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Eureka Street is published fortnightly online, a minimum of 24 times per year by Eureka Street Magazine Pty Ltd

Requests for permission to reprint material from the website and this edition should be addressed to the Editor.

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Responsibility for editorial content is accepted by the publisher.

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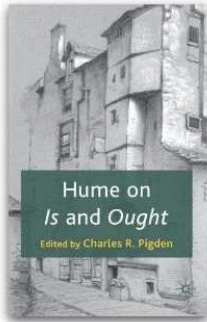
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## Beyond the selfish election

### POLITICS

*Andrew Hamilton*



The language of ethics can sometimes sound as arcane as the results of elections are confusing.

One of the sharpest questions for Catholic ethical frameworks, for example, is whether an 'is' can generate an 'ought'. In other words, is it legitimate to argue from a study of the nature of human beings and of the world to the ways in which human beings should behave? For example, may we conclude from the sexual and gender differentiation between women and men and the part that this plays in child rearing that marriage ought to be a stable relationship between a man and a woman?

In the Catholic moral tradition this kind of argumentation is generally accepted. Some other moral traditions claim that it is invalid, and that ethics must proceed differently.

I shall leave that question for the ethicists. But the election campaign and its results also raised sharp questions about the relationship between 'ises' and 'oughts' in the political sphere. They made it clear how fragmented is the political reality of Australia, and how those who orchestrated the campaigns simply worked within the confines of that fragmentation, and indeed jemmied the fault lines further apart.

The 'is' of political life revealed in the campaign was of one in which voters were generally self-engrossed, considering their own interests without any sense of the common good. Australia also appeared to be an abstraction. Quite different groups of voters in different states, and in different regions of the state, were each dominated by their own interests and resentments. As a result any campaign that presupposed a uniform Australia and a set of broad Australian goals seemed bound to fail.

As a result the pitch of both major parties addressed the reality of fragmentation. They played to strong local desires and resentments, focused on the attitudes of people in seats that were in play, ignored statements of vision or of general principle, and reduced leadership to the leaders' fellow feeling with whoever they were visiting. Any distinctively national policies were negative — against boat people and the unemployed.

This was understandable, because different groups share resentments, and can be united in directing them against the marginalised who are different from themselves. It was ironic justice that the result of the election marginalised both parties.

The presence of so many political agents in the parties and the focus on instant news by the media ensure that this 'is' of fragmentation and of focus on self-interest will continue. The

criterion of policies and actions in public life will be whether a party will be successful at the next election.

We may ask therefore whether such an 'is' can ever generate 'oughts'. Can we expect ever again to see political parties, so led and with such a mindset, to reflect on the future of Australia, on what kind of society they ought to promote, and on how they should prepare for the coming realities of climate change and of increasing disparities of wealth and life chances? It seems unlikely that the current reality of political life will encourage such reflectiveness, let alone the adoption of national policies that incur local unpopularity.

That makes it important to ask whether there is a deeper 'is' in Australian society than that revealed in election campaigns. Examples of this reality might include the quality of relationships between people, their deeper desires for themselves and for their families and neighbourhood, the solidarity between people in their work places, the altruism that makes them give to appeals for victims of hurricanes and floods, the ordinary respect that people show others in need or on public transport.

These would make up a set of implicit commitments to Australian society that escape the analysis of fragmentation and individual self-interest. If strongly felt, this 'is' might generate a generally accepted 'ought' that would express itself in a richer vision of Australian society and a desire for strategies to realise it.

Any good future for Australian public life depends on the recognition of this deeper 'is'. But its recognition will depend on the energy and ability of the people and groups who take a deeply moral view of Australian society to articulate and commend it attractively.

The churches, with their long tradition of recognising the deeper values in human beings and in society, can play an important part in this. But they will need to work cooperatively with other groups who also decry the narrow and self-interested focus in Australian politics. That will be a challenge. To find common cause with people whose ethical view is grounded and expressed differently is not something that churches have found easy to do.

A postscript. At the polling booths I passed on Saturday, the youngest and most energetic of the party volunteers seemed to belong to the Greens. Some were Catholics who joined the Greens precisely because the party commended an ethically serious account of Australian reality.

That account differs in its detail from the Catholic vision. But if the Australian Catholic Church is to help commend the deeper 'is' of Australian public life, and so commend more ethical practice, it can hardly do so without recognising the Greens, for all its disagreement with many of their policies, as partners in this large task.

If the Catholic Church demonises the Greens, it will see itself used by hard political operators to entrench a narrow and self-centred view of Australian life.

## Mixed marriage of Indigenous and Christian spirituality

### VIDEO

*Peter Kirkwood*

While the result of the federal election still hangs in the balance, it looks likely that the new member for the crucial seat of Hasluck in Western Australia will be the first Aboriginal Australian to sit in the House of Representatives.

Distinguished health and education bureaucrat Dr Ken Wyatt is the Liberal candidate for Hasluck. Along with political pioneers Neville Bonner and Aden Ridgeway who served in the Senate, his election will be a milestone heralding increased Indigenous representation and greater access for the Aboriginal voice in federal parliament.

In a similar vein, Joan Hendriks, who features in this interview, is a pioneering Indigenous voice in the realm of Catholic theology. With an Aboriginal mother and Irish American Catholic father, she is a bridge figure between the Indigenous and Catholic worlds. Her life's goal is to bring these two realms into productive engagement, and she is taking on an increasingly prominent public role in bringing this about.

She spoke to Eureka Street TV at an international Indigenous theology symposium held in June at the Brisbane campus of the Australian Catholic University. She was one of the keynote speakers at that meeting. This video is sponsored by the university's [Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue](#).

Hendriks talks about her personal journey exploring the two sides of her heritage, her view that the Christian God and Aboriginal creator spirit are one, and the important role in her life of *dadirri*, or quiet inner contemplation based on connection with land.

As a revered elder of the Ngugi people of Stradbroke Island in Moreton Bay, just off Brisbane in Queensland, Joan Hendriks is commonly and affectionately known as Auntie Joan. I first met her in 2008 when I made a documentary for ABC TV's *Compass* that followed her on a trip to Venice where she presented a paper at a major international theology conference. The program [reveals](#) her fascinating family and tribal background.

Her parents met and were married on Stradbroke Island, but moved to the mainland just before she was born. Because of the shame at that time of a mixed race marriage, her parents could not go to church, but they made sure their children went to Catholic school and to Sunday Mass. She was brought up and lived most of her life in Brisbane, but has recently moved back to the island.

It was only in the 1980s when Auntie Joan's own children were grown up that she started to explore her Aboriginality in earnest. It started with a national Catholic gathering of Indigenous people that opened her eyes to the richness of her Aboriginal heritage. She became



even more involved in the Church, and began speaking around Queensland and beyond about justice and reconciliation.

At the age of 68 she started studying for her Master's degree in theology, and graduated in 2008. She immediately applied to do her doctorate which she is undertaking at ACU. As well as studying at the university, she also lectures on Indigenous and cross-cultural issues to students in a number of faculties.

In 2007 Hendriks received an Honorary Fellowship from the ACU, and in 2008 won the ACU Indigenous Research Award and Scholarship for her study entitled *A Dialogue Between Christian Theology and Indigenous Spirituality*.

## All MPs have Independents envy

POLITICS

*Tony Smith*

Even before this cliffhanger election, some journalists questioned the democratic credentials of Independent MPs. One critic argued that Independents had only a few thousand supporters, while the votes given members of parties should be aggregated to measure their individual approval rating.



Since both major parties wasted their chance to secure a clear mandate, the Independents have been treated contemptuously in the media as opportunists, impractical idealists and vengeful egotists.

This negative attitude by some elements of the press gallery is most likely explained by laziness. The 'in-out' nature of the Westminster system is simple to understand and to comment upon. By making Parliament complex, the rise of Independents complicates the lives of the political hacks. The truth is however, that all MPs envy Independents.

My research among state MPs some years ago showed that most considered themselves to be 'trustees' committed to the common good. Some thought of themselves as 'delegates' representing specific seats, but few rated highly their roles as political partisans.

Asked about their representational ideals, most rated their conscience and community interest highly and about half of the interviewees thought a specific electorate important. A number of backbenchers spoke of the frustrations caused by party discipline and some related incidents where they had expressed dissent from the party whip, absented themselves from a vote or even crossed the floor because of a conscientious stance.

While these findings might not necessarily generalise across time and systems, there is no reason to believe that federal MPs today would express markedly different views.

In 1991 after being elected initially in 1988, the Greiner Coalition Government was reduced to a minority. At first it could rely on a conservative Independent and then needed support from three genuine Independents, who demanded implementation of a Charter of Reform. In return the Independents promised not to support opposition motions of no confidence and not to block genuine money bills.

Some Coalition MPs later admitted that the extra parliamentary scrutiny saved the government from making embarrassing mistakes and helped improve legislation. The lack of a majority did however, lead to some desperate measures and eventually to the resignation of the premier.

The online lobby group GetUP! organised a National Press Club Forum for crossbenchers this week. Independents Tony Windsor, Rob Oakeshott and Bob Katter were joined by the Greens' Adam Bandt.

Bandt's perspective was different from that of the Independents. He seemed prepared to accept a role in a Labor Government to advance Greens policies and ideals. The Independents said they would reject offers of a ministry or the speakership under the same old 'red team — blue team' arrangements.

They emphasised that stability for the next three years was their agreed aim and that they would reject overtures from any party that seemed interested in returning to the people for a majority.

Clearly, they would throw away a unique opportunity if one of the major parties sought a majority at a fresh election because with a majority they could continue to ignore the crossbenchers. In the view of the Independents, to ignore the crossbench is to ignore the parliament.

Oakeshott challenged the other 145 MPs to help sort out the post-election mess and questioned why major party backbenchers were leaving negotiations to their leaders.

The Independents noted that excellent, objective and widely consulting reports had been brought to Parliament, but that they had been wasted. The Garnaut Report on climate change, Henry Report on tax reform and the deliberations of the '20-20 Summit' created perfect opportunities for the Parliament to advance serious issues. Instead, executive government had assumed control and the major parties had sought political advantage. The resulting inaction led to the community cynicism expressed in the election.

