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## South Africa shows compassion to Zimbabwean refugees

### HUMAN RIGHTS

*David Holdcroft*

If one ventures into downtown Johannesburg these evenings, you will witness an unusual sight: a straggly queue of hundreds of people winding down Harrison Street for a number of city blocks.

Some lie under blankets, catching snatches of sleep on the concrete. Others munch away on roast chicken wings or pap peddled by the ubiquitous throng of hawkers so characteristic of any public gathering in South Africa.

One is reminded of the long nightly queues that formed in Sandton of people waiting to purchase tickets for the World Cup. However this line ends not at a ticket booth but rather at an office of the Department of Home Affairs.

Those in the queue are some of the estimated 1.2 to 1.5 million Zimbabweans presently living in South Africa. They are here to apply for work permits having been told they must secure them by December 31st this year or face deportation.

Most Zimbabweans have come to South Africa as a result of a combination of factors. The political violence that marred the 2008 elections and the various land reform programs that have displaced many, are two such factors. But most observers cite the total collapse of the economy, also in 2008, with the accompanying hyperinflation that rendered the local currency worthless and led to the introduction of the United States Dollar, as the main reason.

Initially the South African authorities took a legalistic approach towards the Zimbabwean migration, turning people without documentation back at the border. Deportations were common. Desperate people would try again and again to make the crossing. At one stage the army was deployed to fight an unwinnable battle.

For the migrants, avoiding the authorities was only one of the dangers faced on the journey. Many fell foul of the *amagumaguma*, local thieves who posed as minibus drivers. Many are believed to have died from violence, drowning, and the occasional crocodile attack in the Limpopo River that lines the frontier.

In April 2009 South Africa introduced a policy of 'special dispensation'. Deportations were halted. Those without documentation were to be issued with a special permit to enable them to live and work in South Africa.

To the disappointment of NGOs there was a change in government and the special permit was never introduced. But Zimbabweans crossing the border were issued with a 'Section 22' renewable asylum permit. It enabled the bearer to live and seek work in South Africa for a

period of 6 months as they waited for their refugee claim to be processed.

This 'half solution' had the positive effect of creating a means by which Zimbabwean people could move to and work legally in South Africa and so remit money home to their impoverished families. But it also created a number of difficulties.

Others besides Zimbabweans were free to use the 'asylum route' as a migration pathway. In 2009, 222,324 people took advantage of the policy, making South Africa the biggest asylum destination anywhere.

Genuine asylum seekers were penalised as the system quickly overloaded. Nor was this a lasting solution for the Zimbabweans themselves. Over ninety per cent of claimants were refused asylum. Their situation did not entitle them to refugee status under the various refugee conventions on which South African law is based.

As a result many 'disappeared'. They assumed false identities or lived a precarious existence without documentation. On 2nd September the South African Government announced the end of this dispensation.

The decision is both pragmatic and has elements of compassion. It allows Zimbabweans currently working, studying, or operating a business in South Africa to regularise their status by 31 December with a permit that will be valid for 4 years. Applicants must firstly obtain a Zimbabwean passport, and provide evidence of their work or study in South Africa. Those declaring false identity papers are to be given amnesty. Importantly, those seeking asylum will still have access to the Section 22 permit and a determination process.

As was the case in 2009, there is much to commend this new decision. It is a brave attempt both to close some loopholes in the existing law and to create greater protection for this vulnerable group within the larger community. But problems remain.

Although the cost of a Zimbabwean passport necessary to obtain a work permit was reduced to \$50, this remains a large sum for many people. No one knows how long the Zimbabwean embassy will take to process applications.

The capacity of the South African authorities is also in question. Only a fraction of the estimated 100,000 people who stand to take advantage of the policy were processed in the first month. The deadline clearly needs to be extended. Those in informal employment, too, will have difficulty in attaining the required documentation.

The most serious criticism of the new rules is that they are based on an over-optimistic assessment of the Zimbabwean economy. Only time can tell whether this proves correct or whether people will still feel compelled to make the journey south. Ultimately nearly everyone agrees that the only end to this extraordinary migration is a political solution within Zimbabwe itself. And that, sadly, remains a long way off.

## A hybrid Christianity for Aboriginal Australians

### VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

A striking feature of the recent Vatican ceremonies elevating Mary MacKillop to sainthood was the central involvement of Aboriginal Catholics. Earlier this week *Eureka Street* published the [text of an address](#) given by Father Frank Brennan last Sunday at the American Academy of Religion in which he spoke movingly of his experience being with the Aboriginal contingent which attended the canonisation in Rome.

He also gave some insights into the troubled history of interaction between Aboriginal and Christian religiosity in Australia, and he referred to the 'deep, nurtured and nurturing spirituality' displayed by many Aborigines in straddling the two very different worlds.

Someone who patently has this sort of spirituality is prominent Aboriginal elder, Tom Calma, who is featured in this interview. Though brought up a Catholic, he no longer sees himself as a Christian, and has gravitated towards his Aboriginal spiritual heritage. But he still envisions a positive engagement between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality, and urges the Churches to be open to a hybrid Christianity that embraces both.

He spoke with *Eureka Street TV* at a conference held in July 2010 to mark the centenary of the [Melbourne College of Divinity](#). The overall theme of the meeting was 'The Future of Religion in Australian Society'.

Calma is one of this country's most accomplished indigenous leaders and activists. He is an elder of the Kungarakan tribal group on his mother's side whose traditional lands are south-west of Darwin, and on his father's side is a member of the Iwaidja tribe whose country is on the Coburg Peninsula in the Northern Territory.

For almost forty years he has had a distinguished career in various parts of the public service. From 1995-2002 he was a senior diplomat in India and Vietnam, and oversaw the management of the Australian Education International Offices in Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

After this he served as both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission, and as Race Discrimination Commissioner.

He was instrumental in setting up the recently formed National Congress of Australia's First Peoples which will be the major indigenous consultative group for the federal government. He is a member of its Ethics Council.

Tom Calma sits on many boards, and is in demand as a speaker around the country. He is

Patron of the Rural Health Education Foundation and the Poche Centres for Indigenous Health, and is Deputy Chair of the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation. In June 2010 he was appointed to the Board of Directors of Reconciliation Australia.

He delivered the 2009 Mabo Oration, and made the formal response in Parliament House to the Prime Minister's National Apology to the Stolen Generations. In May 2010 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Charles Darwin University in recognition of his contribution to the advancement of indigenous and multicultural Australia, primarily in the areas of education, employment and training programs for indigenous and remote communities.

## Questions miracles raise

### RELIGION

*Andrew Hamilton*

In the 1970s Latin American theologians began to explore the connections of faith to a public world marked by great injustice. Some of them initially criticised such popular expressions of faith such as devotions, fiestas and processions. They saw them as sentimental and preoccupied with individual salvation to the neglect of the call to change an unjust world.

For a while a gap opened between popular religion and the more focused account of faith given by the educated. But as theologians began to study the popular experience of faith more deeply, they came to see its complexities and its resources for developing a more just society. The coverage of Mary MacKillop's recent canonisation disclosed a similar tension between popular expressions of faith and more reflective accounts of religion. The tension was reflected in different ways of viewing sainthood.

The criteria for the canonisation of Catholic saints include three elements. Saints must have lived in ways that totally embodied their faith, and so be appropriate models for imitation. A pattern must have developed of people praying through them to God. And authenticated miracles, usually healings, must have been associated with prayer through them.

Most educated Catholics give priority to the heroic and exemplary life of saints and see them as models to be imitated. They also find the emphasis on miracles unhelpful because it suggests that God intervenes at will in the natural world. Instead of remarkable cures, they emphasise moral miracles inspired by the saint's example. The courage people find in suffering, conversion from a vicious to a virtuous life, and enthusiasm in the service of others are seen as more remarkable.

Generally, too, they downplay prayer to the saints because asking for things can assume a manipulative view of prayer and a God who responds in crude ways to our requests. We pray more purely when we give thanks to God and entrust lives into God's hands.

These attitudes echo those of the broader culture. They were seen in the media coverage of Mary MacKillop, particularly of miracles, the most dramatic part of the story of her canonisation. But when ordinary Catholics were asked to speak of the miracles claimed for her, and to describe what her sainthood meant for them, their replies generally brought together in a natural and down to earth way all the aspects of sainthood.

They saw Mary as a model to be imitated in typically Australian pragmatic and sleeves-rolled-up ways. They had no difficulty with miracles. Friends of those cured accepted the miracles without fuss. They saw them as signs of God's work in people's lives, complementary to other more ordinary events through which Christians understand God to

work in their lives. They focused less on the spectacular aspects of the miracles than on the faith which formed their context.

Many people, too, spoke of prayer through the saints as a natural part of life. They prayed lightly and humorously for small and concrete things, and with greater investment for the things that really mattered. Overall, they fitted prayer and miracles into their world in comfortable and discriminating ways.

