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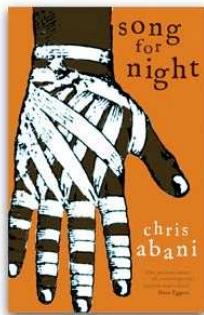
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Book of the week: *Song for Night*

BOOK FORUM

Patricia Pak Poy

Abani, Chris; *Song for Night*. Scribe, Melbourne, 2008. RRP \$22.95. ISBN 9781921372094



In *Song for Night* Chris Abani draws the reader into the barbarism of war, of war using children whose voices have been silenced, whose experience is of ferocious degradation but whose very power to recall some past act of goodness is a saving insight for the child become soldier and for the whole of humanity — and all in simple and lyrical language.

My Luck is a 15-year-old 'mine diffuser' searching for his lost platoon in some war somewhere in West Africa. This lost time allows memories of home, of his Catholic mother and Muslim father, of Grandfather who taught him so much of a valued and valuable human life, of love even in the midst of the degradation that war and violence brings.

In the midst of all this the reader shares the horror of the child turned man before his time, of that child soldier forced to rape and kill, of his pride in leadership, of his fear in the face of being lost, of his sheer fatigue, and of his saving experience of love.

Abani draws the reader on through familiar images and poetic style even while he shocks the reader into realising that the experience being described is beyond the imagining of most. We catch ourselves basking in the lyrical language to find ourselves face-to-face with a child trapped standing on a landmine, starving people resorting to cannibalism or a soldier suffering the fear and fatigue of the one who is lost and who now wants to be found.

Always we see it from the point of view of My Luck. The the author ensures that the reader shares My Luck's experience, his version of the protocols from Major Essien's manual, his silent understanding, his sign language developed to fit the circumstances of mine diffusers who no longer can speak. A response is called for from the reader and that response is easily given: first horror, then sympathy, even empathy — then surprisingly, hope.

In this small book of memories, of poetic reflections, Abani forces us to look at our own experience and at the current situations of civil strife, of barbarous practices in war situations, of the use of child-soldiers, of desperate situations of poverty and starvation, of conflict arising out of racial and religious differences and the desperation of communities subjected to conflict.

Yet the very style and poetry of those 'signed' reflections, of thoughts of one-ness in difference, strangely, can give us hope. *Song for Night* can be strongly recommended for provocative reading.

Olympics a good time to start wars

SPORT

Gillian Bouras

So the Beijing Games are on, even though it seems hardly a minute since 2004. The Athens Games were a long-awaited return to the country of origin, but the Beijing Games are more about politics: China is showing its friendly socialist face in an effort to make the wider world forget inconveniences like its treatment of the Tibetans, the Taiwanese, and a few million domestic Christians.



Sport, with its tribal appeal and its effect on adrenalin, is a great distraction of the bread and circuses kind. Then there's the patriotic angle: how many medals can each athlete collect? How many tears will be shed during the playing of the national anthems?

And let us not forget the money: the IOC stands to make about three billion dollars, 8 per cent of which will be spent on IOC staff members.

Another minute and London 2012 will be upon us. And what's this? Talk of a Brisbane bid for 2020 or 2024! One wonders why, really: the Modern Olympics have changed their nature so much since 1896. They've changed drastically since the 1956 Games in Melbourne.

I was a biddable child at that time, but I fell into a fit of pique when my parents refused to let me go on the school excursion. We were then living a good 250 miles from Melbourne, but how could I forego the chance to see Betty Cuthbert run?

I sulked, but soon recovered when I found Mum practically leaping around the kitchen in a state of high glee shortly after the broadcast of the women's 100 m freestyle swimming final.

'It's all-Aussie, and a world-record,' she warbled. 'Fraser, Crapp and Leech. Teenagers! That's shown the world!'

Other great Australian names marked Melbourne: veteran Shirley Strickland, Murray Rose. In a more innocent, amateur, and presumably drug-free age, Melbourne was called the Friendly Games.

But the Cold War was at its most frigid, and the Hungarian uprising had spiralled down into defeat a mere ten days before. Tensions ran predictably high, so high that the water-polo match between the Hungarians and the Soviets came to be known as the Blood in the Water match. Hungary went on to win the gold medal, and at the end of the Games, 56 Hungarians out of the squad of 113 remained Down Under.

The innocence of the Olympics was chipped away, I suppose, over the years, but finally

died when Israeli athletes also died, and horribly, at the 1972 Munich Games. Nothing, and particularly not the Games, could ever be the same again.

I have long viewed politics as a necessary evil, and usually a necessity of a particularly evil kind, but the decision to continue with the Munich Olympics, despite such a breach in the notion of what it means to be human, was, I believe, the right one. But how unspeakably difficult it must have been to make it.

Fast forward to Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004. Friends in both places could not cope with either prospect, and so fled in order to avoid what they were sure would be disasters of various kinds.

But they made a mistake: in Sydney and in Athens, it was as if some kind of magic cloak of caring had been dropped over each city. The natives were graciously helpful, public transport ticked along like clockwork, and the people who left and those who stayed both took away happy memories.

But back to politics: the Games seem inseparable from this thorny fact of life. I live not too far from Ancient Olympia. Human nature does not appear to have changed in over 2,000 years. As you walk towards the stadium, you see statues that were built from funds accruing from the fines of athletes who had cheated. Still, there were the ideals of peace, of the suspension of whatever hostility-in-progress, and the notion of simply taking part.

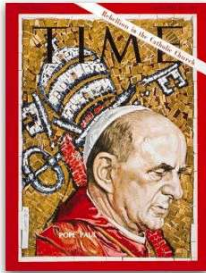
And now, what's happening? PM Rudd recently pledged to raise contentious issues during his visit to Beijing. But since then, all hell broke loose between Russia and Georgia. I checked the internet, and discovered the assertion that August, when Europeans are on holiday, is a good time to start wars. Good? War?

And, said this cynic, the Olympic Games are on.

Reliving the Church's sexual evolution

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



1968 was a year freighted with symbol. It is usually associated with student protests. In the Catholic Church, it is remembered for the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which was directed against artificial contraception, and for the turmoil that followed it.

To understand the way in which the Encyclical has shaped the Catholic Church 40 years on, we must recall its background. By the 1960s the overwhelming emphasis in Catholic theology on the place of procreation in sexual relations had been qualified by an equal emphasis on fostering loving relationships. In the 1960s, too, the contraceptive pill became readily available and widely used.

Pope John XXIII appointed a commission to review Catholic teaching on contraception in the light of these developments. His successor, Paul VI, expanded the commission. A majority report recommended that Church teaching permit artificial contraception within marriage. The minority said that it would be wrong to change established teaching.

This report was leaked, creating expectation of change. The Encyclical, which set the question within a rich theology of marriage, decided against contraception on the basis that it contravened natural law.

In the developed world the Encyclical was received with hostility. The response led many Catholics to question more broadly the attitudes of their church to sexuality and to the use of authority. The Encyclical was followed by dissent, disciplinary measures against many priests who protested, and by the resignation of many from ministry.

At a deeper level the response to the Encyclical modified many of the symbols that shape the everyday life of Catholics. The privileged place that Papal statements had in Catholic understanding was eroded. It became common to distinguish between the official teaching of the Church and what was received in the pews. Conscience and Catholic teaching were often seen as in opposition, not as complementary.

The paths by which Catholics incorporated teaching into their daily life also became overgrown. Most priests avoided preaching on controversial questions. Indeed, few spoke of sexual morality at all. Confession, where Catholics could seek guidance on the implications of Catholic teaching for their lives, fell into decline.

Forty years on, it can be seen that the changes that followed the Encyclical were evolutionary rather than revolutionary. They mainly affected the churches of the West.

Authority was not overthrown. Sexual morality was not cast aside. But the language and symbols of both have needed to be reshaped.

The credibility of Catholic statements about sexuality and authority has been further weakened by debates about the place of women and by the publicity given to clerical abuse and its cover up. Yet people, not only Catholics, still look for authoritative statements on the larger questions that face human society.

Authority used sensitively continues to have an impact. The demeanour and the words of Pope Benedict during World Youth Day led people to reflection. They also set standards for the use of authority and the response to sexual abuse in the local church.