Windsor stressed the importance of stability over the Parliament's full three year term. Oakeshott stressed that by involving local stakeholders in his mid NSW north coast seat he had been able to achieve a great deal for his electorate. He called MPs the 'building blocks' of democracy and stressed that the Independents saw themselves as wanting to build something better rather than wreck anything.

Optimistically perhaps, Oakeshott suggested that an executive might be formed with people from across the Parliament, including both major parties and crossbenchers.

The Independents also appealed to the media to embrace the opportunity for change. Media support seems unlikely given that most of the questions directed at the Independents were attempts to determine exactly what price they wanted to support one major party or the other.

The Independents have divergent opinions about major issues such as how to address climate change. But they agree that the best way to achieve workable solutions is to take Parliament seriously and to draw upon the wisdom collected there.



These three men rebelled against the strictures placed on their participation in Parliament by Coalition pressures and left the National Party to sit on the crossbenches. All three are keenly supported by their regional electorates. No-one should doubt their very legitimate mandates to work for their constituents.

As the late Peter Andren, Independent MP for Calare often indicated, the MP must also consider the common good. In the time that they have been the subjects of intense media scrutiny, Windsor, Oakeshott and Katter have shown that they are dedicated fully to the national interest.

## Ratings hog Seven kills Cousins doco

### TELEVISION

Tim Kroenert



The makers of *Such Is Life: The Troubled Times of Ben Cousins* have crafted an excellent documentary film unprecedented in the world of Australian professional sport.

Characterised by frank talking head interviews with sport and media professionals who charted Cousins' rise and fall; with those who worked with, above and around him at football clubs the West Coast Eagles and Richmond Tigers; with friends and family and with the charismatic Cousins himself, *Such is Life* offers a brutal insight into the pressures of Australian sporting celebrity, and penetrates deeply into the private battles of an individual who has been as obsessive in his pursuit of on-field excellence as in his recreational substance binges.

Complaints that the documentary downplays the downside of drug use are misguided. There's footage of a drugged-up Cousins twitching in his kitchen; looking physically wasted while detoxing at a friend's property in Cottesloe; emotional anecdotes from his family about witnessing their beloved Ben's self-destructive behaviour; distressing audio from a 911 call made after Cousins had been on a five-day cocaine binge in the US.

Not to mention his dramatic, devastating fall from grace at the Eagles, where he lost first his captaincy, then his place at the club, after having been an inspirational superstar for 238 games; and recollections of the death in October 2007 of Cousins' 'great mate', former fellow Eagle Chris Mainwaring, of a drug overdose. These are real consequences. *Such Is Life* is a film with a powerful, implicit moral to communicate.

In being broadcast on a commercial network, what *Such is Life* gains in exposure it loses in momentum. To its credit, Channel Seven kept the commercial breaks in last night's broadcast to a minimum, and even these were flanked with promos for addict support services, in keeping with the film's cautionary tone.

Yet one of the film's strengths is its relentlessness. We are drawn with Cousins to the compulsive limits of physical training and the pursuit of perfection, to the vertiginous heights of fame, to the joyous, frightening maelstrom of drug use, to the pits of public shame and on towards the arc of redemption. The commercial breaks, a necessary evil in this medium, nonetheless damage the integrity of this empathetic experience.

On the other hand, the decision to cleave the film in two and screen it over successive nights can only be described as a cynical ratings grab. That statement is not disproved by the fact that part two will be married to a televised discussion forum. This seems to be more an

attempt to build hype around a televised product, rather than a serious attempt to understand the core issues.

It is disappointing to see Seven take this route. Few would deny that whatever his wrongdoings, Cousins has, like a drug, been used and abused by the media. That's a central theme of *Such is Life*, underscored by Cousins' bewilderment at returning from a stint in rehab to find his personal struggle had been made a public issue, fair game for anyone with a soap box to mount or an axe to grind.

It is unlikely that this treatment did anything other than exacerbate the problem.

The mistreatment continues. Cousins is no angel, but neither is he a demon; just a man with a problem that he's fought to contain. His story has mirrors in the lives of many people who have battled addiction. Seven's treatment of it borders on exploitative.

## Australia racist? Well, der!

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

*Bill Collopy*

### Fear and loathing in the Antipodes

Having arrived with her family from Kabul 12 months ago, 15-year-old Zara is walking home from high school. She passes three younger girls in a playground. Two turn away when they see her in the hijab, carrying textbooks, but one calls out: 'You're a terrorist. You kill people. Go back to your own country.'



Running home seems to take Zara forever.

This happened last year in Dandenong, where every second person is from a non-English speaking background. In Victoria's most diverse multicultural community, mixing more than a hundred ethnicities together is easy: living in harmony takes work.

Racism is the thief that steals from haves and have-nots alike, from victim and perpetrator and onlooker. It degrades integrity and human rights, and then tries to blame the theft on its victim. 'What else can you expect from one of 'them'?' Insert the word Jew, Arab, Aborigine, Vietnamese, Chinese, Lebanese, Sudanese, Pole, Greek or Maori, to name a few maligned groups of recent decades. But are we a racist country today?

The one-word answer is an Australian expression that new settlers often strain to comprehend: a schoolyard idiom-intoned with prepubescent ennui — the word 'der' (as in 'Der, Fred'). Though seldom seen written, and originating in a less tolerant time, it means 'mega-obvious', a hyper-truism. The Americans have 'Duh' and 'D'oh' but these lack the crushing schoolyard putdown of a 'der'.

Few Australians will admit to racial intolerance. Well, der. We'd sooner admit to Satanism. 'I'm not a racist but ...' is the usual disclaimer. But.

Our tradition of fear and loathing on these shores began with the first European arrivals. Presently, in 1788, a British fleet ferried human refuse across several oceans to fulfil Jeremy Bentham's vision of a thieves' colony in the empire's back yard. Enlightenment visionaries got their continental panopticon with its seas and wilderness in place of walls, and an uber-gaol in place of decommissioned battleships on the Thames scooping the overflow of full prisons.

Our forebears called Port Jackson a penal settlement. If founded today, it would be a 'detention centre'.

Immediately upon arrival, settlers feared the shadowy Other. We've been afraid ever since, with each new plane or boatload. What agenda might the Other have?

Racial awareness is endogenous for Australians, whether guilt-ridden or conscience-free, but does this make us racist? Racism has no homeland, no borders and no scientific basis; despite the efforts of Eysenck, Jensen and Rushton to develop a racial league table.

Lack of logic doesn't stop Australians uttering abusive taunts, however innocuous our intent. Been to the footy lately and listened to some of the barracking? Heard the terrible things schoolkids say about gays?

And at some time, most Australians will speak a version of the following: X people work hard. Y people are natural musicians/athletes/dancers. Z people treat the world like they own it. Q people are violent. R people are drunkards. S people mistreat their women. T people are arrogant. V people are queue jumpers. Racial generalising becomes racist only if we accept its false premise.

Is this an unfair allegation? We need no Hanson to articulate such tendencies. Just sit behind the wheel of your car and fume while someone from XYZ background does something you dislike. Just suffer inconvenience when persons of ABC background do not wait their turn or misunderstand some unwritten rule. We need only hear about a miscarriage of justice at our child's school or our partner's workplace perpetrated by someone from DEF, GHI or JKL background. Suddenly 'they' are taking away our jobs, scholarships or neighbourhoods.

However, similar complaints can be heard about newcomers in many countries, so is this attitude especially Australian?

For years we looked down our liberal-humanist noses at apartheid. Then liberal-humanists of the world condemned us for not condemning Hanson. But demonising her is a mistake. Pauline didn't invent bigotry. Nor did she supervise a half-century's systematic theft of Aboriginal children from their parents. Did Australians suspect this was happening? Edmund Burke warned that all it took for evil to flourish was for good men to do nothing. The dubious honour was entirely ours.

Ah, but we've changed since. We've reformed. We now accept our fair share of refugees; more generous per capita than most industrialised nations. We're not like our predecessors; colour-coding and playing favourites, screening people by means less than honourable.

Or could we be in denial about our racist propensities? We might concede some colonial errors, even a massacre or two. Oh, let's not dwell in the past. Myall Creek? Several lifetimes ago. Lambing Flat? Ancient history. Tampa? All a misunderstanding. Mohammed Haneef? Case of mistaken identity. Rationalising is easy. John Howard famously refused to accept there was underlying racism in Australia. Well, he would say that, wouldn't he?

On today's airwaves we hear obscenities that might've prompted our grandmothers to reach for mouthwash. The world's largest car maker uses the word 'bugger' for TV ads, while an international clothing store proclaims 'FCUK' across billboards. Yet what advertiser would



dare exploit racist equivalents of such words? The only people who can appropriate name-calling with impunity are the insulted parties, reclaiming terms of abuse, as some minorities have done. Racist taunts remain taboo precisely because they're still live ammunition.

In societies where human life is cheap, ethnic groups are often institutionally disenfranchised. Aussies aren't like that. We're good guys: a fair-go egalitarian society in which everybody has rights. But some animals are more egalitarian than others. We enlightened Australians might like to think we left xenophobia behind with the days when we couldn't buy bok choy at the supermarket.

Hanson and her heirs know otherwise. They know our fear of the Other. We heard Pauline's bleating demands for quasi-parental explanation and her claims of Asian invasion by stealth. Could it be that Australian racist statements reflect fear and loathing in the soul: ghosts of our mongrel past and geographical illegitimacy? Lacking the midwifery of independence war myth-making, we were a foundling country, abandoned where we didn't belong, and fearing the Other all around us: in the outback, the Pacific and Asia.

So can we be called racist in 2010? We've enacted laws against our worst tendencies. It's now illegal to dabble in behaviour that offends colour, race, nationality or creed. We have the Racial Discrimination Act, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act, the Racial Hatred Act, not to mention the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Such legislative niceties offer cold comfort to Indian students attacked in unprovoked robberies and copycat beatings. The official explanation: Indians are soft targets for crimes against the person; often travelling alone, carrying expensive gadgets, and working in high-exposure environments like taxis and late night convenience stores. Really? Is it the victim's fault now? Do we blame a rape victim for wearing a mini-skirt?

Besides, we risk begging the question if we brand these attacks simply as 'racist'. They're symptom, not cause; spawned by ignorant fear of the Other. Der.