The interesting thing about the encounter between the educated and the popular approaches to sainthood was that, as in Latin America, the popular approach seemed more interesting and potentially subversive. The easy accommodation of miracles and prayer was seen as strange, but also as attractively liberating because it addressed a hidden disquiet that the world is entirely worked out, and that the only questions that now matter are ones of technique. Within this view, pervasive in our culture, miracles and prayer are primitive survivals. The discussion of miracles focuses narrowly on whether they can be proved to violate scientific laws and to be an intervention of God.

Against such a constricted view of the world, miracles and prayers are signs of a larger world and of a reality which is much greater than we can ever comprehend. They do not prove the existence of God or that God intervenes from outside, but they point to a reality beyond what we can know and to a God who cares for it. That relaxed and open view of reality is valuable because it encourages curiosity about what we do not know.

Once miracles are seen, not as events outside the order of nature that prove God's existence, but as inexplicable and non-replicable events that take place in the context of faith, they raise interesting questions. Spontaneous cures involve physical processes — tumours are absorbed into the body, lesions are healed and malignant cells lose their power. Intellectual passion and energy would surely be better deployed in research into such events and into the *prima facie* connection between them and mental states than in dismissing them in the interests of a narrow and controlled view of the world.



## Sex, songs and cigarettes

### FILMS

*Tim Kroenert*

***Gainsbourg* (M). Director: Joann Sfar. Starring: Eric Elmosnino, Laetitia Casta, Lucy Gordon. 117 minutes**



The Troubled Artist — for whom self-destruction is a necessary by-product of creation — is a cultural cliché whose ubiquity risks robbing it of tragedy. Biopics about such figures are frequently mawkish affairs, that work too hard to either humanise or idolise.

*Gainsbourg*, about the iconoclastic 20th century French songwriter and singer Serge Gainsbourg, is neither mawkish nor celebratory. It attempts to undercut clichés and corniness by employing an endearingly idiosyncratic visual approach, and by striking a tone that is irreverent yet glum. It doesn't try to decipher the enigma, but as a result it offers little insight. This is to its detriment.

Gainsbourg is portrayed by Elmosnino as a swaggering louche, drinking and chain-smoking his way amid a murky and surreal Parisian backdrop. The film follows him from his childhood, through his most successful songwriting years in the 1960s, to his alcohol-fuelled decline in later years.

He is tailed throughout by the imaginary figure La Gueule ('The Mug' or 'Face', portrayed by renowned prosthetics-performer Doug Jones), a spindle-fingered caricature who bears Gainsbourg's physical features (nose and ears) in exaggerated proportions, and embodies and encourages his basest desires.

A gallery of women pass through the clutter of Gainsbourg's creativity, drawn by his artistic prowess and animal charm. They include the model Brigitte Bardot (Casta) with whom he has a brief but intense affair, and the English actress Jane Birkin (Gordon), who becomes for a time his wife and his greatest muse.

Each of these relationships is vividly portrayed. Each has its own tenor and tone, and each leaves a different imprint upon Gainsbourg who, though physically unattractive, is defined by sexuality. Indeed sex informs many of his song lyrics (his catalogue spans jazz, ballads, mambo, lounge, reggae and pop).

*Gainsbourg* is enjoyable for its music and Elmosnino's gloriously unflattering portrayal, but suffers from being long and unfocused. Comics artist turned director Sfar adapted the film from his graphic novel, and the impression is more of a collage of rough-hewn comic panels than of a well-conceived picture book.

In other words, what the film gains in visual panache it loses in narrative cogency. Characters come and go without explanation. Gainsbourg's Jewish childhood in Nazi-occupied Paris is significant, but its influence on him in later life remains unclear. We hear his songs, but gain little insight into their source.

Compared with the kind of pedestrian biopic Hollywood might have produced on this subject, *Gainsbourg* is, at least, an original and ambitious attempt at the genre. It is memorable, if not entirely successful.

## **Greece's wheel of financial hardship**

NON-FICTION

*Gillian Bouras*

It is 45 years since the father of my children, seeking a way in which to provide his youngest sister with a dowry, disembarked from the good ship Patris and stood, shivering and bewildered, on rainy Station Pier.

He was not alone, for the ship's cargo, people and mail, had come from Piraeus: those were the days when the Chandris Line had a whole fleet moving constantly between Europe and Australia.

Greek immigration was a highly organised process in the booming mid-60s. Factory agents boarded the Patris at Fremantle, and by the time Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney were reached, most hopeful arrivals had been set up in jobs and boarding-houses.

Factories had experienced Greek workers already *in situ*, and the new chums always found themselves living in the familiar comfort of Greek families who saw a good way to add to their income, for that was what immigration was all about then, in that period between the displaced post-war refugees and the 'boat people' of the 1980s.

My very old Dad is fond of saying that 'the wheel has come full circle.' And that is what most people, I think, hope for: replication in the form of descendants. But there are other wheels, and one has already turned for me, for my eldest son left Greece for Melbourne in 2002, and has never returned. Now my second son is thinking of doing the same thing.

There are many countries whose main export has traditionally been people: Ireland and Greece, suffering dire financial difficulties together at present, are two of these. For an extended period, however, the populations of both countries enjoyed the prosperity that they had long yearned for.

Such prosperity did not last, for both simple and complex reasons that are still being investigated and analysed, and it now seems that many young Greeks, at least, may revert to traditional patterns as part of the human search for hope and for work.

Greece's story is an old one borne out by new statistics: just on 33 per cent of people aged between 15 and 24 are currently out of work, and 16 per cent of those in the 25-34 group are also unemployed, at least in the short term: Greece is an agricultural country in which there is a great deal of casual, seasonal labour, but construction activity, which also uses casual labour, is down 80 per cent on the 2006 level. In 2008, before the financial crisis had deepened, more than two million people were living below the poverty line. Now there must be many more.

The Greek population is trying to cope with the consequences of three decades of greed and

irresponsibility, and with the fact that the nation as a whole has been living beyond its means: these are the simple reasons for the catastrophe.

Another fact, one that has to be accepted all over again, is that Greece is a hard, poor and inhospitable land: it can no longer support a growing population in the manner to which it became all too readily accustomed. The middle-aged and old are angry but resigned. At least that's how it seems to me: part of ageing consists of dealing with consequences, after all. But youth is a time of possibilities, or should be.

My middle son is in the Greek Army; my youngest son, a bachelor, is a fire fighter. Both have had their salaries cut by a total of 3000 euros for the year, and more cuts may follow. My youngest son has tightened his belt, and has adopted a typically fatalistic attitude; my middle son has made his economies, and he and his wife are good managers.

But they are worried about their two very young children: Greece has never treated its youth well, as Greeks themselves will tell you, and although cautious optimism is being expressed about the nation's current situation, nobody can predict how long the present hardships will continue. But they seem certain to be with us for years rather than months.

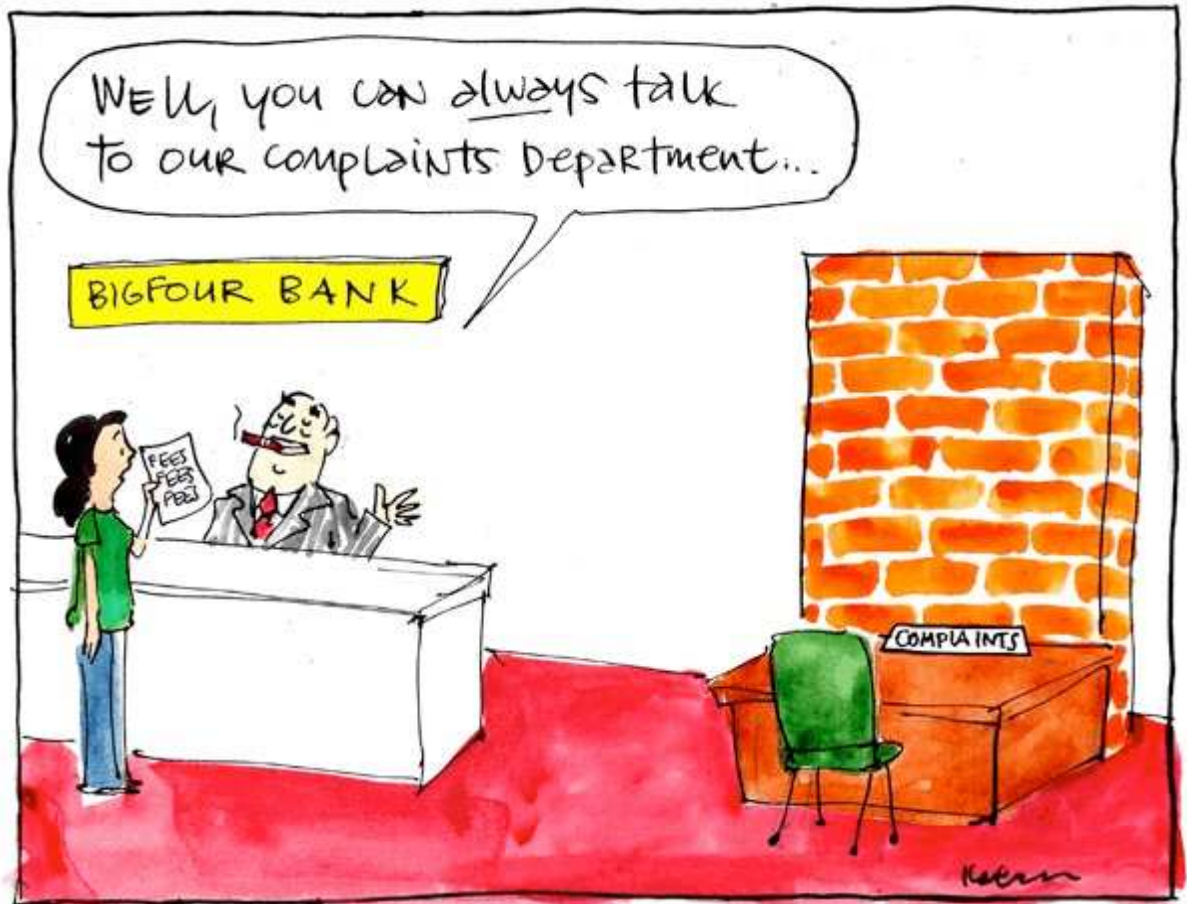
Hence my Melbourne-born son's investigation of opportunities Down Under: a couple of his colleagues have already left for Germany.