Catholic leaders still struggle to gain a hearing when they speak about sexual morality. At a time when the simple canonisation of personal choice in matters of sexuality has increasingly been seen as thin gruel, they lack a language that can communicate persuasively to young Catholics a rich body of reflection on marriage and relationships.

But there are some signs that more modest and conversational ways of speaking about sexuality are being found. Church agencies have been influential in arousing concern about the sexualisation of children. Young people have led teaching programs for other young people in a frank and enquiring atmosphere and have won a hearing.

In retrospect, however, the main burden of an Encyclical on contraception can be seen paradoxically to have fallen on celibate diocesan priests and religious. They are the local representatives of Catholic authority, under authority themselves, and charged with communicating Catholic teaching.

The effects of the Encyclical, of the later debate whether there is a place in the church for modern women, the revelations of sexual abuse by clergy, and their own diminishing numbers, have forced them to shape a style of ministry as they go.

At its best this style is conversational, modest and encouraging. It is a too rarely recognised gift to the wider Catholic Church.

Film of the week: *Garbage Warrior*

FILM FORUM

Tim Kroenert

Garbage Warrior: 86 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Oliver Hodge.
Starring: Michael Reynolds During the decade prior to directing his feature debut, Oliver Hodge worked in the art departments on such blockbusters as *Judge Dredd*, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and the James Bond film *Die Another Day*.



A no-frills documentary about an eccentric environmentalist may seem a world away from these monolithic 'event' movies. But in *Garbage Warrior*, Hodge attempts to cut his subject from the same larger-than-life cloth as those films' colossal heroes.

Michael Reynolds is an architectural maverick who, for 30 years, has been designing and building self-sufficient housing from recaptured garbage. His materials of choice include empty beer cans, plastic and glass bottles, and old tyres packed tight with dirt.

Various designs harness solar or wind power for energy. He often utilises a 'greenhouse' approach to heating, angling glass windows towards the sun. The houses are fitted for capturing rainwater, and for growing vegetables and rearing livestock.

It's little wonder publicists are badging *Garbage Warriors* as 'stirring and timely'. Arriving at a time when phrases like 'climate change' and 'sustainable energy' have become part of the lexicon, the documentary plays to public concerns about how we might best reduce our environmental impact, and to fears that the expiry date for 'life as we know it' is already fast-approaching.

As the title suggests, Hodge has pitched the film at least in part as a David and Goliath drama. Reynolds believes ideas evolve through making mistakes. Thus his houses, dubbed 'Earthships', have evolved during decades of trial and error. His renegade practice of learning through getting things wrong has seen him at odds with formal architectural bodies in the USA.

In *Garbage Warrior* Reynolds goes up against government bodies in an attempt to gain legitimacy for a process he describes as 'dreaming' of solutions to the climate crisis — basically, building stuff, and seeing if it works.

In this regard the film is a one-sided affair. While it is tempting to entertain Reynolds' underdog cynicism towards the brick-wall bureaucracy he encounters at government level, realists will realise there are likely to be unspoken, well-intended health and safety concerns behind the existing building regulations. Both Hodge and Reynolds give short shrift to counter-arguments, whether they be persuasive or otherwise.

Reynolds is certainly not your typical, benevolent crusader. He openly confides that his motives are not altruistic. He sees himself as a kind of catcher in the rye, who is driven less by his concern for others than by fear that he might be dragged off the cliff by the environmentally negligent stampede.

In fact he's not even entirely likeable. At one stage he scoffs at archeologists who first 'walk around picking up spearheads' before he can be allowed to develop a New Mexico property. For Australians, currently engaged in the ongoing process of reconciliation between Indigenous and white inhabitants, Reynolds' apparent indifference towards the native cultures that preceded his mini eco-empire smack of racial prejudice.

Nonetheless, Reynolds is a compelling and charismatic character. One of the film's most affecting sequences comes during its final act, when Reynolds and his rag-tag mob of workers travel to the Tsunami-affected Andaman Islands to build Earthships for the devastated community.

It comes late in the film, but this sequence provides a focal point for all that has gone before it. It's as if this endeavour is the end result of years of Earthship evolution, and it provides a meaningful counterpoint to Reynolds' vain attempts at legitimising his methods in his home country.

'Brilliant' Martin scuppered by party white ants

POLITICS

Moira Rayner



Paul Henderson, the pro tem chief minister of the Northern Territory, squandered a 15-seat majority in the eight months since he prised Clare Martin out of the shoes of power.

At Saturday's election, cynical and disengaged Territory voters stayed home in their hundreds, and those who bothered voted for an independent or CLP candidate they didn't respect any less than they didn't respect Labor, Henderson style.

Ironically, the administration was preserved by a squeak-through win in Martin's vacated seat of Fanny Bay.

Martin, who retired prior to the election after nine months on the backbench, had been a brilliant leader. In August 2001 she swept the CLP out of its 27 year sinecure. She offered justice for all, especially to the Territory's indigenous citizens, with whom the CLP had played race politics for 20 years, embedding intolerance and fear in Darwin's predominantly middle class northern suburbs, where all important Northern Territory elections are won or lost.

She concentrated on those northern suburbs to be re-elected in 2006 with a huge majority, but alienated the Left and the too-long neglected citizens of the bush and the margins. Little had been done about the living conditions of indigenous children by 2006 and she was forced to flirt with the mean beasts of Canberra over land rights policy, indigenous and other infrastructure and local influence. Her own party mutinously plotted.

By the time of the Howard Intervention the Territory's five new Indigenous MPs seemed convinced Martin had been captured by 'southern' advisers and over-cautious bureaucrats. Marion Scrymgour, a Tiwi Island MP, condemned the Intervention as a 'vicious new McCarthyism' in late 2006.

By 2007 Henderson and 'Labor strategists' were testing support for his future leadership. Martin became the whipping boy on government inaction in child protection. In November 2007 a tired Martin and her Treasurer Syd Stirling resigned. Henderson got the top job and Scrymgour became his Deputy.

You had to be there. Clare Martin slipped from saint to sacrificial lamb because local media led the charge and the party followers thought they had won government all by themselves. And could do it better.

Most female MPs accept that having a public profile means having dung thrown at you.

Clare Martin did, but it was particularly malodorous. Many in her party didn't take the long view about the damage this might do to them.

It just stuck. The 'Little Children' report triggered the Intervention because of her government's supposed inaction, not to speak of the naiveté of its authors. The *NT News* drove the night cart, printing overwhelmingly negative letters to the editor and vicious SMS messages.

Laws to bring the Territory in line with the rest of the country, such as road speed limits, mining agreements, and rationalisation of local government by amalgamating small shires and town councils into regional councils were an attack on the 'Territorian way of life', and Clare Martin the byword for all things 'un-Territorian'.

The Howard Government set out to undermine Martin, perhaps because she was female (therefore fair game?) as well as Labor, and because it enjoyed marginalising 'territory' politics, whose laws it could (and did) override. The Intervention was meant to achieve a national advantage which, along with the Intervention itself, seems to have stammered to a halt.

Not long into her second term, though she had succeeded in achieving a massive 19 seats out of 25, her party's white-anting got busy — she may have been good enough to win power but not good enough to lead.

Neither Scrymgour nor Alison Anderson supported Martin over the Intervention. Malarndirri McCarthy crossed the floor with two other indigenous politicians to vote against the Government's McArthur River Mine legislation, which allowed the mine to divert the river and override the sacred sites issues.

And ten months ago, while Paul Henderson was in Singapore, he told local media that if Martin decided to stand down he was ready and able to take on the role — never a mention of support for his beleaguered Chief Minister. He now stands with no-one in the wings who has the simple quality of those who were ousted.

It is ever thus with Australia's women leaders, those who step up to the unbeatable foe, and win. Lawrence, Kirner, Martin — wasted. Perhaps those in the party who elevated Henderson over Martin or just failed to get behind her now rue the day.

On Friday the Territory lost one of too few politicians with integrity and courage and we will not see her like again — at least not in the Territory, and not for a very long time.