Raised in Sarajevo, Marijana had survived domestic upheaval and a ruined homeland after the breakup of Yugoslavia and subsequent war in Bosnia. In 2005 the former refugee was now a mother of two, working in a Moorabbin factory. She and her family took out a mortgage in the suburb of Endeavour Hills, where streets are named after Cook, Banks and Flinders. Locals ignored her attempts at greeting. Her next door neighbour's van displayed a bumper-sticker that read 'I Shoot and I Vote'. This man's wife refused to return Marijana's smiles.

Finally the women came face to face, when their daughters were in the same class. Marijana learned that the elderly mother living next door came from Holland, after escaping

near-starvation under Nazi occupation. Two households, both alike in dignity, each fearing the Other: imaginary bomb-making Bosnians versus gun-crazy Aussies, and both hoping to live on Ramsay Street in mutual prosperity.

To those who deny Australia is a racist country, I say this: the elephant is in the classroom, in the workplace, in the neighbourhood. Racism thrives, and not only for people of Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. It's as easy for those from Middle-Eastern, European, Asiatic, Islander, or African backgrounds to evince racist behaviours, albeit by neglect. Is it racist to point out this elephant? We all fear some version of the Other, and how it might change us.

Multiculturalism does change us. Are we worse off for it? We might blame our parents' attitudes or our ancestors but that's a cop-out, like blaming government. Hanson-like, we can plead with lawmakers to solve our problems but that won't stop racism. We can vote for more police. Will they stop racism? Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu wants to put two armed guards on every Melbourne train after dark. This will relieve the concerns of travellers and increase rail patronage but will it reduce racist behaviour, or merely chase it underground?

The 2005 riots in Cronulla, lasting several days and nights, showed how little effort is needed to scratch racism's sore. Alan Jones and 2GB broadcaster Brian Wilshire helped to fan a fire already spread by text-messaging. Sections of the public hadn't forgotten the gang rapes of 2000, perpetrated by a group of Lebanese-Australian youths. Justification or excuse? We mustn't allow mob mentality to dictate social policy.

The rabble that attacked the Bastille kick-started a revolution but only with weapons and hate, not constructive plans for change. There will always be knee-jerk jerks like Jim Saleam and Jack van Tongeren but it isn't neo-Nazis who incite racist acts in significant numbers: it's irresponsible demagogues like Jones et al. who retard Australia's civic maturity, because they know better.

Our constitution contains a remarkable section (51, xxvi) known as the 'race power'. In its original form it was drafted to enable the government to restrict the conditions of migrant workers, especially the Chinese. Our new-minted parliament in 1901 passed the infamous Immigration Restriction Act. Its legislative architect, Alfred Deakin, reasoned thus:

'It is not the bad qualities, but the good qualities of these alien races that make them so dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors.'

Legally enshrined, the White Australia Policy was institutional racism. Supposedly we've moved on. Or have we?

Susan Jones (her real name is equally commonplace), born in South Africa, had married an Australian. Prospective employers here were impressed with her credentials, and invariably granted her an interview. They didn't expect to greet a woman of Zulu origin.

Susan's accent presented no problem. Her qualifications were excellent. She had experience. Attractive and in perfect health, she had glowing references and she interviewed well. So what thwarted her attempts to gain a job in her chosen field? No explanation given. Susan at least managed to attend interviews. Her fellow black South Africans didn't make those shortlists. Could it have been their exotic names? A coincidence, surely.

Research into the recruitment industry in Australia has repeatedly shown that employers tend to hire people like themselves. Are they racist or merely conservative to shy from the Other? Employers are ordinary folk, glacier-slow to change. But they'll adapt, usually following someone else's lead.

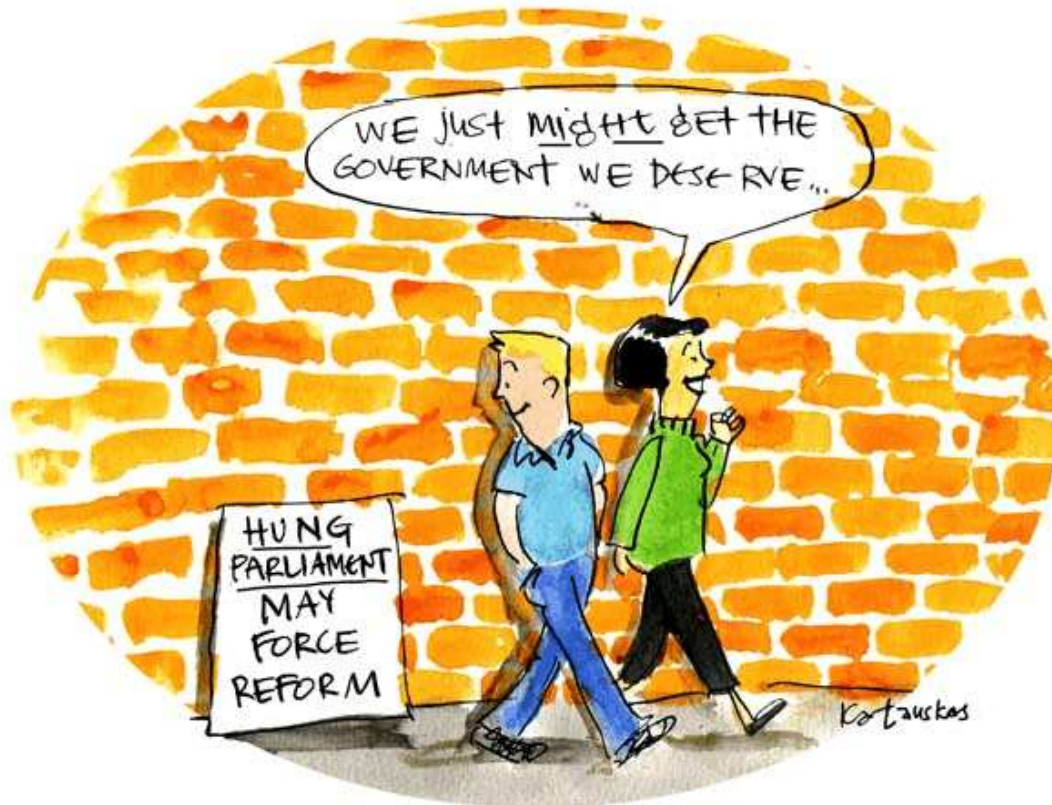
So who will defeat racism? We've all watched it happen. When someone from XYZ becomes a colleague or friend, the prejudice fences often subside. When someone from ZYX marries or brings a child into our family, the fences usually fall. The Other remains but no longer frightens.

Racism lacks a natural predator. We'll never stamp it out with force. Nor will we develop a social discord vaccine. Experiences from our workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods continue to show racist behaviours shrivelling in environments of understanding and collaboration. Despite all the education and advocacy and preaching racial tolerance, Australia's multicultural experiment remains a work in progress, relationship by relationship.

## The government we deserve

CARTOON

*Fiona Katauskas*



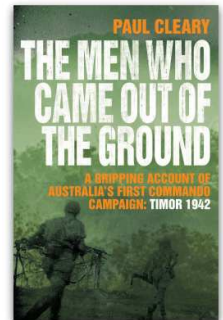
## Guerilla diggers' East Timor debt

POLITICS

*Paul Cleary*

On 23 June, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's last day as prime minister, he hosted a lunch in Parliament House Canberra with East Timor's President Jose Ramos Horta. At about 2pm he met with Nora Kenneally, whom I think became the very last ordinary Australian citizen to meet with him as PM.

Nora is the widow of [Paddy Kenneally](#), one of the most outstanding veterans from Australia's Timor campaign during the Second World War. From the end of the war until his death at the age of 93, Kenneally made it his business to remind people of the simple fact Australians owed the Timorese people a great deal — that he and his mates owed their lives to them.



Prior to the lunch Rudd held a press conference with President Ramos Horta, who was visiting Australia for his first state visit as president. At the press conference Rudd announced a total of five 'dedicated' scholarships for East Timorese students in recognition of the Timorese who 'showed solidarity' with Australia's Sparrow Force during the Second World War.

'Showed solidarity' was Rudd-speak for the hundreds of Timorese and Portuguese men and boys who had served side by side with Australia's guerilla fighters, enabling them to stage an amazing behind-enemy-lines commando campaign throughout 1942. The campaign, involving the first Australians trained as special forces commandos, tied up several thousand Japanese troops while the battle for New Guinea was underway.

Rudd was responding to a grassroots campaign calling for formal recognition and compensation for this legendary war-time assistance. But the announcement seemed a token gesture — it was simply an allocation from the existing Australia Awards scholarship program.

And it all seemed very rushed and last minute; the scholarships weren't even given a name, and Rudd didn't even make a speech during the official lunch at Parliament House.

Activist Josephite nun Sister Susan Connelly has gathered 24,000 petitions in support of an honorary AC for the people of Timor. The initiative was rejected by Rudd. Tony Abbott says should he win office he will revisit this proposal and consider any other worthwhile initiative.

While Australia has made a significant contribution to the country over the past decade, particularly with two military interventions, more could be done in a targeted way to show that Australia is true to the words contained in a leaflet dropped over Timor during the war:



‘Your Friends Do Not Forget You’.

Australians clearly forgot this promise in 1975, when the Whitlam Government sanctioned an Indonesian takeover. While those events were complex, we’ve had opportunity to deliver on this promise from 1999 onwards, but we seem to be missing the mark.

After the independence ballot, Australia missed an opportunity to fully engage in the reconstruction effort. The country really needed a substantial reconstruction effort after 1999 given that most of its infrastructure was destroyed and it had to rebuild an entire government system from scratch. The Howard Government responded a bit like Rudd, just because the Timorese leadership was standing up for their rights in the Timor Sea oil and gas negotiations.

After the \$2 billion military intervention was wound down, Australia’s aid program was reduced to a rather stingy \$40 million. It has now been increased to around \$100 million, although we know that a lot of our aid boomerangs its way back home.