I am keeping a close eye on this particular wheel. I do not look forward to it turning again.

## The banks' public interest deficit

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



## Political opposition need not be nasty

### POLITICS

*John Warhurst*



Popular images of parliament and of parliamentarians as a group are generally negative.

Parliament is regarded as an ivory tower that contributes to politicians being out of touch.

Parliamentarians are regarded as overpaid and as too eager to take advantage of parliamentary perks and such as overseas study tours. They are seen as privileged, their privilege shown in the widely envied first class travel and government cars.

Uglier images too include the perception that parliamentarians are corrupt. It certainly doesn't help that former MPs seem so central to the lobbying industry.

And at the really ugly end are sex scandals and other personal misbehavior, including the abuse of parliamentary privilege to slander private citizens.

One of the most important of these negative images of parliamentary politics is that it is unnecessarily adversarial. Parliamentarians are often seen as bad mannered and lacking in common courtesies towards one another. They shout too much and use mildly abusive language. They should be models of best behavior but instead often engage in personal attacks.

Some commentators defend adversarial politics, arguing that such competition is a necessary and positive side of Westminster style parliamentary politics.

But they confuse two different aspects of adversarial politics, mixing up style and content. The good side is spirited opposition. The core of good adversarial politics for both the government and opposition is that well thought out views should be put clearly in argument and, if necessary, very strongly indeed.

There is nothing wrong with assertiveness in this context. Ideological differences will lead the government and opposition to be in deep disagreement from time to time. But this should not always happen. Agreement should be the default position. Indeed most legislation passes through the Parliament with the support of both major parties.

The public has no objection at all to genuine ideological differences expressed politely. If anything it would prefer to see more of this than to see neither side willing to take risks on contentious issues, as happened during the election campaign.

The bad side of adversarial politics is needless aggression, expressed in a nasty tone and

apparent anger. In this style bipartisan agreement or consensus is avoided as a matter of course. The major parties emerge as sworn enemies with little in common.

The public does not appreciate this sort of adversarial politics and they like it even less when it is exemplified in the relations between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Tony Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, has recently demonstrated a strongly negative form of adversarial politics.

In his view the job of the Opposition is to oppose. Although this position is credible, it neglects other tasks such as constructive compromise and preparing the party to govern.

He also confuses the two aspects of adversarial politics. His verbal explosion over the trips of the two leaders to Afghanistan is a recent example. He accused Julia Gillard of an act of bastardry. Whatever the full truth of the matter Abbott's language and tone were intemperate. His own handling of the issue caused most of his problems.

He persisted with aggression and encouraged his frontbench to emulate him even when his approach appeared to have contributed to a fall in his personal approval ratings. And this was not an isolated case. It encapsulates the type of adversarial politics that Abbott seeks to embed as part of his persona.

Only time will tell whether this is a productive *modus operandi*. It is his right to oppose the Prime Minister as strongly as he likes, but he gains no credit for doing so in an over-the-top aggressive style.

This bad side of Tony Abbott reinforces negative images of Parliament. Ultimately it will probably hurt not only his own standing but public respect for all parliamentarians.

## The inevitability of tears

NON-FICTION

*Alison Sampson*

You're standing in a circle of women, chatting about winter boots or a place to get good coffee, when someone asks you a simple question and grief hits you over the head like a baseball bat.

Suddenly you're sobbing, the school bell is ringing, children are streaming out of the building, and people you barely know are looking at you with kind eyes and rubbing your shoulders.

At least, that's what happens to me.

When my grandparents died earlier this year, I barely cried at their funerals. While reading aloud at my grandmother's, I glanced out at the congregation and saw my grandfather's face shiny with tears, looking up at me so gentle and trusting with sad brown eyes like a spaniel's. My voice cracked, but I'm a good girl so I held it together, finished the reading, and quietly sat down.

Eight weeks later, at his funeral, I silently wept; I couldn't be the only one racked with sobs. I avoided everyone's eyes. As grief ballooned in my throat I looked through the glass wall to the birds outside and watched them flit between the grass trees. As I lost myself in them, the tears slowly ebbed.

There were no glass walls at my mother's funeral, no little birds to watch. I had been staying at my father's house. Most of my clothes were at my house but I couldn't remember what I owned and couldn't think what to send for. So I found a funny old black skirt and borrowed my sister's leather jacket; I wore ugly shoes. We sat in the front row of the church, six hundred people behind us, and every time I moved the jacket creaked.

When I started to weep and raised a hanky to my face, the leather shrieked and groaned. The sound ricocheted around the great emptiness and I felt twelve hundred eyes drilling into my back; six hundred people saw that I didn't know how to dress for a funeral; six hundred people pitied me. So I lowered my arm and sat still, eyes straight ahead as the snot and tears ran silently down, and like a child in church played all the games I knew to make the time pass.

After a year, or maybe it was two, the service was over. Under cover of the organ I blew my nose and wiped my face and stumbled out, tummy sucked in, back straight, our row the first to leave. I wanted to be alone. But instead the six hundred came one by one and shook my hand or hugged me, and said how sorry they were.





I became giddily cheerful and Teflon-bright as their unwanted hugs and concern ran off me and puddled on the floor. They weren't the important ones; they hadn't visited when she was sick; and I was so angry that I just jiggled around and smiled and pretended nothing mattered. Finally, finally it was all over and I could go home, throw off the jacket, put on my pyjamas and sit there numb. Did we do a crossword? a jigsaw? Did we watch a movie? I don't remember; it was ten years ago now.

But I find myself wondering why I was so contained each time, why so polite. I should have let loose. I should have shrieked and wailed and torn my hair and rent covered myself in ashes. Instead I sat tight, with a hanky dabbed here, an emotion stifled there. I bottled up hot tears like jam, and firmly screwed down the lid.

But they won't be stopped. Instead, they come later, inconveniently, in the supermarket, on a crowded tram, when three generations of women sit next to you in a coffee shop, when a bird drops down between two buildings or a certain slant of light stabs you in the eye, when you see a loved one walking and realise it's a stranger and your loved one is dead, when you're washing the dishes and you glance down and the hands in the sink are theirs, when you're cycling at night all alone, all alone; then grief roars up and hits you like a tidal wave.

Or when the mother of a little boy you read with is killed in an accident and his school has the jitters and shakes; and later that day at another school, your daughter's school, you're hanging around waiting for pick up and someone casually asks how your morning was and you suddenly feel kicked in the guts. Your voice cracks and your eyes start with tears and there's nothing you can do to stop them.

Four weeks, three months, ten years later. It doesn't matter how long it's been. Sooner or later, a thousand times over, you're gonna sob.