Living with dignity

MARGARET DOOLEY AWARD - winning essay

Ruth Limkin

‘Often the test of courage is not to die but to live.’ Count Vittorio Alfieri may have written these words over 200 years ago, but they ring just as true today in an Australia seemingly seduced by death.



In March, Senator Bob Brown introduced a private senator’s bill into federal parliament to repeal the Euthanasia Laws Act 1997, thereby allowing territories to legalise euthanasia. Then, in April, the former Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Clem Jones, left a bequest of \$5 million to fund a campaign for the legalisation of euthanasia.

Next, in May, Victorian Greens MP, Colleen Hartland, put forward a private members bill to introduce ‘voluntary euthanasia’.

These pieces of legislation, and the accompanying commentary, are often framed in terms of compassion and dignity. Opponents of euthanasia, or the oft-used palatable euphemisms such as mercy killing or death with dignity, are accused of being heartless and cruel.

Yet how many of us take the time to listen beyond media-friendly sound bites, and really engage with what may be one of the gravest, yet most subtly redefining issues of modern humanity? We fail the generations that follow if we shy away from the courageous examination of the issues at play in this current debate.

We must examine the notion of choice. Those in the pro-euthanasia movements often speak of euthanasia as a choice, and demand that every Australian be given the choice to end their life. However, there is an intrinsic flaw to this suggestion. To say that euthanasia is a choice denies the fact that the decision to end your life is rarely made apart from factors that place immense pressure on the individual.

For public debate to have integrity we must acknowledge that an often unspoken, yet powerful, influence in decisions relating to euthanasia is fear. Whether it is fear of pain, fear of losing physical or mental control, or fear of being a ‘burden’ to family, this fear is powerfully persuasive. And fear makes you vulnerable.

Ending your life is rarely, if ever, a decision made by those who are free from encumbrances. The decision to kill oneself is only ever made by those, or for those, who are vulnerable in some way — physically, mentally or emotionally.

While conversations about euthanasia are puzzlingly divorced from community dialogue on suicide, it is instructive for us to consider the broad issues that affect both subjects.

Author Edwin Schniedman, who studied suicide for nearly 50 years, said, 'Nearing the end of my career in suicidology, I think I can now say what has been on my mind in as few as five words: Suicide is caused by psychache.' Schniedman went on to describe psychache as the 'pain of excessively felt shame, or guilt, or humiliation, or loneliness, or fear, or angst, or dread of growing old, or of dying badly, or whatever'.

Fear, angst, dying badly — a psychological climate eerily similar to the one that affects those who would consider euthanasia. Such a climate makes incredulous the suggestion that a terminally ill person is capable of making a dispassionate choice, free from fear or pressure. The notion of choice is so clouded with uncertainty that it is almost powerless as a reason to support euthanasia.

Further, we must also engage with the idea behind euthanasia. We often treat euthanasia as simply a medical issue, and discuss issues including terminal disease, pain management, and palliative care. However, euthanasia, at its heart, is not primarily a medical question. Euthanasia is a values question.

Our social ethic no longer considers human life as having intrinsic value, but as something we can throw away at will. The idea behind euthanasia is that human life has no inherent, sacred value but is rather like a commodity to be used. Therefore, if we are to seriously engage with this issue, and protect the vulnerable, we must understand the cultural conditions that have allowed this to take root.

Within Judeo-Christian cultures, murder has always been considered wrong. This was because we considered life a gift from a creator God; hence it also was regarded as his alone to take. Civil governments were charged with keeping order, and passed laws that made the taking of a human life a criminal act. This was an absolute we all agreed on — the rules of play, if you like.

However, as we have embraced moral relativism and cast off any sense of responsibility to a higher power, such as a Judeo-Christian ethic brings, we have set ourselves up as the final arbiters of life — and of death.

The ramifications of such a change in worldview are crystallised in the words of Pieter Admiraal, a former Dutch anesthetist, who became one of Holland's leading campaigners for euthanasia. He [said](#) :

In 50 years time, you will see euthanasia accepted all over the world. It will be used with patients suffering from Alzheimer's who are otherwise kept alive for five or ten years. The time will come when we say that this costs money, and if you are demented for one year, we will kill you. I see it not as the answer to the growing elderly population but as the exercise of the right of self-determination.



In the philosophical world inhabited by the likes of Admiraal, the value of human beings is assessed against their 'quality of life' — a seemingly benign yet ultimately abhorrent phrase. This phrase, which is used as a replacement for 'sanctity of life', is oxygenated by this idea that life has no inherent value but is defined in terms of its usefulness.

This ethical leap, from life being a gift that we have a responsibility to protect, to life being a commodity to use at will, has staggering implications.

England's Baroness Mary Warnock, a medical ethics expert in Britain, [expressed](#) these implications in an interview with the London *Sunday Times*. Warnock explained that it is better for elderly people to kill themselves than to be a burden on their families and society. 'I don't see what is so horrible about the motive of not wanting to be an increasing nuisance,' she said.

Warnock's views are unusually confronting in their brutal honesty and assessment of the place of the vulnerable in our society. However, they are eminently logical if one follows the line of thought that euthanasia advocates lead us down. Surprise at Warnock's comments only comes from the fact that these views are expressed in raw terms of consequential action, rather than obscured by gentler sounding terms such as dignity and choice.

Finally, one of the deeply sobering, yet rarely examined, consequences of the euthanasia debate is the notion of dignity and its implications for those with disabilities.

The redefining of dignity, and the concept that some of the processes of dying are inherently undignified, has, in effect, passed judgement, not upon the death of some, but upon the life of many. The value judgements behind 'dying with dignity' are actually highly offensive to those with physical or mental disabilities, and who have to live each day with the symptoms that euthanasia advocates deem 'undignified'.

In a ruling against a request for someone to be allowed to 'die with dignity' the Alaskan Supreme Court [explained](#) this concept:

Unlike the concept of pain, the concepts of 'dignity' and 'degradation' are expressions of prevailing social norms. As Professor Peter Hammer has said, '... dignity is inherently a relational concept, defining the person with respect to her community'.

Thus, feelings of indignity or degradation are not caused directly by terminal illness. Rather, they are caused by the community's reactions to the disabilities that accompany terminal illness or by the patient's expectation of adverse community reaction.

In Professor Hammer's words, '...feelings of indignity are largely fears of rejection by our community'. Two of the most important fears of rejection that accompany the dying process are the fear of violating social norms related to incontinence and the fear of violating social norms related to dependence on others.

Men and women around Australian have to live every day with physical limitations such as incontinence and dependence on others. When the pro-euthanasia movement advocates death as a far better option than living in such a state, they make horrific comment about the status of people with disabilities. Such a stance is not only highly offensive, but is cruel and lacking in compassion.

The late Dutch euthanasia opponent, Dr. Karl Gunning [said](#), 'Once killing is seen as the answer to one problem, it soon becomes the answer to 100'. Therefore, we cannot afford to abandon even one person to the false notions of choice, to the commodification of human life and to the redefinition of dignity that euthanasia embodies.

Medical funding and training for effective pain management and palliative care is essential if society wishes to offer a comprehensive and compassionate response to suffering. However, Australia also needs courageous voices that advocate, truly, for the terminally ill. Often the test of courage is not to stay silent but to speak out.

Uncreation story

POETRY

Val Yule

Psalm 148 Apocalypse: A contribution to the debate on whether humans should be doing anything about what they have been doing

'And they said, 'We shall be as gods.'

The Lord is praised by the heavens and the heights

Men destroy their ceiling of safety

The Lord is praised by the sun and moon and shining stars

Men seed their skies with mavericks.

The Lord commanded and they were created

Men command, and they are destroyed.

The Lord established them for ever and ever

Men destabilise time

The Lord fixed their bounds and men uncompass them.

The Lord was praised from the earth

Men turn it to deserts and salt

The Lord was praised by the sea monsters and all deeps

Men trawl them to extinction

Fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind

Men change the climate with their pollutions.

Mountains and all hills!

Men bore them, quarry and scalp them.

Fruit trees and all cedars!

Men spray them and clearfell them

Beasts and all cattle!

Men extinguish or factory-farm them.

Creeping things and flying birds!

Men wipe them out also.