After independence there was literally a handful of doctors in the country. To rebuild their health system the Timorese had to go all the way to Cuba for training their medical students and for getting stop-gap doctors and nurses into the country. Australia’s short-sighted approach to the rebuilding of Timor has enabled China to get a big foot in the door, emerging as an influential player with close ties to the country’s elite. China recently sold patrol boats to the country and has been busy building grand edifices that the political elite seem to want.

It is true that East Timor now has substantial oil revenue; but the problem is that money is not reaching into these poor places. Part of the problem is lack of capacity to deliver services on the ground; another element is explained by corruption. The country now has a substantial budget of about \$1 billion, but it was evident to me during a recent visit that this level of expenditure is just not hitting the ground.

This is why I think a range of community based aid projects can make a difference in this very poor country. Poverty in East Timor is great. The country is in a fragile position, notwithstanding substantial investment and growth in the capital, Dili. Other parts of the country remain on par with the most miserable parts of Africa and the Indian sub-continent.

I think it is in Australia’s own interest to make restitution for the wartime support of the Timorese and Portuguese people. I think we could certainly do something that is more imaginative, and more substantial, than award five scholarships which would have been awarded anyway.

## **Predator caged**

POETRY

*Grant Fraser*

### **Le Jardin des Plantes**

#### **1. Snow leopard**

Soundless as snow  
the leopard comes,  
all of his weight  
is in the gold of his predatory eyes.

He comes down from  
the bright mountains  
with the musk of deer,  
the scent of ice,  
the grazing breath  
of the high, prodigious goats  
meticulously held  
in the perfume of his face.

He is exactly the size  
of the strike  
in his lethal heart.

He prowls  
behind the heavy, protecting glass  
in amongst the cemented stones,  
ready at the impatient edge,  
the predator,  
eternally deprived of prey.

#### **2. Orangutan**

In his sullen belfry  
he rests in his bemusement,  
this Quasimodo,  
and considers the splendour of his fingers,  
his great patriarchal hands;  
yet his back is arched away,  
he is a wary gambler  
guarding his jealous cards.  
But then,  
he leaps with the facility  
of a melodious song,  
as if adrenalin had rushed  
his simian arms  
and he swings through the loopholes  
of his aptitudes.  
Swooning in this mastery of air  
he is the twilit forest,  
he is the warm tropical rain  
that shimmers on a celtic coat;  
he is the russet arc that veers  
between the far destinations  
of Cancer and Capricorn.

### **3. Flamingoes**

They are the strangest fruit,  
grown on thornless canes;  
they are the pink locutions  
of a calligrapher's pen.

Even in their slow tense  
they are tentative,  
poised as if each step  
were a princely thing  
reserved for the pleasure  
of their king;  
If they could sing,  
then their secret song  
would be 'La Vie en Rose'.  
Although they are sinuous,  
they like good order,  
they nest in the symmetry of sonnets;  
For all their shyness,  
they never blush;  
for all their mock hauteur,  
they are never vain;  
and, for all their flamboyance,  
they never dress for dinner.

## Hung parliament could be the making of Gillard

### POLITICS

*Tony Kevin*



This remarkable election outcome should be a wake-up call for all three parties. The people have spoken, and with a clear message.

There was a massive and well-deserved loss of confidence in the Labor Government's policies. But the Coalition's insubstantial policy alternatives barely benefited from it. The increasingly well-informed Australian electorate saw through the triviality of what both major parties were offering. The Greens — a serious party — gained massively, yet there is no room for complacency in that party either.

Australia now truly has a three-party system in place. The remarkable erosion of support for the two major parties was focused in Australia's best-educated inner city electorates. So it is a harbinger of more to come.

I am quite sure that this result is attributable primarily to the major parties' pusillanimous policies on climate change, leading to a progressive loss of confidence among thinking voters in either party's fitness to govern the nation. The Greens vote will continue to grow in future for as long as the major parties cling to scientifically ignorant, pressure-group-subservient climate policies which are little better than spin and greenwash.

Gillard could fail here, as Rudd and Abbott failed. All three leaders have turned a deaf ear to the people's urgent demand that Australian federal governance take decisive policy action against disruptive climate change.

Rudd, Gillard and Abbott now have paid the price for this. In a hung House of Representatives, no government can be formed without the support of four or five Independent MPs (three ex-Nationals, one Green, and probably Andrew Wilkie). And after July 2011, no new policy will pass the Senate without Greens support there.

Looking at the past policy profiles and post-election statements of these independents in the Lower House, I believe a Gillard Government is likely. Abbott is only arithmetically and formally still in contention.

The three NSW/Queensland sitting Independents are open-minded or progressive on climate change policy and all share a healthy scepticism of market rationalist economics in confronting the water and climate change crises. Wilkie is ethically focused, and Green MP Adam Bandt has, of course, Green values. I cannot see them working with the Coalition as led by the erratic and undependable Abbott.



The Greens will need to use their new power responsibly. They should hold to their principled 2009–2010 position that Labor’s carbon-trading ETS was corrupted and ineffective. They should firmly press on with concrete proposals for a carbon tax, and talk with industry and trade union leaders, and with the Independents Windsor, Oakeshott, Katter and Wilkie on this. They have a lot of educational work to do.

The Greens need to continue to broaden their electoral base, setting aside the lingering unpleasant whiff of anti-Catholic prejudice that still hangs around some parts of the Greens culture. Speaking as a liberal-humanitarian Catholic environmentalist, I see Greens and Catholics as natural allies — we both care about our grandchildren’s climate security, which must be a first-order issue now.

Bob Brown needs to encourage a serious leadership succession plan. Christine Milne, Sarah Hanson-Young and Bandt are all reassuring figures to the mainstream public.

Gillard ran a valiant and honourable campaign, burdened as it was by great circumstantial disadvantages. She now deserves her party’s full support in her challenging task of leading a Labor Government in a hung parliament. This may be the making of her as a great prime minister.

Gillard needs a wider range of better advisers to help strengthen her own instinctive commonsense recognition of where the national interest lies in difficult times. The Labor Party backroom boys who helped her to power lack the wider national vision that is now needed. This is how her prime ministership will stand or fall now. I believe she will hold the loyalty of the Independents and the Greens for a full term, if she governs ethically.

Gillard needs to get up to speed fast on climate change science and public policy. She should ditch the foolish idea of a citizen’s assembly, and see off the discredited ETS market-trading approach to carbon dioxide emissions reduction.

She needs expert climate policy advice now. She should set up a commission with real expertise, comprising scientists, energy and systems engineers, economists and leading responsible business and trade union voices.

The Commission should have a sharply focused mandate: to advise her government on the feasibility of a carbon tax and on the best means of setting it up; and on how the proceeds of this tax should be spent (or returned to voters) to facilitate the most rapid possible transition to a decarbonised energy economy.

The roles of market incentives and of government regulation in road-mapping this urgent national energy transition should be evaluated, without ideological preconceptions.

For the past three years, the denialist Murdoch press and conservative status quo coal-mining and industry groups have run rings around Australia’s established environmental organisations. The latter need to come together, well before the new Senate in July 2011, to

decide how they can equip themselves better to play a more policy-positive national role on climate change.

I am confident that the new Gillard Government will get the economy, health, education and foreign policy settings about right. Climate change policy is the real challenge — the real policy blindspot in conventional Australian policy thinking — that she must rise to meet.

Good luck, Julia — you could yet become Australia's greatest prime minister.

## The election Rudd could have won

### POLITICS

*John Warhurst*

There are a number of memorable aspects to this 2010 federal election result, but none more so than its expected result as a hung parliament, one in which neither side, Labor nor the Coalition, has achieved a majority of seats in the House of Representatives. The party leaders, Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, now must begin negotiating with the Independents and the Green MP even before the election count is concluded.



This type of outcome, close results and often hung parliaments, is fast becoming the new Australian way. You only have to witness recent state and territory elections in Tasmania, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory (and even Western Australia in part). Just about all of them have ended this way since the defeat of the Howard Government in November 2007. This development has not received enough attention in early post-mortems of the Federal Election.

It reflects an evenly divided electorate unconvinced by the claims of either side; as well as disillusionment with the way the political process is conducted. All of these elements were demonstrated during this campaign.

The memorable aspects include the precipitous decline and possible defeat of a first-term Labor Government, and the best-ever performance of the Greens in both houses; including their first-ever general election win in the House of Representatives in the electorate of Melbourne.

There have also been notable landmark individual performances, including those of the two Wyatts (Ken Wyatt who is likely to become the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives by winning Hasluck in Western Australia for the Liberals; and Wyatt Roy who, at 20 years of age, has become the youngest ever member by winning Longman in Queensland for the Liberals).

Ed Husic, winning Chifley in Sydney for Labor, has become the first Muslim elected to the federal Parliament.

The result also suggests some fascinating questions. Prime among them is whether Labor panicked and threw away this election when it deposed Kevin Rudd and replaced him with Gillard in June.

Would Rudd have done better? The answer is probably yes. He would likely have done better in Queensland, though less well in the rest of the country. But on balance Labor probably would have done better given the enormity of Labor losses in Queensland (ten seats

lost). This occurred even though NSW State Labor is more unpopular than Queensland State Labor. Labor did well in patches in NSW and only lost four seats.

The result delivers a remarkable opportunity to the occupants of the cross-benches. Notably they all support a greater role for government regardless of their other differences.

The negotiations, as in the recent past in the Senate, may involve the three Ps: personal preferment, policy changes and the pork barrel. Some electorates, regions and states will receive greater largesse as a matter of course (as with Senator Nick Xenophon and South Australia, for instance).

What it will not necessarily involve is political instability. A hung parliament, though irritating and uncomfortable for the major parties, is nothing to be afraid of. Life will go on and the new government will consolidate. The purists who prefer clear majority government will not like it (just as they do not like a Senate that can check a Lower House government). But that preference is as much ideology as balanced judgement.

A hung parliament can produce a stable government, and even improved government. It may moderate extremism. It shifts the balance away from the major parties a little, but that will be a good thing, acceptable to, even welcomed by, the wider community. It will mean concessions and compromise all round.

After the uncertainty of the next week or two parliament and government will settle down, whoever ultimately wins. There is nothing to suggest that the new government that emerges will not serve a full term. There is no guarantee of that anyway, as history shows us, under the alternative, majority government.