## Ten short poems

POETRY

*Various*

### **Lost**

I'm already lost  
In Sydney  
Although we haven't arrived  
Lost is a place  
A facial expression  
Mothers recognise  
It looks for sympathy  
Sometimes help  
But finds 'direction'

— **Ben-Peter Tersptra**

### **Waiting for Spring**

The lights don't work  
but I know  
I am still reflected in my mirror  
soon the sun will come and help to prove me right

It's getting cold and I am worried  
about getting through the winter  
burning candles in my room to cut the chill

But I can just see myself in spring  
dressed up like a past-due notice

pale yellow...  
or collection agency green

and I can just hear my brother laughing  
when we can afford to go have dinner

There will always, always be a spring  
Wherever the sun has gone I will always be me

— **Raina Morreau**

**God owes me Royalties**

Do my words need makeup  
anti-age cream for my lines  
Remixing and deejaying  
multiple images of a singular deity  
Reincarnated of carnality  
cindered in obdurate morality  
Pulsing throbbing the ghosts  
rearranging  
Skeletons like lego  
pomegranate love-buds juicing stains  
Not guilt but smudged badges of honour  
my soul copyrighted for first-use and  
the royalties will pay the debt I  
accrued on your behalf.

— **Vinay Verma**

**Niche**

How I'd like to find my niche

Even if it is just a cliché  
I really want to find my niche  
And have my own nice little place  
Inviting my friends to take their place  
At my table  
I now feel as stable as the table  
As solid as the door  
As open as the window  
As warm as the bed  
Totally at ease

With a brand new lease not only  
On my place but on life  
As I am transformed in my own  
Little world

**-Isabella Fels**

**Folding & Flying**

A folded piece of paper floats  
My every thought swims towards you  
Against the current of netbanking and lunchtime  
And essays to write  
This life, some kind of unvarnished document  
On which to carve our longing  
A piece of paper  
Which we fold, at our leisure  
Into a plane; we jump in  
And take off into some other dimension  
Thoughts fold and paper  
Flies

— **Cecilia Condon**

**Judas and Jezebel**

Did you hear the news today?  
Judas married Jezebel;  
It was not announced with trumpet calls  
or eardrum-rupturing decibels.  
Did you see her walk the aisle  
with luminescent eyes?  
Are they the eyes of piercing truth?  
or demons in disguise?  
Did you know I loved her once?  
But her heart I could not tame,  
'Depart from me, I know you not,'  
she callously exclaimed.

— **Damian Balassone**

**Donne captains a ship of fools**

Let me not nit my net too fine  
Thus trap small fish or venal sin  
Neither cast it in to deep  
As to ensnare Leviathan  
Yet guided by shared impotence  
Within the seas of what contains us  
To then retrace love reconsidered  
And choose here what remains of  
As if memory could thus divine  
The middle point of our lost night  
With plumb & sextant plot the sky

Span, count, and wait upcoming light  
But if instinct which haunts foresight  
Should trace shadow before it falls  
Then circumspect mind must navigate  
Through the communion of lost fools  
So turned and prayed to permeance  
Both cartographer and first-mate  
One skyward eye then cast above  
Its twin below trimming to winds fate

— **Michael Healey**

### **Home**

In this house divine  
the interior  
of varnished wood  
so sublime  
the hinges are  
comets, stars and planets  
inanimate and animate  
humbly by blue sky design.

— **Michael Crotty**

### **Loose Change**

I'm there in your wallet, lying, it seems,  
on the ocean's wide blue towel —  
except that I'm upright, toes in the sand,  
looking at you, trying not to squint, naked  
without my dark glasses.

While you concentrate on reading the light,

the sea keeps breaking it up, taking  
its reading of you. Who'll be the first  
to blink?

I stole a look at the photo last night,  
I guess to confirm nothing had changed —  
and was almost caught in the act. We are  
what people see.

What words would I have fumbled for —  
unable to play celebrity shoplifter,  
unwilling to play guilty schoolboy —  
and you embarrassed for me?

— **Michael Sariban**

### **election**

on four new walls  
the artefacts  
of a long marriage  
& the routines broken  
institutional care  
little dirt under fingernails  
a cliché of food  
& a month's dust collected  
in the corners of the house  
you built, you grew too small for  
took four weeks to clean  
before you left it  
the birds got the figs

& on weekend secateur visits

take off the grapes

water the lawns

bugger the cost

& bugger the state election

— **Rory Harris**



## Indigenous jobs another forsaken moral challenge

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

13 year old Madeleine Madden is best known as the granddaughter of Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins. In a widely distributed television [address](#) on Sunday 24 October, she called on all Australians to help create real jobs and a better future for Indigenous Australians.

‘With a job — a real job — you can look after yourself, your family and help your community. I’ve seen the difference this has made in my own family because my Grandfather worked his whole life to give his kids what he never had,’ she said.

It follows that many Aboriginal Australians cannot look after themselves and their families because they do not have a job.

As part of the Intervention in the Northern Territory, the Federal Government committed to phasing out Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), and replacing the lost employment with ‘real jobs’.

Both the Coalition government then in office, and its Labor successor, were thinking that the CDEP closure would help Indigenous Australians become more self-reliant, and to find jobs outside government assistance provisions. However these jobs have not materialised in significant numbers, and the loss of CDEP positions has adversely affected Aboriginal workers in many communities. Moreover those still working on CDEP are being subjected to the indignity of being put on income management.

On Wednesday 20 October, Gurindji workers and residents from the communities of Kalkaringi and Dagaragu stopped work in protest against the loss of what they considered were hard earned rights. They were especially aware of the history of their people, remembering the action of Vincent Lingiari who led the walk off of exploited stockmen from Wave Hill station in 1966.

John Ferguson is national executive officer of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. Writing on Aboriginal employment in the November [issue](#) of the Council’s *Briefing* newsletter, he quotes John Leemans, spokesperson for last month’s Gurindji protest. Leemans believes history is being repeated, with his people ‘forced to work for rations again’.

‘Prior to the Intervention we had nearly 300 CDEP workers employed in municipal services, construction and maintenance roles. When the government took over and abolished the community council and CDEP everything came to a halt. We went two years without regular rubbish collection.’

Many of the Gurindji travelled to Alice Springs on Friday to join [national rallies](#) calling for

'Jobs with Justice' for Aboriginal workers and an end to the Intervention.

Their action deserves widespread public sympathy, as it is almost three years since former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generation, and there has been no closing of the gap in jobs between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Rudd committed Labor to halving the gap in employment incomes within a decade as part of the targets established under the government policy framework. It looks like another moral challenge that Labor has given up on, and a further task for the independent parliamentarians who could be more committed to genuine action.

## Tokenistic action against homophobic bullies

### EDUCATION

*Fatima Measham*

Victorian Education Minister Bronwyn Pike launched the Safe Schools Coalition (SSCV) in October with much support from psychologists and gay support groups. To be delivered in partnership with Rainbow Network Victoria and the Foundation for Young Australians, its primary focus is to make educational environments safer for and more supportive of same-sex attracted and gender-questioning young people.

At first glance, it is a laudable initiative especially in light of Australian research showing that 74 percent of gay young people experience verbal and physical abuse at school.

The experience of homophobic bullying is made acute by the fact that young people are legally required to be *at* school until the age of seventeen years. They spend five days each week on campus for forty weeks of each year of their secondary school life. This is the fraught stage when they begin exploring and defining their identity, including their sexual identity.

When the setting of their unfurling is also the place of their nightmares, then something has gone horribly wrong. And something needs to be done.

So why has the response been largely lukewarm? Schools were called to become 'founder members' of the SSCV back in September? How is it possible that from over 1500 Victorian state schools, only eleven were officially part of the coalition when it was launched? More important, shouldn't all schools be 'gay friendly' by default, anyway?

The reality is that education against homophobic bullying cannot be isolated from prevailing attitudes in the wider community. As with any social value that we hope to instil, children take their cues from adults, of whom their teachers are merely a subset.

The idea of an education-oriented advocacy to support gay young people is not new. The Washington-based Safe Schools Coalition has existed for 20 years, and is part of a national network in the United States. Around 120 organisations are also dedicated there to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual rights. Yet, in the past few months there have been disturbing reports of a rise in violence against gays, even in liberal New York. In separate incidents, two young men committed suicide due to the pressures of being gay in their communities. Commentators draw links between these and recent developments such as the gay marriage debate, the right-wing politics of the Tea Party movement, and homophobic language used by high-profile Republican politicians.

Principals and teachers can keep gay young people safe at school only to the extent that they are also safe in the wider community. The discussion around bullying often overlooks the ways in which perceptions of power are being fed. Bullies like power, and their sense of

power is fuelled by the notion that others are inferior. As long as specific groups of people at school or elsewhere are regarded as inferior simply because they are different, bullies will find targets.

Without a sea-change of attitude towards gays in mainstream society, the effectiveness of school-based programs against homophobic bullying will be always be limited. Although such programs remain important, ticking boxes on 'teacher training, resources and consultancy' may not adequately address the source of the behaviour.

There is also a danger that defining 'safe schools' narrowly by the experience of young gay people may suggest that they the only group that is targeted by bullies. Students who identify themselves as 'emo' or Goth are also the focus of bullying. Those who are overweight continue to be on the receiving end of nasty jokes. Who is to say that they are less vulnerable than someone who is gay? What would it mean to them that the Victorian government has allocated \$80,000 to SSCV to 'support sexual diversity and gender diversity'? We might also ask what is the *real* cost of tackling 'homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism within school communities,' which the SSCV states as its role?

