spoiling the plot, that Batman refuses to become a monster to stop a monster (The Joker). And this, despite the fact that Heath Ledger's Joker is a truly evil character.

Unlike other brutal criminals in the movie, who are motivated by money, power and prestige, the Joker is motivated only by the desire to see good people turn evil. In short, he wants to prove that even the most righteous among us is, deep down, like him: self-serving and willing to murder if the right buttons are pushed.

Batman, of course, refuses to swoop to this level. There are occasions in the movie when he could terminate the cackling one, but he knows that to do so would make him no better than the monster that is the Joker. Instead, he graphically shows the Joker that people aren't always willing to kill when their survival is threatened. The Joker ends up in a padded cell rather than under the fat wheels of Batman's motorbike.

Amrozi's motivation for killing 202 people, many of them Australians, was obviously different from the Joker's murderous motivations. Amrozi claimed his religion mandated him to wage jihad on non-believers.

But do believers in justice, peace and human harmony gain anything by waging a microscopic jihad on Amrozi and his henchmen?

I'm not defending Amrozi's actions any more than Batman would defend the Joker's. When Batman refuses to take his revenge — and Gotham City's — on the psychopathic clown, he actually defends himself and the whole city from the barbarism that the Joker wants to let loose inside him and the public.

A simple fact: Indonesian law allows the death penalty and Australian law does not. Do we think that therefore our hands will be blood-free when Amrozi and his clan smile their last in a few weeks time? Some of us don't even care. Many Australians interviewed in the last few weeks, none of them wearing capes, think it's okay that the Bali bombers will soon be executed.

Our law states that it is unlawful to execute people, regardless of what they have done to us. We have the Batman law in this country, but where are the caped crusaders as the Bali bombers face the death squad?

In his apology to Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, Kevin Rudd demonstrated principle and showed he believes in saying and doing the right thing, even if it's not universally popular. In regard to the Bali bombers' impending execution, all he and his Government have said is that we shouldn't meddle.

Imagine, if you can, our Prime Minister in a Batman suit. And then imagine Amrozi as the Joker. What does Batman do in the current situation? He has his code: he will not take an eye for an eye. And he is the Australian Prime Minister, not his Indonesian counterpart. Even if Batman Rudd stood up with his cape waving in the wind and said, 'you don't stop a monster by becoming one', the Indonesians most likely wouldn't listen.

So what would Batman do? I believe he would stand up and say it anyway. He would explain that Australians do not condone terrorism — we are, in fact, outraged by it. But neither do we believe in becoming monsters in order to stop them. The executions would go on regardless, but Batman Rudd (and consequently all Australians) would know that under his suit of international diplomacy is a man who stands for the good in us all.

As the nights pass before the executions, I'll be searching the sky for the Bat Signal.