Kings of the earth and all peoples,

Princes and rulers of the earth!

Your footprints are larger than elephants

Young men and maidens together

Stopping your ears to the cries

Old men and children

Destroying the past and the future

Let them consider the sorrow of the Lord

And what they have exalted on his earth,

How is the glory hidden

In the smoke of polluting sacrifices

To our own selves.

Where are the saints

And the people of Israel to draw near him

Bringing with them

What they have done.

Have compassion on your creator

Have mercy on his creation.

Poultry parable for homeless youth

COMMUNITY

John Honner

There's much fear around. I'm generally concerned that the sky may fall in. I'm personally troubled that my super fund is going south. I'm particularly appalled by a recent report that 43 per cent of young people who became homeless in Australia before the age of 18 were formerly in the care of the State.



I work with abused and homeless young people. They are in the care of the State, usually because their family and other family options have fallen apart. We try to stay with them in their anger and chaos. They display a lot of what the professionals call 'oppositional behaviour'. Placements can easily break down.

We used to say we had to show 'unconditional positive regard', but now we try to build 'constructive alliances' which focus on 'strengths' rather than 'deficits': we respond 'to the person' rather than 'to their behaviour'. It's all a test of love really.

Even when a young person settles down and starts to rebuild relationships, there's nowhere for them to go after care that can get them out of the circle of disadvantage they are in. Imagine the chances of a young person who has been in care trying to get rental accommodation on the real market. No bank balance, few references, poor education and employment history, and there is no rental accommodation available in the first place. No chance.

It's good that homelessness is on the agenda again. I hope something happens. I need someone to buy a few bedsitter flats to give us an option for the 20 or so young people who leave our houses each year. We will provide support and the young people can pay basic rent.

For privacy reasons, I can't tell you the true story of any of the young people. But I can tell the true story of Beryl, and there's a lesson in it somewhere I believe.

Nearly a year ago I brought home three French hens in a cardboard box with holes in the side. 'Which ones are the good ones?' I had asked the young man in the produce shop.

'They'r'allgood', he said bluntly with a half broken voice, 'D'youwannapickem?'

So I picked the only blonde in the group, and she became known as Cheryl. Then I picked the brownest one, and she became Beryl. Finally there was a beaky medium red one that looked interested in life, and she became Meryl (though we sometimes call her Julia, for obvious reasons).

Beryl, Meryl and Cheryl burred all the way home in the box in the back seat of the car, and

I made chook noises back at them. I was already engaging in a constructive alliance. 'Keep'em locked up for a week,' the young man had told me.

Seven days later I opened up the hutch and out they came. Meryl was full of beans and conversation. Cheryl preened herself and quickly became boss chook. Beryl waited behind and then slowly hobbled out. She was lame. Her left claw was withered.

Cheryl and Meryl grew, went into lay and scratched and screeched around. Beryl hobbled along behind, making little bell-like sounds as if she were talking to herself. She was last on the pecking order. I had to feed her separately from the others. She never laid an egg.

I told Nigel, my chook advisor who had grown up on a poultry farm, about Beryl. He looked at me and made a 'ring her neck' gesture. But she was ours and we kept her.

Every afternoon the chooks have a free roam around the yard. 'One of them is lame,' observed John, a neighbour who keeps cows, judges dairy, and helped build our new bell-tower at St Patrick's. 'She's special,' I said. I'm glad I didn't say anything else. John had polio as a child and now walks with a limp.

For eight months Cheryl and Meryl laid an egg a day. Beryl did nothing but burble to herself. But she was sharp of eye. She was the one who first noticed where the white ants were in the fence. She was the one who spotted where the mulberries were hanging just so high that she had to flap her wings to get to them. She was different.

I continued to talk to her in burbling tones, feeding her separately, and patiently walking her back to the chook run when the afternoon roaming was over.

A few weeks ago I noticed that her comb was growing bigger and redder. This is a sign of coming into lay. I also noticed that she was eating more (the other two never stopped) and getting bigger, and starting to push the other two around. 'Good on you Beryl,' I told her.

She started laying a week ago and hasn't stopped. She still limps, but the way I see it, she has found a home. Maybe I was right to focus on her strengths and not on her deficits, to build a constructive alliance by speaking her language.

I find the same thing works with young people. It helps, too, if you can walk with them every afternoon.

Games won't tame China's internet guard dog

POLITICS

Cat Juan



With China attempting to show the world they are ready to implement a newfound freedom towards the foreign press, many journalists are right to wonder if this isn't a façade that will fade quickly once the Games are over.

Both the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Chinese government have claimed the Games will bring a historic change for the better in China's stringent media boundaries. But the Human Rights Watch has [recently reported](#) what many feared — that China has not been keeping to its end of the bargain.

A number of foreign correspondents have faced threats of an Olympic ban if they do not report positively on other issues. Intimidation tactics on foreign journalists have also been implemented, as have firewalls on sites such as [Amnesty International](#), which recently released an in-depth report on China's human rights violations.

This should come as no surprise. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has always been on its toes when it comes to allowing the free voices from democratic nations to reach the ears of their people. A strong example of China's ability to turn a powerful tool for freedom of expression to their own advantage is the internet.

It was commonly believed that, during its formative years in China, the internet would play a key role in voicing the opinions of disgruntled citizens, and would become a new medium for public debate.

But former CNN Beijing Bureau Chief Rebecca MacKinnon [disclosed](#) this year that 'as China's pool of internet users increases, it appears that a decreasing percentage take advantage of technologies such as proxy servers that make it possible to circumvent internet censorship'.

Surveys reveal that most urban Chinese internet users trust domestic news sources more than they trust foreign news websites. MacKinnon claims 'nationalism and xenophobia have found a fertile breeding ground on the Chinese internet, while a pro-democracy movement has been prevented from growing there'.

China's government has always had an interesting approach to the net. Many academics agree the CCP was initially reluctant to apply the internet to mass media, fearful that the fast exchange of information would undermine government authority.

However, the CCP has done an impressive job of using the internet to strengthen its

propaganda. In 2006, former *Time* magazine South East Asia Bureau Chief William Thatcher Dowell wrote that 'Chinese authorities are proving unusually sophisticated at reigning in the internet's free wheeling nature'.

The CCP allows its citizens a false sense of freedom on the net by permitting the free flowing exchange of information on trivial topics such as sports and entertainment. But when users attempt to search for news and opinions around the world, they are often blocked by what is known as the Great Firewall of China — a complex system that uses IP blocking, DNS filtering, URL redirection, and other techniques to filter most web content.

An average Chinese internet user would be hard pressed to find information on topics such as the International Tibet Independence Movement, the Falun Gong, or the Taiwanese Government. The CCP has also discovered that American software designed to protect children from pornography is ideally suited to political censorship.

This balance of openness with control is nothing new to the CCP. What is more fascinating is that rather than just becoming the internet's guard dog the CCP has decided to use it to its advantage. The CCP has realised that in order to have their propaganda reach a younger audience, they must turn to the online world. It has created numerous online forums and weblog sites that encourage and spread positive publicity for the government.

By targeting the Chinese youth through a media outlet that is familiar to them, the CCP will be able to keep their message alive. MacKinnon goes so far as to suggest 'one could even argue that the skilful management of the internet might buy the CCP another few decades in power'.

The Beijing Games have been touted by many as a chance for the Chinese government to showcase a positive change towards their views on foreign journalism. But if China's control over their internet is an indication of anything, it's that they're not ready to allow outside voices entry just yet.

China's ability to turn a threat like the internet into an asset can easily be mastered by other totalitarian nations with the same goals. What's more, the internet's status as a tool for freedom of expression could be undermined if China continues showing the world it can wield the net's power for its own agenda.

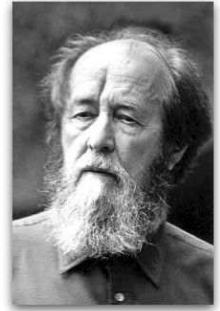
Freedom fries not to Solzhenitsyn's taste

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

While he was best known for his unrelenting criticism of the atrocities of the Soviet system, Alexander Solzhenitsyn also provided a devastating critique of the excesses of Western capitalism.