The issue of bullying in schools, and particularly bullying against young people who are figuring out who they are in the world, is serious business. One can only hope that this program is neither tokenistic nor part of a pre-election soft campaign, and that it will truly make a difference to those young people who need it.

## John Howard shoe-thrower's moral miss-hit

POLITICS

*Farid Farid*

Writing in the *Huffington Post* in 2008 about the infamous incident labelled by US media as the Iraqi 'shoegate', comedian Dean Obeidallah [said](#): 'Let's be honest — in what culture is getting a shoe thrown at you while making a speech considered a compliment?'

On Monday's edition of Q&A former Prime Minister John Howard felt the stinging rebuke and righteous outrage of what host Tony Jones termed the 'smelly sneakers' of what is left of leftist civil disobedience. Or did he? (Continues below)

Peter Gray, a Hunter Valley resident and member of Rising Tide (a Newcastle climate change action group), asked Howard a succinct question about Australia's moral culpability in Iraq.

Amid the recent [spectacle](#) of Wikileaks evidence about the Iraqi occupation, Gray raised the uncomfortable truth of decrepit civilian corpses littering the streets of Baghdad, Mosul, Basra and Fallujah. These maimed and nameless bodies are not given the dignity they deserve, instead ending up as [statistics](#) on the Iraq Body Count website.

The occupation of Iraq has just become what Australian anthropologist and cultural theorist Michael Taussig terms as the 'public secret'. Compassion fatigue has set in for populations of the countries of the coalition of the (un)willing. We all know the secret but repress it deeply within our national psyche. To confront the secret would be to undergo a national process of self-examination.

It is no coincidence that Howard's abnegating stance on the other national secret, regarding the Stolen Generations, has still not changed.

Political bankruptcy and lack of intellectual imagination is at an all time high in western leftist political discourse and tactics, notably under the newly formed Labor Government in Australia. The same goes for conservative forces in Australian, European and American politics, with the rise of the Tea Party movement and the German scapegoating of multiculturalism as a failed social experiment.

This is playing out in parliamentary debates and partisan posturing regarding our military involvements in Afghanistan, which inevitably calls Iraq into question.

In his op-ed piece for the *Newcastle Herald*, Gray [evokes](#) the spectres of the dead and living dead in Iraq and estimates that 60,000 civilians from 2003 have died. Some assessments go as high as 95—110,000. But Gray assumes that shoe throwing in Iraq is the same as shoe throwing in Australia, and in the process he elides and conflates facts on the ground.

Gray explains the genealogy of the shoe-throwing gesture and how Muntadar al Zhaidi, the Iraqi journalist who heaved his shoes at US President George W. Bush in 2008, eventually got jailed. Gray admits he is 'cognisant of the freedoms' that allow him to make his protest, and goes on to argue 'that these political freedoms were hard-fought for, and that if they go unused they will be taken away'.

But Gray does not identify who fought for what, and who will take said freedoms away. This ambiguity is symptomatic of western leftist movements. The culturally co-optive nature of benevolent groups to take on causes and speak on behalf of those who allegedly cannot speak for themselves is disturbing.

In my research with Iraqis living in Sydney, I have heard about trauma and torture prior to and during the occupation, and the struggles of exile, in poetically cogent words. These articulate voices must be heard.

If smelly shoes are the last objects of resistance then this occupation will never end. The larger Australian public, including Iraqi Australians, need not be bombarded with futile projectiles but sensible arguments based on intellectual, ethical and empathic capacities that recognise the disfiguring effects of occupation.

## Hating Canberra

NON-FICTION

*Ellena Savage*



During one conversation about Canberra's flagrant lack of appeal, a friend told me the true reason why Canberra, like Washington DC, is positioned in such an inhospitable climatic location (parched summer coupled with hypothermic winter): 'To diminish the appeal of government for politicians and public servants. Who in their right mind would want to live with that weather for more than a decade?'

Disregarding the mind-states of individuals who gravitate toward absolutist governments, and not vouching for my friend's sobriety when he told me this interesting 'fact', the gist is compelling: that if Australia's capital was Brisbane, we might be living in a banana republic whose despotic ruling family would never want to relinquish their grip on leisure governance.

The model explains a lot about Canberra's austerity.

I recently visited my brother and his wife there. I hadn't visited Canberra since my year six class were bussed off to study public life. In other words, I had previously only been there while under the nauseated influence of junk food for four days. My few recollections of that first trip are a mud-brown motel with a swimming pool and the rumour of a Kim Beazley sighting.

This time around, I decided I would try my best to form a coherent view of the city.

My foremost impression was that Canberra's defining quality is the dull consistency of its design. The city is a product of the Modernist project, which attempted to eliminate all disorder and congestion. This imposed, and imposing, harmony, marked by the calculated placement of monolithic buildings and wide roads, neglects what is dynamic about urban life and the what defines great cities: their ability to encompass extremely diverse populations and activities.

The city's layout was heavily influenced by the garden city model, which incorporates the natural environment with urban development, allowing for plenty of park space (and for animals to frolic freely with automobiles...).

Canberra's unostentatious nature is attractive compared with Melbourne's posh Euro gardens, but the labyrinthine roads are frustrating. Frederick Law Olmstead, the father of landscape architecture, wrote, 'Curved streets imply leisure, contemplativeness, and happy tranquillity'. Unsurprisingly, he never lived in Canberra, where the mantra goes, 'Like the clunky machinery of bureaucracy, these roundabouts take us nowhere very fast, chortle, chortle'.

When I arrived on a Saturday afternoon, the place seemed somehow sinister; the deep silence of the street was unsettling. 'A capital city ought to have some life to it', I thought to myself, hearing the cry of a far-away bird. I was interrupted by a whoosh as a peloton glided past, helmets sporting a forest of cable-ties intent on deterring the magpie's swoop.

There is plenty of activity in Canberra. Outdoor activity. It must be the abundance of nature that encourages such healthful living. Lots of cyclists, joggers and generally fit people. So I thought, until I noticed the young professionals jogging around Lake Burley Griffin during their lunchbreaks, and learned that a popular social pastime in Canberra is pumping iron. At the gym.

G. K. Chesterton wrote, 'The mere pursuit of health always leads to something unhealthy. Physical nature must not be made the object of direct obedience; it must be enjoyed, not worshipped.'

I think like many professional environments, Canberra's competitive atmosphere encourages mindless self-improvement and fuels a dependency on external validation. But unlike other professional environments, Canberra is isolated and by virtue of its function, culturally homogenous. It is naught but the pumping organ of Australia's vibrant bureaucratic life.

The best thing about hating Canberra is that it discourages nationalism. Australia has great cities, and as their populations increase, they will become more dynamic and exciting. But so long as none of them is the capital, our sense of pride about where we come from, and what we think that means about who we are, will always be thwarted by that dark little secret that we share: Canberra.



## No clear villains in Facebook tragedy

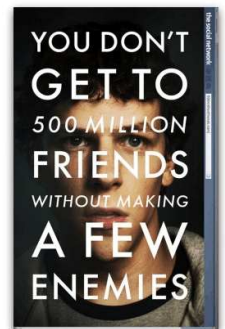
### FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Social Network* (M). Director: David Fincher. Starring: Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield, Armie Hammer, Justin Timberlake, Rooney Mara. 120 minutes**

Which 'social network'? The one that has more than 500 million members, which turned its young founder into a multi-billionaire, and saw him named by *Vanity Fair* as the most influential person of the Information Age. Chances are that you have it open right now, in a separate browser tab, as you read these words. Incidentally, so do I, as I write them. For better and worse, Facebook is with us — always, it seems.

Based on Ben Mezrich's 2009 nonfiction book *The Accidental Billionaires*, *The Social Network* is a funny and engaging account of Facebook's inauspicious founding and cataclysmic rise. This is dramatised history rather than documentary — screenwriter Aaron Sorkin (*The West Wing*) has been candid about the fact that he put storytelling ahead of slavish factuality — but it does walk with its toes close to the historical record.



Two parallel lawsuits provide the framework for a tightly structured narrative about the rise and rise of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (Eisenberg). One is mounted by his co-founder and former best friend, Eduardo Saverin (Garfield). The other, by titanic twins Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss (Hammer), Harvard alumni and aspiring Olympic rowers, who have accused Zuckerberg of stealing their intellectual property.

The film flashes back to Harvard and to the roots of an idea that will change the world. As a student, IT whiz Zuckerberg cripples the Harvard network, along with his reputation with his female peers, by creating a website that invites users to rank female undergrads based on their physical attractiveness. This frat-geek stunt brings him to the attention of the Winklevosses, who enlist him as a programmer on the exclusive Harvard dating website they have conceived.