## We're to blame for election shocker

EDITORIAL

*Andrew Hamilton*



The 2010 election campaign and its result have proved inadequate one of our unspoken assumptions about the political process. We accept that we are most intensely involved in the political process during the election campaign. Our involvement ends with the casting of votes and the election of the new government. We then leave the shaping of public life to the government that has been chosen, with whatever expressions of sadness, delight, fear, shame, relief, distaste or lament at lack of leadership we care to indulge.

Many aspects of the 2010 Federal Election exposed this assumption. Most obviously, nothing has yet been decided. We shall wait for counts and recounts, for negotiations to form a government. For a while we shall not be able to hand over responsibility. We shall not be clear to whom we are who are leaving responsibility, nor even who are the 'we' who hand it over.

The campaign, too, was dominated by the calculation of political professionals and by attention to the whims and prejudices of small groups of Australians in marginal electorates. As a result the large challenges that will face us as a society in coming years received only cursory attention.

These challenges include our response to climate change — the major criterion by which our generation will surely be judged; respect for the human dignity of marginalised groups like Indigenous Australians and asylum seekers; and how we use the prosperity created by our mineral resources to enhance our human resources.

It is clear that it is self-indulgent to decry the lack of political leadership in the hope that it will be found in another election. Unless there is concerted demand for hard thinking and appropriate action on the issues that will shape Australia's future, the next election will be fought on the same narrowly focused and negative terms as was this election.

If anything is to change, it must begin with Australian public opinion. That can change only if those who care for Australia's future keep an active interest in public life and participate in it in modest ways. We should ask to be offered leadership from the top only after we have committed ourselves to provide it within the small groups that form the basis of our public life.

To involve ourselves in public life is less about acting and speaking visibly in public forums than about acting and speaking more deeply. If our response to climate change, for example, is the single criterion by which future generations will judge our moral seriousness, the effectiveness of our public activity will depend on our personal integrity. That means not



being intimidated by people who try to persuade us that nothing needs to be done or that nothing can be done.

We need then to name to ourselves what needs to be done at universal, local and personal levels, and then to attend to the ways in which we contribute to the problem and its alleviation through the ways in which we heat, cool and light our space, and choose to travel.

When we take seriously the need to make climate change salient in our lives, and so to change our own patterns of living, we inevitably become involved in honest conversation, and so able to influence others. Inevitably we find ourselves representing our views in more public circles, connecting with others who share our convictions, and becoming involved in more public ways.

As more people become similarly involved and connected, public opinion will be affected. Eventually it will be reflected in policies that politicians will ignore at their peril. Leadership will then naturally develop.

The other large challenges that face Australia require the same continued involvement by ordinary Australians in public life. They require the same integrity in naming what respect for the human dignity of less privileged Australians entails, in becoming familiars of those different from ourselves, and being linked with like minded people by conversation and action that will eventually change public opinion.

If the experience of a fetid election campaign, of leadership abdicated and of a hung parliament leads many Australians to offer these modest local forms of participation and leadership, all Australians will gain.

## Don't wimp out at the ballot box

POLITICS

*Edwina Byrne*

At local markets, shopping centres and polling places we stand shivering in the cold. All is quiet until a stranger approaches with a grim, resigned expression, looking at their watch or cursing the weather. They avoid our gaze until the last moment, looking up briefly and maybe acknowledging our smiles and 'Good morning!'s, then slowing as we descend upon them, three or four of us reaching out to stuff papers into their retreating hands.



Most take how-to-vote cards from each of us, then lower their gaze and hurry into the polling place. Others will look at one of us knowingly, winking or giving a pat on the back before leaving. For that one moment, we feel part of something bigger. That moment differentiates us from the telemarketer or street-corner spruiker, and it is enough to warm our hearts and convince us to stick around for another hour making awkward conversation with the volunteers of other parties.

It may surprise 'normal' people to learn that many campaign volunteers have no political ambitions of our own, and stand to gain nothing from the time and labour we donate. Nor are we all starry-eyed university students who have yet to reach an inevitable disillusionment. We're just ordinary folk who believe wholeheartedly in the value of our democracy and the virtue of our party.

Admittedly, this is an election in which it is hard to mount a high horse brandishing party colours. But to us the party is more than a collection of election promises and slogans. It is this that compels us to brave the cold (and occasionally abuse from strangers) in its support.

Even in the safest seats you'll find volunteers at train stations from 5am, declaring the virtues of a candidate they may never have met, all to lose by a lesser margin than last time. Are we mad? Probably. So why do we so covet a vote that you may have little interest in? Especially when it may result in no tangible benefit to our party?

The answer is simple. Party members, like zombies, only want you for your brains.

Let's not kid ourselves. Sometimes, in a safe seat like the one I grew up in, your vote serves absolutely no purpose. The other guy is getting in. You can claim that you're 'sending a message', but the MP doesn't care about your message, as long as he's got the votes of 50 per cent of your neighbours.

But behind the MP there's a party made up of ubiquitous, unelected 'shadowy-figures' — party members, community members. We care because you are one of us, and we want you to see the world the way we do. Not because it'll allow us to implement policy; just because our

way of thinking is the right way of thinking.

The motivation is different in marginal seats — your vote decides who governs — but the philosophy is still the same. It's a battle of ideas, and a major statement about the beliefs and vision of an entire nation. It is a chance to align yourself with like minds in a nation-wide show of hands.

In an election of miniscule policy differentiation and very little talk of vision, sometimes this battle for hearts and minds can be forgotten. Such recognisable figures as Mark Latham and the boys on *The Chaser* are even advising voters to cast informal votes.

In a representative democracy, this smacks of neglected responsibility.

It is typical of the individualism of our age that so many people are now talking of 'making their voice heard' by voting for a minor party representing sectional interests. Presumably this conclusion is reached through a belief that having one's exact policy concerns voiced in Parliament is more important than the chance to build broad consensus and momentum for nationwide action.

Presumably, those voting for minor parties are unfazed by the thought that the 'populism' of major parties actually appeals to a popular majority.

This election is boring because we allow it to be so. If you want to hear more visionary ideas, then speak up. If the policies sound dumb, then say so. There is an old feminist saying: 'don't get mad, get elected'. In a representative democracy, a vacuous election represents a lazy polity.

It would be easy to cast a donkey vote or a vote for a minor party and thus wash your hands of the responsibility for our governance for the next three years. As the economy falters, as civil liberties are denied or as the Earth warms, you can shrug smugly and say 'I didn't vote for this government'.

The more difficult course of action is to take responsibility for the society in which you live, not just on election day but as part of your permanent civic duty. To attend council gatherings, party branch meetings, the AGM of a local not-for-profit or community group, or to write conscientiously to local papers or MPs.

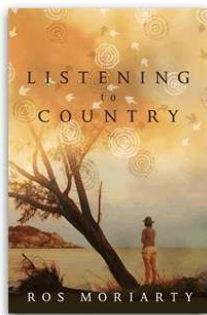
These are hard, time-consuming tasks. You'll not be thanked. But one day, as you shiver in the cold, someone might give you a wink and call you comrade. And that just might take the sting out of another electoral defeat.

## A journey with Indigenous 'in-laws'

### BOOKS

*Myrna Tonkinson*

***Ros Moriarty: Listening to Country.* Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010. ISBN 9781741753806**



The author offers her readers a window into the lives of some women of Borroloola in the Northern Territory as they travel to a desert location to conduct a women's ceremony.

Ros Moriarty gained access to these experiences through her husband, John, who was born at Borroloola, but was removed from his mother when he was four years old. Like many of the Stolen Generations, John had a white father and an Aboriginal mother; in the eyes of the authorities, this was enough to justify his removal from his young mother. John's story is very much at the core of his wife's account.

Nine of the book's ten chapters begin with a diary entry from Ros' journey with John's classificatory mother and other Yanyuwa women from Borroloola to a ceremonial ground in the Tanami Desert. These entries convey a sense of the excitement and the logistical and other practical aspects as the women travel from their remote community to an equally remote place to gather with others from several other far-flung communities.

The women assemble to sing, dance, tell stories; thus the elders induct younger women, including the author, into some of the religious knowledge and rituals that are shared across a wide area.

However, the bulk of the book is about the author's life and that of her husband, her love and admiration for whom comes through in every chapter. She writes about his Irish father as well as his mother and the Borroloola family. She devotes attention to their children, and to her own background. She provides detail about the vicissitudes of setting up a business, Balarinji design company, and its success in Australia and abroad.

The diary entries, written in the present tense and chronologically, tell the women's bush story, while there is a more wide-ranging account, in past tense, of the Moriartys' lives, including Ros' introduction to John's family and many subsequent trips to Borroloola. These parts of the book seem like random musings, switching back and forth over her life and more than 20 years' connection to Borroloola; there is a fair amount of repetition.

For readers unfamiliar with Aboriginal people and with outback communities, the book provides a gentle introduction. Moriarty paints vivid word pictures of the landscape, the people and their situation. In economical language and with a personal touch, she conveys

information about living conditions, poverty, health and other problems that are often the subject of detached statistical accounts.

She offers insights into the stoicism, patience, affection and humour of this extended family. The contrast between their lives and the life she and her own nuclear family have attained, despite her husband's scars from his early removal from family and unstable institutional existence, is stark.

The Moriartys' success is countered by the many tribulations of their Aboriginal relatives; the author makes the contrast plain and conveys her frustration and anger about this from time to time, but in muted tones, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions.

The trajectory of John's life shows the value of education, the importance of serendipity, the power of kindness, the human capacity for change and resilience.

There is much to applaud also in the lives of the Borroloola family who have endured much hardship and yet come across as positive, forgiving and generous. The voices of the Aboriginal women appear in several chapters in transcriptions of their accounts of history, beliefs, family relationships and so on.

One of these accounts is Yuwani Annie's origin story, which blends a Yanyuwa version with the biblical Adam and Eve story. There are also poignant accounts of separation and loss – of country and family – and of fears for the future in conditions of rapid change, so much of which is imposed rather than chosen.

Readers with experience of unstructured time among Aboriginal people on their own lands in remote settings, and who are familiar with the history and anthropology on which the book touches, may be less satisfied than less-informed readers. The author invokes clichés and tends to romanticise the past.