It is worth revisiting [his address](#) titled 'A World Split Apart', delivered at Harvard University in 1978, in which he called into question the myth of Western superiority. He offers a sobering insight into why today's so-called 'rogue nations' and 'forces of terror' are impelled to act violently and destructively against the West.



He begins with the suggestion that 'any ancient deeply rooted autonomous culture ... constitutes an autonomous world, full of riddles and surprises to Western thinking'.

Western visitors chose not to allow themselves to be arrested by the beauty and majesty of these cultures. Instead, they conquered them.

'How short a time ago, relatively, the small new European world was easily seizing colonies everywhere, not only without anticipating any real resistance, but also usually despising any possible values in the conquered peoples' approach to life.'

It is tragic that Robert Mugabe's single-minded determination to remind the west of this absurd and unfair reality has only served to destroy Zimbabwe.

Solzhenitsyn goes on to offer a critique of the western understanding of freedom. The US and its allies, including Australia, have continued to wage war in Iraq in order to impose this value on the people of Iraq. But Solzhenitsyn made a distinction between 'freedom for good deeds and freedom for evil deeds'.

George W. Bush knew only one variety of freedom fries. For his part, Solzhenitsyn said:

'Destructive and irresponsible freedom has been granted boundless space. Society appears to have little defence against the abyss of human decadence, such as, for example, misuse of liberty for moral violence against young people.'

The affirmation earlier this year of Americans' constitutional freedom to own guns is a further example of freedom gone wrong.

Meanwhile Solzhenitsyn added another important qualification to freedom. He believed it was dangerous to talk of human rights *per se*.

'It is time, in the West, to defend not so much human rights as human obligations.'

For him, speaking up for human rights without the corollary of an obligation to do good, was a form of fundamentalism.

‘Life organised legalistically has thus shown its inability to defend itself against the corrosion of evil.’

Solzhenitsyn also applied his principle to press freedom, and it could be worth using it as a criterion with which to judge China’s derided attempts to censor internet access during the Olympics.

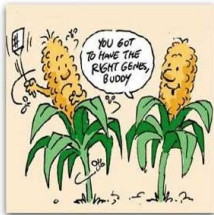
Solzhenitsyn said: ‘People also have the right not to know, and it is a much more valuable one.’

We may scratch our heads and ask how this can be. It does not make sense to the western mind, yet we’re being asked to accept it. That is Solzhenitsyn’s point.

Nossal's leaky GM defence

ENVIRONMENT

Charles Rue



In a commentary in [The Age](#) in June, Sir Gustav Nossal reported on genetically modified canola hearings in Victoria. This was one of a number of media outings, including an address to the [National Press Club](#), in which Nossal reiterated the same biotech message that the pro-GM lobby has peddled for more than a decade.

The article claims that pro-GM farmers should be able to choose whether to grow GM crops or not. However, this ignores the fact that conventional farmers will be denied their choice because all crops face the threat of becoming contaminated by GM cross pollination and the mixing of seeds.

Nossal claims that GM and non-GM seeds can easily be segregated, ignoring the experienced opinion of farmers, carriers and seed merchants, as well as the extra costs involved in separating the seeds. Allowing pro-GM farmers a choice between GM and conventional crops takes choice away from opposing farmers and the consumers.

His article also claims that great financial benefits are promised from growing GM crops, paralleling a report on the potential benefits of GM crops presented by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics earlier this year. However, this ignores the real financial losses experienced by farmers who cannot get the premium prices given to certified non-GM canola.

Nossal suggests that farmers, consumers and anyone who expresses reservations about GM technology are against science. He suggests that critics believe GM 'is somehow against nature or God's plan'. This is far from the truth. Anti-GM farmers encourage scientific research, but they do not want to equate good science with GM.

In fact, farmers want more science, and praise research done by the CSIRO in the past. What they do not want is a reduction of funding to conventional agricultural research as is occurring under the Federal Labor Government.

Nossal also suggests that people who question the introduction of GM canola do not respect the democratic process. However, at the hearing, it was the pro-GM lobby which was the loudest and best funded. The opinion of the majority of farmers, expressed in surveys reported in *The Land*, is to continue the moratorium on commercial growing of GM-canola was ignored. This is hardly democratic.

The GM lobby argues that it is not really new but merely a 'high-tech extension of biotechnology processes used over millennia'. However, direct gene-swap between organisms

through GM is totally new. Its proper name is revealing — ‘recombinant DNA’ and ‘transgenic transfer’.

Individual genes can be compared to words, writes Steve Jones (*The Language of Genes*, 1993) — just as the meaning of individual words depends on their function within a language, a gene only functions properly within a living organism and its genome. GM ‘distorts’ this relationship.

The lobby also plays on people’s hopes and fears by associating GM foods with genetic ‘miracle cures’. However, the two processes are very different. In GM foods genetic information is passed on to following generations through breeding in the open environment. In therapeutic work genetic information usually stays with the particular human. The use of GM to produce such things as insulin stays in the controlled environment of the lab.

The most recent advocacy of GM plays on people’s fears concerning climate change, suggesting that GM crops are better suited to withstand a changing environment. However, the genetic diversity preserved in conventional breeding has proven results and is cost effective while GM is only promises.

In his article, Nossal pushes the notion that GM foods will cure world hunger. The US embassy to the Holy See also used this argument in an attempt to get the Vatican to endorse GM technology. However, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization International Conference in 2007 concluded that organic agriculture remains the better choice between the two, being able to feed the world’s poor better than GM promises.

Book of the week: *Enid Lyons - Leading Lady to a Nation*

BOOK FORUM

Alexandra Coghlan

Henderson, Anne: *Enid Lyons – Leading Lady to a Nation*. Pluto Press, June 2008, RRP \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-9802924-9-7

That a woman should have been elected to the Australian House of Representatives in 1943 is achievement enough. That this woman should be the child of a Tasmanian sawyer and a postmistress, and herself the mother of 12 children, renders the achievement quite remarkable.

What is most striking about the life story of Enid Lyons, however, is not its trailblazing singularity, but rather the degree to which she remained — throughout her life — a typical Australian wife and mother.

It was precisely this quality of down-to-earth practicality coupled with her awareness of everyday concerns that informed and energised a political career that saw Lyons mixing socially with royalty, shaping the legislative agenda for the Division of Darwin, and ultimately becoming one of only two women in Australian history to be made a Dame of the Order of Australia.

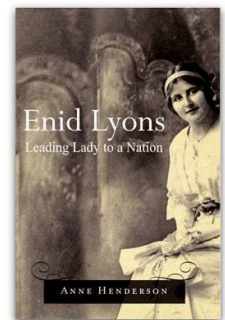
Anne Henderson's biography traces Lyons' history from her birth and upbringing in rural Tasmania through to her death, focusing on both her public political life and her relationship with husband Joe Lyons, Australia's tenth Prime Minister.

The relationship between Joe and Enid Lyons forms the basis of Kate White's 1987 book *A Political Love Story — Joe and Enid Lyons*. Henderson's biography provides something of a revisionist gloss to this earlier work, challenging several of White's readings and providing newly fleshed-out details of various key events.

Chief among Henderson's new material is a chapter on the origins of Enid's father, William Burnell, in which she exposes a scandal long buried in the sanitised family records. While providing an interesting contextual footnote, such details as emerge do not radically alter a reading of Lyons herself, who — it is revealed — would have been unaware of them.

More interesting is Henderson's take on the relationship between Joe and Enid, a marriage '... revolving around the vagaries of political highs and lows', which she claims has been substantially misinterpreted by history.

Enid survived her husband by 42 years, during which time she pursued a diverse and highly successful public career, independent of her husband's influence and legacy. Such drive and endeavour, Henderson argues, have led many to cast Enid as the true political force in the



relationship and Joe as the figurehead, an impression fostered by Joe's own extensive public acknowledgement of his wife's achievements.

Through judicious use of primary sources — letters between the couple and interviews with the Lyons' children — Henderson creates a compelling portrait of a truly modern partnership of equals, in which Enid's energy and charisma were both a support and a spur to her husband's political ambitions.