Zuckerberg strings the twins along while secretly working on his own sleeker and more ambitious social networking site. Saverin, unaware of Zuckerberg's agreement with the Winklevosses, puts up capital and comes on board to oversee the business side of thefacebook.com. By the time the Winklevosses learn of the rival site's existence, it has been live for several days; it's an instant hit, and ready for expansion, to other schools and beyond.

*The Social Network* is a drama with plenty of conflict and no clear-cut baddies. Clever visual effects and finely distinguished dual performances from Hammer embody the boyishly

arrogant Winklevosses on screen. Barrackers for the underdog will take pleasure in Zuckerberg's undercutting of these twin towers of exquisite genes and silver-spoon breeding. But Cameron and Tyler are more buffoonish than villainous.

Although the film shies from stating how substantial their legal claim against Zuckerberg is, there's no doubt his betrayal is ethically questionable. The twins are therefore more pitiable than malicious, as they stand back all but helpless and watch Facebook's exponential growth. It's hard not to feel sorry for them when a close loss in a major rowing regatta coincides with the news Facebook has gone international.

Timberlake gives a scene-stealing performance as Sean Parker, founder of the notorious music-sharing website Napster, whose rock star lifestyle, maverick conduct and anarchistic philosophising inspire the impressionable Zuckerberg, not always for the better. Parker becomes the devil on Zuckerberg's shoulder, whispering hedonistic temptations in his ear. But still, it's Zuckerberg's choice whether or not he'll listen.

The real Zuckerberg is reportedly displeased with the film, but the portrayal is sympathetic. Zuckerberg is shown to be driven, hard-working and prodigiously intelligent. If his behaviour is not always admirable, it's because he is too proud to admit to his own insecurities — regarding, among other things, his inability to gain access to one of the exclusive, prestigious Harvard 'final clubs'.

It is pride that causes him to raze, in humiliating fashion, his romantic relationship with fellow student Erica Albright (Mara); a mistake that plagues him throughout the film, motivating his quest to connect the world and ultimately robbing his quest of personal spiritual resonance.

Pride can also be blamed for his eventual, heartbreaking betrayal of Saverin, who is portrayed by Garfield as intelligent, generous and trusting to a fault. The decay of this friendship during the creation of a site predicated on accumulating 'friends' is the *The Social Network's* greatest irony, and greatest tragedy.

## Wikileaks' problematic moral justification

MEDIA

*Andrew Hamilton*



The recent [release](#) of documents by Wikileaks on the Iraq war has renewed questions about the ethics of the enterprise.

Wikileaks routinely publishes documents that governments and corporations regard as confidential. The spontaneous responses to Wikileaks are either bolshie pleasure at seeing the powerful embarrassed or serious concern that authority is being flouted. I own to the first. But like any initial response, this is unreliable and needs to be tested.

Two clearly opposed responses to any issue usually suggest that rights are in conflict. That is true also in this case. First, governments need a measure of confidentiality in order to do their work. Much government business demands building relationships and gathering information. In making peace, for example, governments will need to speak secretly with their enemies. They can only do this if the communication remains secret on both sides and respects the safety of the parties to the conversation.

Governments also need people to volunteer the information on which good policy can be based. This can only happen if the government guarantees confidentiality.

On the other hand, citizens also need to be adequately informed of their governments' actions and their consequences. Governments are responsible to their people, who in turn must own their government's actions. So the people must be given an accurate account of what they are asked to own.

These conflicting abstract considerations must be set within the broader context of the ways in which particular governments relate towards their people. Generally modern governments try to portray in a favourable light their policies and their implementation. They do this by concealing unfavourable aspects and by controlling access to information.

In military campaigns like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, they offer simplistic accounts of the reasons for going to war, underestimate the number of people who are killed, injured and otherwise harmed by the war, and exaggerate the differences between the way in which they and their allied forces conduct the war and the way in which the enemy forces behave.

So their citizens receive a sanitised version of the damage done to people, a simplistic and over-optimistic account of its likely result, and a representation of the war as between goodies and baddies. They have no opportunity to take responsibility for the complex reality of the action.

This is the context in which ethical discussion of Wikileaks should be set. The widespread practice of concealment and spin by Government offers a *prima facie* justification for bringing into the public realm information that offers a broader or more concrete understanding of the Iraq invasion and of the military action in Afganistan. It offers a picture of the messy reality of war and of the human suffering that participants in war cause and tolerate. This is the reality that the people in combatant nations must own.

Whether Wikileaks is justified in leaking material that can endanger lives is a more complex question. It is made more complex by the fact that the charge of endangering lives forms part of governments' attempt to discredit Wikileaks. It should not be accepted (or rejected) uncritically.

It has been argued that even if the leaks do endanger the lives of some allied soldiers and people who have helped them, even more lives have been lost because governments have concealed the reality of the war. This utilitarian argument is crude. It would also undermine Wikileaks' claim to be ethically superior to governments in its handling of information.

In assessing whether it would be right to publish leaked documents despite the risk they posed to human lives, it might be relevant to distinguish between the lives of combatants and those of civilians. A generalised risk to soldiers' lives that arose from the disclosure of military procedures would be different from the risk to the lives of specific civilians who could be targeted after disclosure. Whereas the former have the resources and training to defend themselves against threat, the latter do not.

It might also be important to ask why people will be put at risk. If they are directly and personally put at risk by the fact of being named, that would seem to be unacceptable. If people are put at risk indirectly by the anger that follows the disclosure, say, of brutal and disrespectful interrogation techniques, those responsible for the abuse and not those reporting it would bear primary responsibility for the risk.

So a favourable ethical judgment on Wikileaks seems to depend first on the judgment that governments are not discharging their duty to inform its citizens of the reality and consequences of their policies, and second, on the judgment that Wikileaks has handled properly the risk that disclosure involves for human lives. At a minimum, documents which could disclose the names of non-combatant individuals should be edited to prevent disclosure. Disclosure would be ethical only if both conditions were satisfied.

## The hard life and death of Tyler the Sorrowful

### COMMUNITY

*Moira Rayner*

Tyler Cassidy was 15 and 'very upset' when he was shot dead by police near a skate park in Fairfield, Melbourne, early one evening in 2008.

Evidence about that night is being led, day by anguishing day, to a Melbourne inquest, in an investigation sought by his mother because she can't believe that her bereaved little boy died by gunshot. Champions of independent investigations into police killings have welcomed the inquest.



Nothing in what I write is meant to influence the coroner's findings. That ancient office is meant to quiet public concerns about the circumstances of a sudden or violent death or disaster. But a coronial inquest is not a court proceeding. A coroner establishes the facts. She can't give grieving families what they crave when a member dies violently, or suspiciously, unnecessarily, too young, or too cruelly: a finding of guilt.

There's no such thing as closure for such a wound, though over time it folds like the wake behind a ship. Those who sailed away have gone. Those who are left, remain. Grief has to be brought within bounds.

Knowing what happened, helps. It also helps to ask just how we expect our guardians of public order to balance the community need to feel safe with the protection of the vulnerable; especially when the person who is 'the problem' is both a victim and a perpetrator.

So far, the inquest has been told that an adolescent who hadn't been able to fit in at school or with his peer group, wasn't perceived as a child in trouble by the armed police sent to deal with him. They weren't to know how wounded he had been by his father's death when he was 11. There was not enough time to ask what had tipped him into this public state of disconnection from friends, family and neighbourhood.

Like many adolescents, Cassidy might have been trying on roles that day; learning how to manage his 'moods' — 'worst ever', he texted to a friend that morning — and his need for his pain to be acknowledged. Like most adolescents, his state of mind fluctuated. A couple of women who saw him shot talked with him shortly before the confrontation, recalling that he patted their dog and chatted cheerfully.

Teenage years are hell for many of us, as hormones rage, autonomy beckons but our undeveloped frontal lobes fail to allow us to predict the consequences of our actions. That is why the law and society have special rules requiring special responses to and understanding of children's histrionics and mistakes. Children will develop, learn, and become responsible adults. If they live.

Adolescents 'know' they are wise enough to be free from constraints, because they will live forever. Adolescents are impulsive and inexperienced and readily feel that they may, by a dramatic act, somehow ennoble or vindicate their world view.

This is nothing new. In 19th century Europe German poets wallowed in the 'Sorrows of Young Werther', and the romantic deaths of young poets such as Keats, Byron and the suicide, Chatterton. Drama, despair and romance: no wonder 'vampires' — the undying ever-young — are such juicy fiction even now.

Tyler was a very upset, masked child on the day he died: drinking, when his brain was probably too malleable and scantily wired to handle intoxicants; socialising, when that group of young people he wanted to be his 'family' were not as accepting of Tyler the Sorrowful as he needed them to be. Needing, in one counselling session, to have his pain recognised, and hoping, in the next, to be 'normal'.