Phrases like 'the last of their line' have been used by observers for many decades now; 'songs handed down for thousands of generations' and 'the world's oldest culture' invoke a changeless culture from before colonisation. And some accounts of mystical experiences are presented in a just-so fashion that begs for analysis.

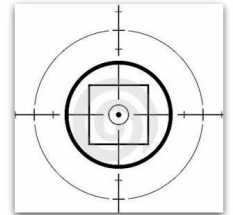
These quibbles aside, this book is well-written and offers a personal and family journey that is predominantly positive. It will be appreciated by many as an example of Australian small business success, as well as for the story that is given more prominence in the book's title and blurb.

## Cheap targets this election hunting season

### POLITICS

*Andrew Hamilton*

As the election campaign draws towards its end, and those of us who live in Victoria brace ourselves for a state election, I am reminded of the Italian hunting season. There it becomes dangerous to go out of doors when so many guns are pointed into the air. Anything that flies is at risk. Sparrows and dragonflies head for the Alps.



Elections are like the shooting season except that high fliers are safe. Wingless birds are picked off.

In the Federal election asylum seekers and wives or children of refugees have been made fair game. So have the young unemployed. And although Indigenous Australians have not been directly targeted, they have seen guns occasionally turned in their direction.

In State elections it is usually open season on prisoners and marginalised young people. Election policies, like Christmas stockings, are stuffed with more jails, longer sentences, more deprivation of rights, and greater police powers. These things don't make Australia a better or safer society, but they are held to win elections.

The targeting of the deprived is not new in Australian politics. Unpopular minority groups like communists and foreigners have often been the focus of political campaigns. So it would be simplistic to blame this phenomenon on changing media patterns or on preoccupation with the polls.

Nevertheless, this election campaign does seem to have had some distinctive features that encourage brutality. They have been widely recognised and do not need dwelling on.

The first is the lack of almost any kind of moral content. Neither party has offered any vision or story of where they will lead Australia and of what would constitute a healthy or happy society in the face of the challenges we face as a nation. As a result they have also been silent about the strategies by which they will reach these wider goals. Their silence is dispiriting in itself. It also means that they have no coherent framework from which to respond to the demands of special interest groups.

Offering neither national goals nor strategies by which to meet them, the parties appeal only to conventional economic wisdom that is divorced from the social and national goals that economic prosperity should serve. Given the discredit which conventional economic wisdom brought on itself during the financial crisis, this appeal lacks any authority. It has been further undermined by the promises made to voters in strategic electorates during the campaign.

It has been suggested that in this election campaign neither party is interested in the future of Australia because their single minded focus is on winning the election. That judgment however seems too generous. Their actions suggest that they are dominated by the desire not to lose.

Sporting teams that want to win are willing to take risks, trust one another and believe in what they are doing. They believe the game is worth playing well. Those who try to avoid losing are purely reactive, are focused on nullifying the strengths of their opponents and have no grand strategy.

In this election, both parties have refused to bowl their spinners, to play any ball they don't have to, and have appealed against the light on every possible occasion.

When cricket becomes boring, you pick on the groundsman, the umpires and yobbos in the crowd. Mercifully, people usually leave the seagulls alone. In elections timidity and negativity encourage the scapegoating of groups like asylum seekers, people perceived as foreign, and the young unemployed. This enables parties to deal with resentment felt by people who do not enjoy the economic and social benefits to which they believe themselves entitled.

In the absence of any larger view of the national interest, such feelings cannot be discussed reasonably. There are no criteria for judging them. They fester. So, to avoid losing the voters, resentment must be accepted and deflected. The best way to deflect them is to work on the prejudices of the people who hold them. That is why in this election campaign both parties have declared open season on asylum seekers and the young unemployed.

Cricket improves when teams realise that there are worse things than losing. We might hope that this will happen in Australian political life. In the meantime, if you do not fly high and fast, watch out.



## The morality of violent films

### FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Killer Inside Me* (R). Director: Michael Winterbottom. Starring: Casey Affleck, Jessica Alba, Kate Hudson, Ned Beatty. 98 minutes**



'I wanted to show that if you choose to kill someone by punching them, it's a long, slow, difficult process,' UK filmmaker Michael Winterbottom [told](#) *The Guardian's* Rachel Cooke. 'Also, I want you to have the space to think about what's going on. Why is he doing this when he loves her?'

The controversial and prolific Winterbottom is referring to a gruelling scene from his latest film *The Killer Inside Me*, in which one of the female characters, Joyce (Alba), is pummelled nearly to death by the gloved hands of her lover, charming sociopath Deputy Sheriff Lou Ford (Affleck). It is a scene of shocking, visceral violence, which has produced anguished, even angry, audience reactions during festival screenings around the world.

Was it necessary? When it comes to gratuitous content, 'necessary' is always a debatable term. But certainly, as evidenced by the above quote, the scene is not thoughtless.

In his previous films such as Guantanamo torture film *Road to Guantanamo* and the pornographic relationship drama *9 Songs* Winterbottom has shown himself to be a filmmaker who does not exploit disturbing content thoughtlessly. Such content is at least bolstered by a well thought-through premise, although it is not to Winterbottom's credit that his intelligent intent can be overshadowed by the gratuitousness. *The Killer Inside Me* falls into this category.

The film is a portrait of Lou and his psychopathy. His violence against Joyce is one aspect of an elaborate scheme designed to mete revenge upon an unknowing nemesis (Beatty). The remainder of the film details further acts of violence (none quite as shocking as the first) and manipulation as Lou attempts to elude suspicion, and as his mental state deteriorates. Flashbacks to an abusive relationship with his mother, and to an act of childhood abuse against a young girl, hint at an origin to his illness.

The film is commended by a classy noir sensibility and intense performances. But it is also cold and, in parts, patchy and confusing, which is one reason why the scenes of extreme violence don't quite stand up to scrutiny.

Lou's perennially calm voiceover indicates a first-person perspective that reflects Jim Thompson's 1952 novel on which the film is based, and which hints at subjectivity. The unlikely extent to which Joyce, and Lou's girlfriend, Amy (Hudson), are shown to enjoy their sado-masochistic sexual encounters with Lou suggest we are being offered a skewed version

of events, tainted by Lou's conflation of sex with violence. This is a clever trick, although hard to pull off on film, a medium where audiences tend to accept what they see as the 'truth'.

But the violence still says more about the character than it does about the filmmaker. Lou shoots or hangs his male victims, but prefers the more personal medium of his fists when assaulting Joyce. This lends a deranged intimacy to this protracted act of violence. Sickeningly, he apologises and expresses love to Joyce even as he destroys her. He *does* love her, so the intimacy of this violence reveals it to also be an act of self-destruction.

'Lou is a very weak person who has been messed up by his childhood, and he has all sorts of insecurities,' Winterbottom [told](#) *The Hollywood Reporter* of the character, who at one point in the film describes himself as someone with a foot 'on each side of the fence', waiting to 'split down the middle'. 'I think anyone watching this film saying this in some way supports or encourages violence is watching the film in a very perverse way.'

That may be so, but one does have to wonder what scenes of brutal violence against women contribute to the betterment of the public imagination. Still, Winterbottom is right to point out that this is no less (or, surely, more) moral than popular action films that use violence for the purpose of titillation. Violence *is* shocking, and so it is both human and right to be appalled by the violence contained in *The Killer Inside Me*.

## Teaching children to read the Aboriginal world

EUREKA STREET/ READER'S FEAST AWARD

*Nigel Pearn*

### Dog school

*Wanja* is a riot of a story — ten pages, 114 words — about a blue heeler who lives on The Block in Sydney's Redfern. The book was written by Aboriginal elder Aunty Barb Stacey and illustrated by Adam Hill. Their *Wanja* is a streak of movement against horizontal surrounds: part flying kangaroo, part street mutt. The palette is tightly controlled: red, yellow and black. The bubble lettering evokes the tradition of the 1970s political poster.



Aunty Barb also lives on The Block and the real *Wanja* came to live with her when still a puppy. I don't know Aunty Barb, but I do know *Wanja* — the dog — quite well because *Wanja* — the book — was the subject of a parental complaint and much school discussion in my first year of teaching.

*Wanja* is a Guided Reader, a book designed to assist reading development in the early years of schooling. In simple language it describes how *Wanja* was a normal dog, how she enjoyed visiting friends, sleeping, playing ball, chasing sticks and footy. It also tells us of *Wanja*'s talent, the special skill that garnered the book's subtitle: *One Smart Dog*. *Wanja*, you learn, could smell a cop at 20 paces. *Wanja*, you'd hear, would defend her turf. *Wanja*, you see, couldn't help but get her paddy up when she saw that paddy wagon coming down the street.

A set of parents, who were not Indigenous, voiced a concern about the positive representation of *Wanja*'s anti-authoritarian attitude: 'Then *Wanja* would see a police van. *Wanja* loved to chase the van. *Wanja* loved to bark at the van. *Wanja* loved to bite at the wheel. The police van would drive away.'

With sincere conviction the parents argued that *Wanja* presented a confusing message for young children. Part of the child protection program at kindergarten age is that the police are people you can trust. Police are your friends. They are there to help you. *Wanja* was removed from the school's Guided Reading program.

Is Australia a racist country? Ask any Aboriginal person and you'll get an unequivocal answer. The statistics of systematic disadvantage are at once well-known and shocking.

Nowhere is the disparity between black and other Australians starker than in the area I work in, education. This year's National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) figures reveal that four out of every ten Aboriginal students sitting literacy and numeracy tests fail them. Education is key not only to employment and economic success, but to health, social wellbeing, and ultimately life expectancy. No pressure teachers, but to fail our

students in the classroom is a predictor, perhaps a determinant, of a life-time of further failure.

We sing the national anthem each week at school. I was cynical about this at first, or maybe embarrassed, but over time certain sections of the song have come to mean a great deal. There's that part in the second chorus: 'For those who've come across the seas / We've boundless plains to share / With courage let us all combine / To Advance Australia Fair.' I really like it when the children sing that.

In reality, however, White Australia has a long and shameful history of racism towards other migrant groups. Andrew Jakubowicz, Professor of Sociology at Sydney's University of Technology, points out that the focus of this prejudice and hostility has changed over the decades. Indian students, African refugees, and Muslims of all ethnicities find themselves the current targets, but in the 1970s and '80s it was Vietnamese and Cambodians; in the '50s and '60s, Italians and Greeks; before them, the Jews and Japanese; before them, the Chinese.