When taxed privately with the tremendous risk that her husband was taking in leaving the Labor Party, Enid proved herself unshakeable in her devotion, reportedly answering: 'If he had done anything else I should have been ashamed of him.'

What emerges most strongly from Henderson's book is the image of an unconventional feminist; a woman whose love of the stage and of the thrill of public performance earned her the nickname of 'the family's Sarah Bernhardt', yet whose life was empty without an infant to nurse and cradle; a woman whose political addresses lived and grew out of the rhetoric of the hearth, and yet who was happy to leave daily domestic activity to others.

These contradictions it seems were at the core of Enid's character — the opposing magnetic forces that kept her in such sustained activity throughout her life — and wisely Henderson makes no attempt to reconcile them.

If the result leaves tantalising gaps in our understanding of the inner workings and motivations of this most unusual of women, it also remains faithful to the perceptions of family and friends alike, providing the most accurate image possible of the private woman and public politician who was Dame Enid Lyons.

Congo thrives under Chinese 'invasion'

POLITICS

Fernando Franco



I recently visited Kinshasa to help review advocacy policies and propose new ones to be followed in Africa by Jesuit institutions. It was three years since I was last in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

These few years of peace seemed to have increased levels of confidence among the population. Development too is taking place. There was clearly greater hope and an awareness that something new is happening.

On my way to visit the offices of Centre d'Etudes pour l'Action Social (CEPAS), a social centre engaged in advocacy issues and peace efforts, I began to understand one of the reasons. I saw at the other side of the compound two huge and well-designed buildings under construction.

'I did not know that your new extension was going to be so grand,' I said jokingly to Father Ferdinand Muhigirwa. He replied: 'I wish they were our buildings. One of the buildings is the new Chinese business and commercial centre, and the other one that looks like a palace is the house of its future Chinese Director.'

Listening to Fr Ferdinand talk about the work CEPAS is doing with the large foreign mining companies was like a class in international geopolitics.

In collaboration with the advocacy officer from the US Jesuit Conference, John Kleiderer, and the new representative of OCIPE-Brussels, Emmanuelle Devuyt, they are dealing with a US mining company whose copper concession extends over 18,000 square kilometres. The concession holds the largest copper reserves in the world.

Operations have not started yet, but the site already has a private international airport, a new highway connecting it to Lubumbashi, new excavating machines as high as a ten-storey building, a private security army of 800 people, and a fully equipped hospital. The infrastructure is massive.

The Congolese government is now renegotiating the contracts of all mining companies. Companies will be classified by a very strict set of criteria covering environmental, labour, tax protocols, social and other issues. Those grouped in Class A will have met all the criteria laid out by the government. They will have their contracts renegotiated.

Companies that do not fulfill all the criteria are placed in Class B. They must commit themselves within a specified time to fulfil all the conditions for reclassification into Class A. Otherwise they will be asked to leave. Companies placed in category C have to leave the

country.

The US copper company I mentioned earlier has been placed at present in category B. It is fighting tooth and nail to be included in category A.

This pressure brought on foreign multinationals 'to take it or leave it' is a new phenomenon. 'Where does the new bargaining power of the Congolese government come from?' I asked Fr Ferdinand. He smiled and replied quickly: 'From the new Chinese and, sometimes, Indian enterprises.'

This is a totally new phenomenon. Unlike the contracts of Western multinationals that have been made public, their contracts are not open to public scrutiny. They are ready to move anywhere.

For example, if the US copper giant decides to leave because it does not want to fulfil the government conditions, a Chinese consortium will take over the concession next day. European and US corporations are facing the onslaught of Chinese and Indian companies. It is remarked that Europe is on the retreat in Africa.

The evidence of Chinese invasion is seen everywhere in Kinshasa. In front of the national parliament building a large site has been given to the Chinese for constructing a huge modern hospital. An abandoned construction site, which was supposed to house a medical college, and a large tract of land occupied by military barracks close to Parliament, will make way for a large housing complex with all modern amenities. And so the stories continue.

The perspective from Kinshasa is that something spectacular is taking place in DRC and other parts of Africa. The 'development' promised to people after independence 30 and 40 years ago has remained a dream of the past. Europe has clearly failed to achieve anything close to success.

The Asian way is already showing results. When the infrastructure projects in Africa start functioning the change is going to be huge. Few have realised the magnitude of its impact. Jesuit and other agencies will need to evaluate it.

Film of the week: *Female Agents* and *Stop-Loss*

FILM FORUM

Tim Kroenert

***Female Agents*: 120 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Jean-Paul Salome. Starring: Sophie Marceau, Julie Depardieu, Marie Gillain, Maya Sansa, Deborah Francois, Moritz Bleibtreu**

A significant problem for Australian audiences of French war drama, *Les Femmes de L'ombre* is the loose translation of its title. *Female Agents* smacks of frivolity (is this a gender-switched spin on James Bond perhaps?) and belies the earnestness of the film's intent and the dark corners in which its characters dwell.



A more literal translation — *The Women of the Shadow* — would be better. This has connotations of spy-thriller espionage and intrigue, and may even be slightly cheesy. But it also captures something of the complexity of character and theme.

This is a film about undercover female soldiers sent into enemy territory during World War II to protect one of the Allied Forces' best-kept secrets. 'The shadow' refers not just to the covert nature of the operation, but also the ethical and emotional implications of putting life and personal integrity on the line in the name of doing your military duty.

The Allies have learned that Colonel Heindrich (Bleibtreu), head of the German counter-intelligence, has had an inkling of the planned D-Day landings at Normandy. So an all-female commando unit is assembled, with trained sniper Louise (Marceau) leading the charge to protect the secret and eliminate Heindrich.

While primarily an action film — and a fairly average one at that — *Female Agents* finds strength in the way it pays particular attention to the power of femininity when working undercover against a male-dominated military. It examines how the women, when invoking this particular power, need to subject themselves to being exploited in order that they might exploit their opponent.

For example, when the commando unit sets out to retrieve an injured British soldier from a German hospital, snatching him from the enemy before he can be tortured into divulging sensitive information, two of the 'agents' create a diversion by performing a striptease for a room full of hollering soldiers. It is unlikely a male soldier would ever be called upon to perform such a task, and less likely he'd be able to carry it off as successfully.

In this regard *Female Agents* bears comparison with the terrific 2006 Dutch film *Black Book*. That film's heroine, a Jewish resistance fighter working undercover against the Nazi occupation in the Netherlands, is used and abused awfully by the men in the film, yet by

making herself thus ostensibly powerless, she in fact gains power.

Female Agents is not as tightly plotted nor as spirited as *Black Book*. But it is compelling in the way it examines the ways in which the degradations endured give the characters strategic power, at cost to personal power.

Not all the degradations are of a sexual nature. For Suzy (Gillain) the challenge is emotional, as she must exploit her previous, personal relationship with Heindrich in order to help his would-be assassins get near to him. While self-serving Jeanne (Depardieu) experiences a realignment of conscience as the ethical hardships of war lead her to consider others' welfare ahead of her own.

And not all characters survive the process intact. Gaelle (Francois), a young explosives expert, suffers physically and morally when captured and tortured for information about her comrades' whereabouts. Her innocence makes her a sympathetic character, which in turn renders her fall from grace all the more appalling and tragic.

A final point. *Female Agents* is a study of femininity in war. This makes it a fitting companion piece to another war film released this week, the US drama *Stop-Loss*.

Director Kimberley Peirce's politically charged but humane tale about a young soldier, Sergeant Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe), and his return home to Texas following a tour of duty in Iraq, puts the surgeon's scalpel to the relationship between masculinity and patriotism in the American south.

King has been deeply affected by his experiences at war and, having completed his required term, is looking forward to settling back in to his old life. When he is confronted with the prospect of being forced to return to combat under the US military's 'stop-loss' clause, the decorated sergeant goes AWOL. His rage-fuelled cross-country odyssey brings him to re-examine his sense of duty to his country, comrades and self.

These are two very different films, but each offers a distinctive take on the ways in which war impacts the human beings involved. After all it is individual humans, not political or military entities, who bear the greatest burden.

iPhone junkies fuel 'techclusivity'

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Ben O'Mara



When the much-hyped iPhone 3G was released last month, people across the world queued for hours to buy the latest incarnation of Apple's uber-cool and feature-packed mobile phone. A few hundred punters braved the winter chill at midnight in Sydney for the privilege of being the first iPhone owners in the country.