What he presented to the police was a boy who sounded like a man, playing 'dare' with a deadly weapon, as Palestinian kids throw rocks at Israeli soldiers. Young officers do what they feel, in that moment, they must. The game becomes deadly.

Fifteen years ago I wrote an article for *Eureka Street* called 'The short life and hard times of Colleen', about the death of an upset, intoxicated young Aboriginal woman with a mental illness who was shouting and chopping at a garden bench in a St Kilda public park with a blunt tomahawk, and was shot by police. I think there was an inquest then, too, and police were supportive of psychiatric emergency teams who are more specifically trained to manage disturbed behaviour of sick people with mental illnesses.

But any parent will know that confronting an enraged teenage boy about his behaviour and advancing on him with threats is not likely to result in submission. People who feel humiliated can't back down.

Tragedies occur, and rarely is anybody clearly to blame. Perhaps police investigations into deaths caused by police should be more than a review of the paper record. Perhaps not only every death in custody but also those that occur in the course of police intervention should be independently reviewed by coroners.

But no finding will ever satisfy a mother whose child died violently, alone. Her pain just gets familiar.

## The return of Honest John

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*

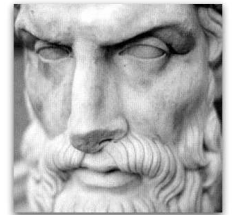


## Philosophy of food

NON-FICTION

*Mark Chou*

Writing in the fourth century BC, Epicurus was the Greek philosopher of pleasure. He said the 'root of every good is the pleasure of the stomach. Even wisdom and culture must be referred to this.'



Rumours swiftly spread about Epicurus' gastronomic hedonism. In one tale, Epicurus had to vomit twice each day to accommodate the amounts of food he consumed and wished to consume still. If this is correct, Epicurus may well be the first bulimic in the history of western philosophy.

But Epicurus was no glut, just a pleasure-seeker, and fortunately 'binge and purge' was not the kind of pleasure he had in mind. At the end of a meal, Epicurus says, '[p]lain dishes offer the same pleasure as a luxurious table, when the pain that comes from want is taken away'.

I'm a student of Greek philosophy and I'm distressed to read these words. I like Epicurus, and his philosophy. But I don't like plain dishes.

Unlike Epicurus, I'm a glut. I eat too much and too quickly, and I know it. What pleases me are vast quantities of food that's heavily spiced and, some would say, over-seasoned.

I eat this way because that's how I was raised to eat: by parents who taught me from an early age that generous portions are the only portions one should serve, to oneself and especially to one's guests. Quantity matters. This is how they ate growing up when there was never enough food to go around.

Today, my dinner table, like my parents', is laden with the foods of childhood. I've come to eat, by choice, what they, by necessity, were forced to when growing up poor in 1950s Taiwan.

This I understand. What I don't understand is the remark my Dad will often make after he's eaten way too much — the remark that 'everything tasted better back then, when he was young'.

That was, until I read Epicurus.

Epicurus makes clear that food is pleasurable to the extent that it satiates a need. This reiterates what he says more generally about pleasure being the absence of pain. Pleasure exists where pain does not, and vice versa. Given this, Epicurus may be best understood as having advocated the absence of suffering and not the active pursuit of pleasure. Once suffering is alleviated then pleasure will naturally ensue.

However, the pleasure we experience in any given circumstance depends, in large part, on



what it is that we actually suffer from. There cannot be any greater or lesser pleasure in Epicurus' estimation, than that which specifically alleviates the suffering in question.

This is why Epicurus said what he did about plain dishes offering 'the same pleasure as a luxurious table, when the pain that comes from want is taken away' — the want in this instance being bodily hunger and the need for nutritional sustenance.

We must, to reduce this to its simplest, know what we actually suffer from, what the root cause of our want is, and not to confuse, conflate or mask it with something else. Failing that, eat all you want and you'll likely remain interned by hunger, afflicted by pain.

Dad's voracity and longing for the foods of childhood has nothing to do with bodily hunger, and everything to do with remembrance: of his childhood and of his parents. Through eating the foods of his youth, he is able to relive the emotion he must have felt when, as a boy, he devoured delicate candies or steamed pork buns he knew his father was too poor to buy but bought for him nonetheless.

Even the sweetest candies and the best steam buns, of which he buys and consumes many, can't fill a void so deep.

The actual foods of his childhood are neither the source of his pain nor the guarantor of his pleasure. His ultimate pain and pleasure, as Epicurus might advise, lay elsewhere.

Still, whenever I can, I like to sit together with Dad, eating the snacks he buys and the dishes he lovingly prepares. This is a pleasure I can't deny him. Nor me.

## France shows Australia how to protest

### POLITICS

*Bronwyn Lay*



The news exploded. Cars were burnt, shops looted, petrol ran out, trains were cancelled, airports shut down. Workers barricaded refineries, protestors took to the streets and the country ground to a halt — all because French president Sarkozy is raising the age of the pension entitlement from 60 to 62.

One can't help but laugh — the French still think they live on a separate planet to the rest of us. In the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis and the Greek bailout, and in light of a healthy aging population, the government doesn't have much choice but to cut back France's generous welfare state.

Despite these economic pressures *Le Figaro* reports that more than 69 per cent of the French population support the strike, but the support relates to dissatisfaction with the direction Sarkozy is taking France rather than the retirement age. Sarkozy's 'Lucky Luke in a shiny suit' style is not the statesmanship the French are used to. His policies trample on human rights, he dismisses civil society and is pushing France towards increased integration in the global economy by dismantling many elements that distinguish French life, such as their reluctance to work longer hours.

This lifestyle might be unsustainable in the current global climate, but strikes and protests serve to question the current climate, and sometimes new answers can be strangely born.

Strikes and protests connect the French to their ancestral selves and call citizens to 'wake up and smell the history' of collectivism and resistance.

Public conversations about strikes in France are never limited to current demands but expand into taking the nation's temperature and examining future possibilities. Politics expands because everyday disruptions demand engagement. This strike, however spoiled the protestors might seem, is not solely about the age of retirement. It is one spark from the ongoing public conversation about what constitutes life under the global economy.

In Australia a mass strike, let alone a French style strike, is unimaginable. Changes to industrial relations legislation in the last 20 years limit unions' links with civil society. The bureaucratic hoops required before a strike can be considered a legal 'protected action' are Kafkaesque, and trade unions and individuals can be held liable for financial losses resulting from illegal strikes. Therefore strikes have become small, localised and limited to issues of contractual entitlements.

Labour withdrawal, the main weapon unions and workers have against capital and the

state, no longer serve to strengthen national conversations beyond workplace contracts. The Vietnam moratorium would have been significantly weakened without the support of the unions. In 2005 the protest against the invasion of Iraq, despite being larger than the moratorium marches, had little effect. Arguably the threat of labour withdrawal can make the state listen, strengthen civil society and enrich national conversation

Without the possibility of a spontaneous strike, dissent evacuates the streets. Instead of striking or putting foot to pavement, dissenters are banished to virtual public space (the internet) where groups like Getup and Avaaz have formed. These groups do great things but different possibilities arise when the people claim physical public space.

Collectivism on the computer at home doesn't feel as powerful as standing with thousands of others because, even with personal political avatars, our bodies still exist. Labour withdrawal and protests use bodies to talk politics and create a collective physical form that booms into government ears whether they like it or not.

Strikes and protests used to open a fissure between past, present and future, between the state and the people, and allow possibilities for re-imagining the status quo. Strikes and protests may commence with small demands but can grow into something more imaginative. The May 1968 riots in Paris were ignited by boys demanding access to the girls' dorm rooms at the University, and resulted in widespread social and political changes across France. Our own Vincent Lingiari led a strike about wage conditions which evolved into a land rights claim.

For better or worse these unpredictable possibilities are retarded in Australia because labour withdrawal and civil society have been forced to divorce and spontaneous strikes, where creativity resides, is extinguished by bureaucratic wrangling that chains any subsequent discourse to the 'core grievance' — to the entitlements in the contract.

At the same time the French unions' inability to accept changes demanded by their economic system seems futile, selfish and anachronistic. Many would agree with Slavoj Zizek, the Marxist philosopher, who stated that these current strikes are led by the workers aristocracy, those with safe positions, protesting against personal reductions rather than advocating change. 'The truly needy and poor ones don't even dare strike.'

Reports say the frenzied French strikes will taper off this week. Not because the passion has died, or principles abandoned, but because it's holidays — time to enjoy the good life. Again — one can't help but laugh. Even if they shoot themselves in the foot they will not let go of the notion that France is its own separate planet where there is equal time for resistance and the good life.