As opposed to shifts in immigrant discrimination, Indigenous Australians have been a constant target of racial abuse and disadvantage. Indeed, Jakubowicz argues that hostility towards Aboriginal people is probably now stronger than against any other race.

One of the cruellest ironies of racism in this country is that the very fact of Indigenous disadvantage is used to perpetuate prejudice. As Noel Pearson writes, 'The irrational nature of anti-Aboriginal thinking through history is obvious. No matter how decimated, powerless, removed to the fringe or distant reserves Aboriginal Australians have been, anti-Aboriginal thinking has been virulent ... the idea of special treatment for Aborigines in relation to land and resources, and the politics of downward envy, have been a real force in recent history, not least among people who almost never see an Aborigine.'

Significantly, it is education, the place where indigenous Australians are being left behind, that has enabled the children of overseas immigrants to climb the social ladder. Successive waves of migrant children have succeeded academically despite the fact that our schoolyards all too often mirror the prejudices of the wider society. A 2009 survey conducted by The Foundation for Young Australians found that 80 per cent of students from non-Anglo backgrounds have experienced racism, ranging from verbal abuse to discrimination and violence.

The Foundation's lead researcher, Dr Lucas Walsh, concluded that schools can and must do more to directly build diversity and tolerance: 'What the research overwhelmingly shows is that schools that have some sort of compulsory in-classroom program about racism or cultural stereotyping were less likely to have young people who displayed ignorance about cultural issues or racist attitudes.'

Such programs do exist, such as NSW's recent Aboriginal Education and Training Policy (2008), which applies to all NSW educational settings, not just schools. The document is better designed and more ambitious in scope than previous policies, and is explicit about the

pathways for improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and building increased knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Australia for teaching staff and students.

Even so, the complexities of Aboriginal experience are all too often lost in translation to the classroom, particularly the primary one. Here the focus tends to be on one of two categories: the Dreaming, safely mythic and uncomplicated by the presence of whitefellas; or individual stories from the Stolen Generations. The tragedy of the Stolen Generations is central to our nation's history, but to use it as the single symbol and summation for the whole history of black experience since colonisation undermines the breadth and complexity necessary to true understanding of white-black relations.

Indij Readers, the publishers of *Wanja*, have developed stories which aim to counter the simplification so many non-Indigenous teachers fall prey to when discussing Aboriginal perspectives. These books are intended to take Aboriginal people out of over-and-done history, out of static symbol, and into the contemporary every day.

For young Aboriginal students, stories like *Wanja* are about equitable self-representation. For non-Indigenous students, these books offer invaluable exposure. This is particularly important in schools like mine, representative of many city schools in Australia, which have high ethnic diversity, but low overall Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments. For both groups of students these stories provide a shared experience: another pathway towards Reconciliation.

Indij Readers state that their 'stories deal in a relaxed and often amusing way with issues that affect the lives of all children: culture, family, self esteem, pride, setting goals and working toward them, good health, humour, tolerance and school attendance'. But when the everyday realities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children are often so markedly inequitable, then perhaps it is not surprising that the content of these stories can offend white sensibilities.

Why *Wanja* might bark at and bite a police van is not an easy subject for a teacher to discuss with young students. The history and present state of black and white relations is indeed a difficult topic, but that does not mean it should be out of bounds. On the contrary. At primary schools today we talk, in age appropriate ways, about difficult things as a matter of course: sex, death, God, gods, and no God. Educators are, after all, engaged in two processes: teaching children how to read and teaching them how to read the world.

*Wanja* gives us a generous hand here. It is not an angry story, nor a tragic one. The weapon Auntie Barb Stacey uses is humour. Australians like to pride ourselves on our larrikin humour, our good-natured disrespect for wrong-headed authority. And while the origins of that independence of spirit are commonly traced to a deep-seated convict irreverence, to Irish immigrants, or to the Gallipoli legend, its parallels with Aboriginal humour are often

overlooked.

In a 1956 essay the pioneering anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner identified the importance of understanding the cultural significance of humour in gaining a sense of the Aboriginal 'personality', referring in his discussion to Aristotle's definition of wit as 'cultured insolence'. More than five decades later, the Indigenous scholar Lillian Holt reflected on ABC Radio National about the all-pervasive current of humour in Aboriginal culture. She identified Aboriginal humour as communal rather than individual, and as more of a philosophical disposition than a genius for joke-telling.

Like Jewish humour, Aboriginal humour can be seen as a response to a history of oppression. The ability to laugh becomes a precious gift when everything could easily make you cry or scream. To laugh is to survive. But no surprise, given the history, that black humour is often, well, black. Dispossession and disadvantage are recurring subjects. Holt describes standing with an old Aboriginal man and looking at a beat-up bomb of a community bus. 'You think those whitefellas would at least have given us a new bus to wreck,' he remarks.

She laughs remembering the scene from the 1977 film *Backroads* when the Bill Hunter character asks a group of Aborigines, 'Hey Jackie, can I take this road to the pub?' and is answered: 'Well you might as well, you white bastard, you've taken everything else.'

For Holt there are 'five H's' necessary for Reconciliation — history, honesty, humanity, hope and humour. Humour lightens the load, allowing the unbearable to be borne, and makes possible a new kind of conversation, one beyond the heavy restrictions of both resentment and shame. Because, of course, the history of black marginalisation in Australia is at the same time the history of white impoverishment. As she tells her interviewer: 'What has diminished me as an Aboriginal person, has also diminished you as a non-Aboriginal person.'

To laugh is to no longer be a victim. The story of *Wanja, One Smart Dog* is so much more liberating and empowering than many of the stories that could be told about Aboriginal people and white power. Instead of Cameron Doomadgee lying dead in a Palm Island police cell, there is Wanja, triumphant and unbowed. A warrior, happily asleep in the sun, waiting for the kids to come home from school and play.

Australia is a country blighted by racism, yes, but one also ennobled by Wanja's brand of fighting spirit and invigorating humour. This is the real knowledge of this book, the difficulty of contradictory world views, hard fought for, continually re-adjusting. She is our education.



## Inside Canberra's Catholic lobby

### POLITICS

*Frank Quinlan*



I have been asked frequently in recent weeks who Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) would like to see win the Federal Election. The truth is that we do not endorse one party over another.

CSSA seeks to bring the message of the Gospel, as interpreted in Catholic Social Teaching and as lived in the experience of Catholic social services and the people they serve, to all members of parliament, and each of the parties to which they subscribe.

Frankly, the task is often very difficult to define clearly in practice. The recent robust discussion about the merits and limitations of various parties in the current election campaign highlights the difficulty that the Church can sometimes have in being clear about its role in influencing politics.

Perhaps this is because the task of political influence seldom involves the linear path from Gospel values, to a careful understanding of the needs and aspirations of vulnerable people, to well conducted research, to sound and effective public policy expressed in effective and just social programs and better legislation.

The real task of political influence is frequently undertaken late in the evening, when the House of Representatives or the Senate is sitting but the public galleries are empty.

For those of us 'outsiders' seeking to influence the political agenda it is always an 'away game'. As visitors we are welcome enough, but we have no office, nowhere to gather thoughts privately, and frequently no colleagues with whom to discuss options and ideas. The opportunity to influence a new public policy can be fleeting. It can appear by chance, or follow an arduous and strategic build-up over months or years.

The task always requires allies amongst sitting members, because it is our elected representatives and no-one else who can pass legislation.

CSSA seeks to build such alliances across the whole of the Parliament. It is ironic that as we face this election we seek to build alliances with a Prime Minister who is doubted by some because of her self-confessed atheism, a Leader of the Opposition who is doubted by some for being too close to God and the Church, and the Greens who are doubted by some as being anti-Christian.

In recent years, CSSA has been involved in important issues with each of these groups.

Under the Howard Government, we supported the development of a national network of



Family Relationship Centres, established in the community to provide counselling and support to families experiencing difficulties. Interestingly, it was not Tony Abbott who led this charge, but the then Attorney-General Philip Ruddock.

While Abbott's detractors might have suspected him of seeding such 'family focused' initiatives as part of his Catholic pro-family agenda this was not the case. Our links to the Coalition were far broader, and their policy development process was supported far more deeply than through a single Catholic representative.

More recently, the early response of the Labor Government to the Global Financial Crisis provided a different model of engagement. In this case, CSSA and other church based service providers prepared a report on the likely impact of the crisis. Julia Gillard responded personally by gathering the church groups together to discuss concerns and then establishing a Community Response Taskforce to respond to the crisis.

She continued to meet with church representatives and other leaders to monitor progress and listen to concerns.

The Australian Greens have supported many of the causes CSSA has prosecuted.

The Greens are a party of review in the current parliament. That means they can explore issues, ask questions, and steer legislation towards compromise outcomes. Their work in steering the Government's stimulus measures toward jobs packages is a case in point. On issues such as the Northern Territory Intervention, asylum seekers, mutual obligation and rights of the unemployed, the Greens, mainly through Senator Rachel Siewert, who has responsibility in these areas, have advocated policy positions very close to those of the Catholic Church.

In a letter entitled 'Catholic culture for true humanism', Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, Archbishop of Bologna, [points to](#) some of the challenges that those seeking to bring a Catholic voice to the political process encounter:

'In this field the disciple of Jesus will be able to rejoice at times over unsuspected agreements with unbelievers, in the defence of an ethical principle or in a practical choice. Further, he will listen with respect and with sincere interest to the opinions of all because he does not forget that, as St Thomas repeated often, "Every truth by whomever it is said is from the Holy Spirit".'

Cardinal Biffi goes on to say 'Politics, we are used to saying, is the art of the compromise.'

Whoever is elected to government on 21 August, and wherever power rests between the major and minor parties in the House of Representatives and the Senate, it will be a compromise. No party has on offer the full suite of policies, programs and legislation that we would consider ideal.

Nonetheless, we can rejoice that Australian voters, free to vote for whomever they choose without fear, will have distributed that power by selecting their representatives. We can rejoice that citizens will be supported in that task by independent and trustworthy institutions commissioned to faithfully return the election results.