The iPhone is a sexy and clever device. Its large, luminous touch screen can zoom in and out on web pages and zip through song lists and phone contacts, while a virtual keyboard allows you to write text messages and emails. Sourcing and communicating information has never been easier.

But new technology comes with baggage. It's not only the high cost that is problematic, although the iPhone is certainly expensive. One of Telstra's cheaper options is the 8GB \$40 per month package for two years which includes a \$279 upfront fee. Additionally, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has warned consumers to be wary of the additional costs involved once download limits have been exceeded.

The most interesting question regarding the popularity of the iPhone is, who is more likely to benefit from this technology, and who is not? Our obsession with slick and funky gadgets makes it hard to see the role technology plays in a wider social context.

Not everyone has access or the ability to use new technology. This is a major challenge for recently arrived people such as Sudanese or Burmese, for example, who have lived long in refugee camps. This in turn has implications for their health and wellbeing.

The use and application of information communication technology has emerged as a major issue in developing effective strategies for health promotion to a multicultural Australian audience. In a world where information is increasingly delivered online, we need to address the social, cultural and economic barriers relating to technology in order to effectively communicate with a rich and diverse range of Australian communities.

Recent research undertaken by the National Centre for Vocational Education has shown there is an increasing tendency to rely on the use of high tech information communication technology despite the well acknowledged 'digital divide' between and within groups.

Older members of some communities, for example, are particularly disadvantaged in terms of information technology literacy. Also, as researchers at Victoria University have discovered, internet communication that is primarily textual can be difficult for communities with largely oral rather than written language traditions.

In health promotion, there is a tendency to focus on one-way transmission and an assumption that the ability to access information equates with knowledge and understanding. A multilingual PDF flyer about managing diabetes might be available online, but this doesn't mean a recently arrived Sudanese woman with little money and no computer experience will be able to use the technology, let alone benefit from the health information.

The iPhone and its competitors should not be dismissed in their potential for supporting communities. Their technological innovation can contribute to the development of more effective communication strategies.

Groups with limited access to economic resources coupled with a limited ability to speak English and illiteracy in their first languages have been disadvantaged by computer and keyboard reliant technologies. Visually based interactive technologies such as iPhones have the potential to address this technological exclusion.

The key is finding socially inclusive and culturally sensitive ways of using technology. Community driven workshops which are adequately resourced and supported by older or cheaper forms of technology, such as community radio, community newspapers and/or multilingual phone support, could work just as effectively in promoting messages of health and community wellbeing.

They may also function as more culturally appropriate points of distribution for health promotion materials on cheap multimedia platforms such as DVDs that can then be played at home on the family television.

Technology is always changing. In the race to create ever smarter, faster and more efficient information communication gadgets like the iPhone, we must never forget who gets left behind, and how we can best foster the use and application of technology for the benefit of all.

Funeral for a marriage

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

Let us handle some cold facts carefully here like brilliant knives.

About 240,000 Australians are born every year. We have a sacrament to welcome them.

About 130,000 Australians die every year. We have a sacrament to say farewell.

About 100,000 Australians get married every year. We have a sacrament to celebrate their nutty courage.

About 50,000 Australians get divorced every year. We have no sacrament for them.

Something crucial and wonderful and holy and sweet and salty between that man and that woman sickened and withered and died, without public mourning or witness or ritual, without communal attention and respect.

It dies shivering the souls of the formerly married and their children and their friends, and the Church has nothing to say, turns and looks away, frowns and castigates, and everyone shuffles forward into the muddled future, trying to repair their shattered hearts.

Maybe there should be a sacrament for the end of a marriage. Maybe we should gather as a people to witness and mourn the death of love and hope. Maybe we should create a ritual by which we honor their brave attempt, and formally conclude their failed endeavor.

Maybe we should offer the people we love and respect a day of dignity to close an immensely painful chapter, to publicly offer our support to women and men and children, in the same way that we publicly offered our support and witness on the day they vowed to honor each other all the days of their lives.

I do not say we should celebrate divorce. No death deserves celebration, as death is loss, hole, emptiness. But in the same way we celebrate the life lived, and the life to come, when we conduct funerals, why not celebrate the love loved, and the love to come, with a funeral for a marriage?

I hear wailing and the gnashing of teeth — by publicly acknowledging divorce, by public prayer for the deceased marriage, we acquiesce to divorce! we make it normal! we make it acceptable! in fact, gasp, we promote it!

Nonsense. Do we promote death by offering witness at a funeral? No — we face what is, we deal with real, we go deep into the ancient magic of the human heart, we soak the



mundane with the sacred, and rise healthy and hopeful from the rubble.

One of the great subtle geniuses of the Catholic Church is the way it makes holy the most intense and powerful moments in life — the miracle of birth, the cleansing and catharsis of confession, the wonderful courage of marriage and priesthood, the preparation for death, the final celebration of life and joy at the journey to Light.

Yet divorce is an incredibly powerful and painful chapter in millions of lives a year in this country alone, and we only murmur around it, gossip and sigh, take sides or notes for new addresses and phone numbers. A judge signs a decree, assets are divided, children's lives apportioned into custodial hours, sadness rises like a tide, and everyone grapples for new lives in which the divorce is a biographical note, not a hammer to the heart.

But there's been no funeral, no hour of public prayer, no ceremony of farewell, no communal gathering to witness what was and pray for what might be.

Why not? Wouldn't we be more honest, more prayerful, more loving children of God if we gathered and held the shattered family in our common hearts for an hour? Don't you think they need us? Don't you think, God forbid you are ever in the same haunted place in life, you would need them?

Tragedy walks through their doors

POETRY

Jennifer Compton

In the Alfred Emergency and Trauma Centre

I hate it when they usher you straight through to the Room.
I've never been in the Room but I always knew I would hate it.
I hate the box of tissues waiting for your tears.
I have seen that box of tissues before.
I asked a security guard what the Room was called.
I felt such a need to write an accurate poem.
He told me it was called the Grievance Room.
I looked askance, although I had a grievance.
He offered me the use of their Spirituality Centre.
I declined. But made sure of their Smoke Zone.
A pagoda arrangement out by the helipad.
A birdbath filled with sand for centrepiece.
My daughter's injury is not time critical.
She will arrive by chopper in an hour, or two.

It's too early for the fighting drunks.

But the legless, weeping girls are arriving.
I hate the way I have to write this poem
to send it off into the future where
time doesn't move by fits and starts as
my silly old heart thumps and leaps.
Into the future, all smoothed, (like this moment,
perhaps, like this dull, exquisite, ordinary moment.

And someone else is getting it in the neck.
Someone else is on fire as if they were alive.)
I hate the way my tragedy walks in through their doors
20, 30, 40 times a day.
I hate the way I strike up conversations with people
seeking comfort, like a needy needy needy person.
I hate these magazines. Famous faces who have
already split getting married on a beach, barefoot.
An ICU nurse on lunchbreak in the middle of the night
confesses it is called the Distressed Relative's Room.
I have the name. (Of it.)
I am safe. (From it.)
If I was a much nicer person I would
go down to the Spirituality Centre.
There is a book and people write poems in it.
Messages, wishes. The things that they feel.
I hate the way it should console me
but I will start criticising, I know I will.
Picky picky picky. Bathos, slop and bilge, tripe.
Already I am planning to edit, tweak, spell check.

Chinese burn for 'political' Games

SPORT

Jeremy Clarke



The Olympic Games that begin in Beijing on Friday will provide surprises and memories that live on throughout the years to come. What is certain is that not all of these surprises will be welcomed by the Chinese government, or the international community.

There is no reason to think the Games will be anything other than a wonderful spectacle that will be enjoyed by billions around the world. The People's Republic of China has employed massive amounts of money, time, energy and creativity to ensure this is the result.

However, the fact is that the Olympics have their own way of providing memorable surprises and the most uplifting of results.