## **Church tourist**

POETRY

*Michael Sharkey*

### **Here, where the Grimms once stayed**

The church is neither hot nor cold  
but place to wait till rain has eased:  
these effigies have waited till time's  
nothing: life of action, pain or tears,  
or blink in geologic span.

This dormant woman and her man:  
how many children did she bear?  
Could she bear him she sleeps beside?  
Some are stacked like supermarket  
layers with a knight above each shelf;  
below, more subtle things to gaze on:  
sandstone toads on sandstone  
corpses, keeping nit till Judgment Day  
with worms that glide from cavities.

Though notices ban trespassers,  
I slip the rope, trace writing on  
each bier declaring faith that life's  
mere pit-stop to eternity. The worms  
are long and fat and sleek, making  
Braille of eyes and cheeks, while toads  
have taken take time off from  
their inroads: food for thought.  
The knights lie in between the worlds

of as things are and as they'll be.  
On tree-sized pillars, painted shields  
have faded out to shadows  
like their bearers now defunct.  
Swords, armour, spurs and other  
tools of trade are rubbed to blunt  
by visitors who've walked the aisles  
through centuries, knelt prie dieux  
down to grooves and gawked,  
felt history and waited out the rain  
to read the scraps of final hopes:  
'Ich komme nicht zur Ruhe'  
or 'Ich danke dir f r alles'.  
The writers of the Gothic script  
are dumb at length, like those who  
carved the wooden saint who holds  
a model of this place named for her,  
though the martial tone is buttressed  
by another grave in here,  
containing one world war's great  
hero who made possible the next:  
some tourists come to see and feel  
that Titan's tomb. The church  
attracts all kinds. Avoiding those,  
I turn back to that pint-sized  
figure even the Reformers left  
for pity. Here, she looks a queen

and young; in fact, she was  
till grief revealed what life  
was worth and she gave all  
she had to feed the poor.  
Reflecting on the brutal way  
the hierarchy treated her,  
I see the logic of the place  
she holds in this ambiguous space.  
Born in murderous times among  
such vicious things as men become  
where power is at stake, she stands  
among the metal, glass and stone,  
the warm antipodes of hate.  
Others will go in to wait until  
the sun appears again to draw them  
out, as it did me, though darkness  
shrouds a dignity past counting.

## Packer's brave new world of media self-interest

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*

There was much surprise last week when billionaire businessman James Packer paid \$280 million for an 18 per cent share of the ownership of the Ten Network.



During the five years since his father's death, he had sold many of the media properties his father had accumulated. He believed he could make more money owning casinos.

Last week's purchase seemed to suggest he is a shrewd businessman who is only in it for the money. A day or so after making his play, he was already \$20 million ahead. Ten declared an unexpected special dividend on top of its final payout following the announcement of a massive and unexpected profit increase.

There was credible speculation that Packer would seek seats on the board, and use his influence to kill innovation at the network. This included cancelling a planned expansion of news and current affairs, and also the costly niche sports channel One HD, which was launched in early 2009.

The latter move also raises competition concerns, as it would remove a key competitor to the sports channels of the pay TV company Foxtel, which Packer partially owns with Rupert Murdoch and Telstra.

For his father Kerry Packer and grandfather Sir Frank Packer, being a media proprietor was effectively a vocation. They took seriously the media's obligation to serve the public interest, in the hope that they may be rewarded with large profits for their businesses. But nevertheless they had a sense of stewardship, and appeared content in the knowledge that they were doing the right thing by their nation.

Broadcast television and radio is especially tied to the public interest because, unlike print and internet media, it uses the airwaves, which are a public property. No media proprietor has an automatic right to the broadcast spectrum.

Use of the airwaves comes with certain regulatory and moral obligations, according to the [Broadcasting Services Act 1992](#), which is administered by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). Owners need a licence to broadcast, and they must continually prove their fitness to broadcast at licence renewal time.

In return, governments have often shown sympathy for media owners during tough times. Last year Communications Minister Stephen Conroy returned \$500 million in licence fees to

the commercial television networks because he believed the broadcasters had a bleak business outlook because of looming competition from internet television.

While the move was much criticised at the time, and now looks quite ill-judged in light of large increases in advertising revenue, it does demonstrate that there is a public service dimension to the activities of the commercial broadcasters.

For many years, Kerry Packer carried the financial losses incurred by Channel 9's *Sunday* program because he believed in the important contribution its quality journalism was making to the strength of Australian democracy. Not long after James took over from his father, the program was gutted, and soon replaced by a lifestyle oriented breakfast program.

In recent years, Ten has distinguished itself from its rivals Seven and Nine by taking risks that are rare in commercial media. The niche sports channel was never expected to be instantly profitable, but it contributed diversity to the offering of free to air television.

This contrasts with the predictably popular content of the new digital channels of Seven and Nine, which has contributed only increased profits. As a more public-spirited proprietor, Kerry Packer would have given One HD many years to prove its worth. Seven and Nine, whose ownership is dominated by private equity firms with no philosophical commitment to broadcast media, were only interested in reliable profits.

Because previous media proprietors operated with a certain amount of good will, ACMA and its predecessors have rarely used their powers to enforce licence conditions, or to deny licence renewal. It could be time for ACMA to use its power to ensure that Packer's return to significant media ownership is in the public interest.



## Social welfare good news stories

### HUMAN RIGHTS

Tony Vinson



The new Jesuit Social Services study *Moving from the Edge* is not a welfare tale of woe. It is a celebration of lives that have 'come good'. Individuals and families have spoken in a basically human way about their transition from being 'outsiders' to social 'insiders'. In the process we gain some important leads on different influences that have supported that journey.

But there is another fundamental lesson to be learned. We are witnessing the revival of an old, recurring criticism called welfare dependency. It goes something like this: there is a morally lax group of people who, given half a chance and in the absence of stern social controls, would happily sponge on society.

The predecessor report to this one, *Dropping off the Edge*, threw light on the real circumstances of many people needing help; it showed how within a small number of Australian communities people get caught in a web of disadvantage. Blaming these neighbourhoods, these people, for their entrapment achieves nothing. It is far more productive to build up the communities, provide opportunities for advancement and help demonstrate what it's possible to achieve.

The stories in *Moving from the Edge* are about individuals and families whose plight matches in severity that depicted in *Dropping off the Edge*. Despite overwhelming challenges these people have made their way to more satisfying and productive lives. Their stories are a reminder of the fact that with human courage and the support of others it is possible for people to 'turn around' ill-starred lives.

Frankly, I was deeply moved by the stories and I hope that reading them will have a similar affect on a wider audience, especially those who make social policy.

Overcoming the odds has in every instance involved external encouragement (from professionals in the field, partners, relatives, teachers, community groups) cultivating and supporting positive aspirations that lay within the people assisted, helping them to chart a path to the attainment of their goals and conveying confidence that the goals can and will be achieved.

Nothing that I heard moved me more than Candice and Louis's efforts to regain custody of their child Priscilla from the care of the state. Prior to that action being taken the lives of the parents had been directionless; their health was undermined by drug and alcohol dependence.

Sheer determination, the partners' affection for each other and their child, the help received with social housing, their trust in and appreciation of the service of the majority of the

professionals from whom they obtained help, all contributed to their becoming a settled, functioning family. Resisting what they saw as the overwhelming discouragement of the child welfare authorities actually helped motivate their efforts.

The story of Kyleen's progressively greater inclusion in mainstream society is the story of her moving up the education ladder greatly supported by her fellow Aboriginal students and mentors.

Brian described his early life as being hopeless. He went on to say: 'I had nothing and not much to look forward to. I didn't know where my life was going. It was reckless. The stuff I was doing; (like) high speed chases. I had no real regard for life at that stage. That's a common feeling with criminals; like they're dangerous mate ... they've got nothing to live for.'

Yet today he is a fully qualified tradesman, settled with a partner and linked socially with upright people and relatives who have always conveyed trust in his ability to succeed. He might not have done that but for human service staff who have gently but purposefully helped him chart his way to the achievement of his goals — the latest of which is the planned purchase of a home.

Then there is June and her kids, who had the stuffing knocked out of them by the gruesome suicide at home of the children's father. From the depths of despair, and drawing upon the support of her worker and an inner-picture of the mother she needed to be, June has managed the admittedly shaky social integration of her children. Only time will tell whether she manages the same for herself.

And so the stories go. There has been a kind of social chemistry present in these lives that has encouraged success: relationships, both natural and professional, that have brought into play positive aspirations to be a 'social insider' and the devising of a road map leading to that goal; the encourager's shared conviction that the outsider's goals can and will be achieved; the availability of the material wherewithal to underwrite the change effort.

We should be profoundly grateful to those who have shared their stories with us. I hope that the lessons we learn from them will help ground social inclusion policy in the advantages of encouragement, guided reflection and careful planning instead of the compliance and income management measures that currently hold sway at the national level.