Just as Olympic medals are the result of a mixture of talent, sheer hard work and luck, a successful Olympics is not just the product of meticulous planning and goodwill on the part of the citizens of the host nation, but also depends upon the absence of international boycotts and political point scoring.

Although there will be no substantial boycott of the Beijing Olympics, apart from perhaps a few non-attendees at the opening ceremony, the Chinese government has realised that holding the Games has not been without cost.

While the successful bid to host the Olympics bolstered national pride within China, it also brought with it hitherto unexpected engagement with large numbers of international communities, ranging from human rights protestors to cyber activists.

It is clear that the Beijing Olympics has already been a great example of what is known as the law of unexpected consequences, and these unexpected consequences will continue to accrue over the next few weeks, even as other memorable Olympic moments unfold.

The torch relay has been one such example of an event with unexpected consequences. It is also a salient example of how such consequences exert their influence on more than just the Chinese government and populace at large.

For instance, activists and protestors around the world welcomed the relay as an opportunity to raise a number of concerns about the political situation in China and sought to use this occasion to bring these issues to a broader international consciousness.

Campaigners who lined the torch routes in major cities throughout the world included people flying banners promoting animal rights in China, protesting the treatment of Falun

Gong practitioners and raising the question of Tibetan and Taiwanese independence.

Largely through peaceful and even theatrical means these campaigners managed to achieve international attention for their concerns and were able to dominate the media cycle in previously unobtainable ways.

Yet the unexpected consequence of all this coverage was not the successful attainment of these disparate goals — although international consciousness was raised through the campaigners' efforts — but rather a hardening of Chinese chauvinism.

Whereas there was the beginning of a certain natural alliance between the general human rights concerns of the international protestors and the aspirations of the large middle class in China who are seeking greater personal autonomy and an amelioration of such things as internet censorship, the vociferous torch protests succeeded in driving a wedge between such groups.

Rather than creating one world sharing one dream, to paraphrase the Olympic motto, the protests had the unexpected consequence of strengthening an aggressive Chinese nationalism. The Chinese people have swung behind the Chinese government, and its Olympic aspirations, because the motley mob haranguing the 'sacred torch' was perceived as having attacked China. Natural allies became alienated patriots.

There will certainly be more such surprising consequences in the weeks to come. As the medal tallies grow, issues such as pollution, transport, religious practice and international relations will feature their own prime time moments — interesting viewing indeed.

Refugee reform: the next chapter

POLITICS

David Holdcroft

The changes to Australia's asylum policy announced last week by the immigration minister, Chris Evans, were as inevitable as they were sensible. They are also incremental: they remove some of the worst aspects of a cruel system but leave intact much of the deterrent apparatus inherited from the former government.



The introduction of mandatory detention is generally regarded as the work of Keating Government immigration minister Gerry Hand in 1992, although the policy direction can be traced three years previously to 1989.

The Howard Government strengthened it in response to what it saw as a sizeable increase in numbers of boat people making for Australia's shores in the late 1990s.

At the same time it introduced the infamous Pacific Solution, excising offshore islands from Australia's migration zone, taking people to Nauru for processing, introducing temporary protection for those who had transited 'safe' countries for more than seven days and employing a narrow definition of the Refugee Convention with which to process claims. The aim was to deter applications for asylum 'on shore'.

Undoubtedly, the Liberals will say their tough strategy set up the conditions under which last week's changes became possible. There is some evidence for this. Recent research from the Australian National University indicates that deterrent measures such as limiting access to territory and those aimed at reducing the proportion of successful claims have played their part in reducing asylum applications worldwide.

However the policies were notable for the sheer cruelty they visited on those caught in the middle.

The same research attributes the overwhelming determinants of forced migration to so-called 'push' factors, namely oppression, terror and debilitating economic conditions in the countries of origin. Asylum seekers and refugees move because they have to.

Australia's stance did nothing to address the causes of forced migration. It only shifted the burden elsewhere. The increase in overall numbers of displacement last year, to 38 million, further demonstrates this.

What the Coalition can take credit for is the high degree of cooperation with Indonesian authorities that has developed since 2001. However there is a perception in Indonesia that Australia is increasingly prepared to transfer its problems to its neighbour.

There are people in Jakarta and Bogor who have been 'warehoused' after trying to reach Australia. Some have been there for years. Their low morale reflects the uncertainty of having been caught in limbo. Australia recognises some moral and financial responsibility for their welfare, and is encouraging Indonesia to accede to the Refugee Convention. Preventing people from coming to Australia is not the end of the asylum story.

Evans is acting cautiously. He wants to restore trust and cohesion to a discredited system. He also needs to manage public perceptions. People arriving in excised territories will go to Christmas Island for processing. Onshore asylum numbers will continue to be included as part of the overall refugee quota of around 7000.

And it remains to be seen the degree to which the move of claimants to the community will burden the sector. The role of measures such as the Community Care Pilot to manage complex cases across the range of their need is critical and needs expansion.

The vexed issues of work rights and ministerial appeal remain as the last vestiges of a system that punishes the victims and concentrates too much power in the minister's office. The ANU research indicates that diminishing the socio-economic conditions of asylum seekers once here has little effect on deterring applications. But it has a huge impact on the community likely to bear the cost of their care in an ongoing manner.

More positively, Evans has moved to broaden criteria for refugee-like situations which will mean fewer people in protracted legal processes and a more transparent system of assessment.

Clearly the building of a cohesive system is a huge management challenge for this Government. Rest assured it will keep a close eye on the numbers of arrivals.

But any policy will only achieve its goals if the question around asylum seekers and refugees ultimately is recast. It is not a matter of how effective our border controls are and how many people we 'let in', as much as what is causing the people to seek refuge in the first place.

Is the Rudd Government willing to take on the causes of forced migration? If not, the victims will inevitably continue to suffer.

Greedy Australia in a league of its own

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



A week ago, rugby league fans were shocked to hear that Canterbury Bulldogs' star player Sonny Bill Williams was breaking his contract in order to accept a more lucrative offer from French union club Toulon.

The *Daily Telegraph* and other media [chided](#) him for his greed. But by mid-week, defenders were coming forward. Anthony 'The Man' Mundine [declared](#) he was '100 per cent behind [his] brother', reasoning that 'a man can change his mind from time to time if he wants new goals'.

Mundine and others were attributing Williams' departure to salary caps, which limit the amount of money players can earn and focus their attention on the game rather than the remuneration. There were warnings that more stars would leave if salary caps were left in place, and that it would spread to the other football codes.

Salary caps are effectively greed caps, and therefore serve a useful social purpose. But unfortunately greed is not confined to sport, nor even the corporate sector. Many Australians were scandalised by the \$50 million retirement package awarded to Macquarie Bank boss Allan Moss earlier this year. However Australians as a nation are more greedy than we would like to think.

Last week, author and former foreign correspondent [Christopher Kremmer](#) delivered lectures on greed, as part of the PEN 3 Writers Project. He called Australia the 'miser of the Western world', and argued that the nation was created and sustained by greed.

He said that those Australians who give to charity donate a mere 0.33 per cent of their income. The British and French nations give twice as much per head of population in foreign aid, compared to Australia. According to the statistics Kremmer was drawing from, we rank 19th on the list of the world's 22 richest countries, in what we give in foreign aid.

He suggested to Radio National's [Life Matters](#) that the revival of estate taxes could do something to cap the greed of the nation's wealthy. Estate taxes, also known as death duties, prevent the passing of inherited wealth from generation to generation, which sustains the 'idle rich' sector of the community.

By contrast, America's rich give eight times as much as their Australian counterparts. Many of that nation's wealthiest citizens deliberately limit the amount of wealth they transfer to their children, because they believe it does them no good.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd commissioned Treasury secretary Ken Henry to conduct a review into Australia's taxation system. Last week it was [reported](#) that new rules being proposed by the review could remove incentives for sports stars such as Shane Warne and Ricky Ponting to set up charitable trusts.

This would appear to fly in the face of the Prime Minister's [call](#) at Friday's Oaktree Future Foundation launch for a 'new era of philanthropy'. He called to mind 'Bill Gates and Warren Buffett and their inspirational generosity'.

Rather than remove incentives that foster philanthropy, it would make more sense to reintroduce an inheritance tax.