CSSA and other agencies and advocates will then recommence our task of diligently working with elected representatives to promote a fairer, more inclusive society that reflects and supports the dignity, equality and participation of all people, knowing that ultimately we will have to settle for less than we would hope.

**UPDATE MONDAY 23 AUGUST 2010:**

Julia Gillard was right at the weekend when, quoting Bill Clinton, she said 'The people have spoken but it is going to take a little while to determine exactly what they have said.'

Regardless of the efforts of both the major parties in coming days to explain how their minority vote might be translated into a mandate to govern, the reality is that neither major party commanded the support of the majority of the voters.

There will be much analysis in the weeks and months ahead as to why this might have been the case, but it is impossible to ignore the conclusion that a large number of 'the people' rejected the ideology, lack of vision and lack of differentiation between two major parties who have engaged in something of a political duopoly over recent years.

Policy determined in focus groups convened by political parties, as distinct from political representatives, must inevitably see parties fighting for the diminishing space at the centre of the spectrum of public opinion. That is no basis for leadership.

A minority government, led by either major party, will be required to take a different approach if it is to provide stable government for any length of time.

As Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott begin the process of courting the independents and minor parties we are already hearing words like 'consensus' and 'power sharing'.

Without a majority of seats once the votes are counted, the successful prime minister will be the one who has successfully negotiated stable government with the independents and minor parties. It seems likely that this will have required the all too familiar excesses of party politics to have been suspended.

When I quoted Cardinal Biffi last week saying 'Politics, we are used to saying, is the art of compromise', I really had little idea what would unfold over the election weekend!

While unfamiliar to federal politics in Australia, minority government is familiar and successful in other countries around the world and may yet yield some welcome results for Australian voters seeking leadership towards the common good.

## Tony's boat-phone

CARTOON



*Fiona Katauskas*

## **Election week poems**

POETRY

*Various*

### **Two triangles**

We were just leaving Singapore for good  
when the Tiananmen Square thing happened.  
The Singaporean Chinese know what oppression is  
and what to do about it  
and for days they lined up for miles outside the Bank of China  
which was next to our office  
to take out their life savings (and maybe get a better interest rate somewhere else).  
We were busy finishing things up and  
I looked down from my office window and  
I saw four Chinese Singaporean bank guys  
on the roof of their building doing Tai chi  
out of sight of the queue on the street.  
Now whenever I see that Tiananmen square guy on the TV  
in front of the tank with his shopping bag or whatever  
I can't remember what happened to the three of them  
the tank the guy or the camera man or  
who backed away first.  
All I can see is the silent line  
and these guys doing Tai Chi.

—*Mark Carkeet*

### **Election time in Derbyshire**

The surprise of big blue skies hung out  
to dry, the old spa town of Buxton

just a sunlit slab of limestone,  
laid out cold in the moors' deep ditch,  
inscribed with windy streets, three stories deep.  
The slopes are steeped in springwater,  
chilling the air where the Duke of Devonshire  
once declared there had to be an opera house,  
pleasure gardens, and the world's biggest dome  
over his stables, like some provincial Kubla Khan  
in tweed and jodhpurs.

The dome's still there — a big white wonder  
of glass and steel, but if you try to take a picture,  
guards in fluoro jackets will 'ask' you  
to delete them, calling you 'sir',  
like some fallen superior on remand,  
as if the Duke still ruled the roost;  
which he does, in a way.

It's election time, after all, and the town's awash  
with posters of the local member, the new Chancellor  
of the Exchequer, come three weeks time.

He went to Eton, did our George,  
like three-quarters of the future bench.

Down here, that doesn't even seem unnatural.  
Up on the hill, outside the blackened town hall,  
the markets are out, and between  
the cut-price toilet rolls, the cheap wet wipes  
and the stovepipe polyester florals,  
two actual human beings are standing firm

against a cruel wind, clutching  
a cardboard 'Labour' stand, handing out papers  
which look quite blank in this washed-out,  
colourless Derbyshire sun.  
They're elderly, unstable, probably a couple,  
their cheerful eyes sprung like steel  
against the cold, their hands arthritic, resigned;  
their grip carrying no conviction.  
Concentration lapses. People fail to see.  
This has never been a Labour town.  
Eyes water. Wind leaps. One leaflet escapes,  
cartwheeling down past the Town Hall  
and on past the Public Art Gallery,  
all the way down to the old spa font,  
a freefalling message from on high,  
looking for wet stone  
to slap its face against  
one more time.  
—*Graham Kershaw*

## Abbott and Santamaria's undemocratic Catholicism

### POLITICS

Paul Collins



I grew up surrounded by the Democratic Labor Party, the 'Movement', Jesuit Father Harold Lalor and the Labor split. My parents distributed how-to-vote cards for the DLP. My uncle edited the *Richmond News* for the federal member for Yarra, Stan Keon, one of the Labor MPs who defected to the Anti-Communist Labor Party. That same uncle worked full-time for the Movement and was later Victorian country organiser for the right wing Clerks Union.

My parents eventually abandoned the DLP because of its extremism, and when Bob Santamaria attacked me in 1986 over my book *Mixed Blessings* my uncle severed all contact with him. So I don't look back with nostalgia to either Santamaria or the Movement. I experienced the toxic divisiveness.

Apparently unlike Tony Abbott who, at the January 2007 launch of Santamaria's *Selected Letters* said, 'I was lucky to know B. A. Santamaria for the last 22 years of his life, to have attended diligently to his writing and speaking.' Santamaria, he says 'left Australian Catholicism more intellectual and less politically tribal', by which he presumably means there are now Catholics in Coalition as well as Labor ranks.

Santamaria's influence on Abbott's policies has been much discussed lately by *The Australian's* Paul Kelly, Labor's Maxine McKew, John Warhurst in *Eureka Street*, Gerard Henderson in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and Robert Manne in *The Monthly*. Reference has been made to Abbott's close relationship to Cardinal George Pell, another self-proclaimed disciple of Santamaria.

But more important than the influence of particular policies is the 'type' of Catholicism Santamaria represented and the subtle, even unconscious influence this might have on Abbott.

Essentially Santamaria embraced a form of theological integralism which sees everything in the world as tainted unless it is 'integrated' or brought into the orbit of Catholicism. Integralism assumes that the Church has an unchallengeable, complete and accessible body of doctrine that gives guidance in every possible eventuality — social, political, strategic, economic, familial and personal.

Integralism defines Catholicism in a particularly narrow, aggressive, 'boots and all' way, and argues that Catholic action involves influencing and if possible controlling state policy. Thus Catholics are obliged to do all in their power to ensure that all legislation is in keeping with church doctrine.



As Santamaria said in 1948: 'the most important objective of Christians ... [is that they] should be capable of formulating or willing to follow a distinctively Christian policy on every social and public issue.'

But what is a 'distinctively Christian' (for 'Christian' read 'Catholic') policy? For Santamaria this was not a problem. He identified Catholicism with his own vision of faith. He refused to recognise that there were other equally sincere Catholics who had other theological ideas about the relationship of the church to the world and the state, people like Archbishop Justin Simonds, Dr Max Charlesworth, the YCW and the Catholic Worker group, who were influenced by the French philosopher Jacques Maritain and the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn.

Integralism has much in common with Italian Fascism, Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal. It is also at odds with the Vatican II *Declaration on Religious Freedom*: 'Freedom means that all are to be immune from coercion ... in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs.'

It is a real threat to democracy and to the freedom that Catholics have to make their own decisions on a whole range of issues, particularly political.

Nowadays Santamaria is praised for being an agrarian socialist and anti-capitalist. While this has made him popular with some aging secular leftists, they forget that these movements are romantic, backward-looking, authoritarian and linked with high immigration rates and the mantra 'populate or perish' with its racist overtones.

So what does this have to do with Abbott? I think it would be worrying if this kind of integralist Catholicism infected contemporary public life. It has no place in a pluralist, democratic state. It is also the manifestation of the kind of Catholicism that was abandoned by serious, mainstream Catholics five decades ago.

Abbott is wrong to suggest that it has made Australian Catholicism 'more intellectual'. It is, in fact, a form of doctrinaire conformism that is the death of thoughtful commitment and is the antithesis of a faith seeking to base itself in reason and understanding.

I am not claiming that Abbott consciously follows Santamaria's integralism. But there is always the danger of osmosis, of absorbing attitudes without realising it. If I were a politician — or an archbishop — I'd want to put considerable distance between myself and the most divisive man in the history of Australian Catholicism.

## Tales from the kingdom of force

### HUMAN RIGHTS

*Ben Coleridge*

*'As to men of the sea in their supplication the god sends  
a fair wind, when they are breaking their strength at the smoothed oar-sweeps,  
driving over the sea, and their arms are weak with weariness.'* —Homer, *The Iliad*

Mohan and Meena came to Australia over the sea from Sri Lanka, fleeing the force of violence. Tamil refugees and now graduates of Christmas Island, they live in Werribee with their two young children. It's a long way out of town, but Meena doesn't care; the bus comes every hour near their house, and she says that's a good thing.



A friend took me to visit them; we drove over the West Gate Bridge with the windows down and music playing, arriving on their doorstep in the late afternoon. Before going into their house, we stopped and took our shoes off; for Mohan and Meena the house, a small cream brick place, is sacred, a shrine, 'a temple', where the family lives and cares for each other. It is kept meticulously clean.

Ushered warmly in we sat down to tea and talked with Mohan about his profession as a goldsmith; after a while I left the conversation and walked out into the garden.

Out the back, Jimmy, also a Tamil and a friend of the family, was hanging out with some friends. I was introduced, and between bouts of throwing the frisbee Jimmy and I swapped stories. Flicking the frisbee my way with a well practised arm, Jimmy began to tell me about his life; he had worked on a container ship but, fearing violence in Sri Lanka, became a refugee in Australia: 'Bro, I jumped ship in Newcastle, me and my two friends, and then we headed to Sydney where people we knew helped us out.'

He spoke of a cold night, of making his way through Newcastle in the dark, the streets gloomy and strange. I asked Jimmy about his former home in Sri Lanka and he went on: 'Man, you realise people are actually dying back there!? People are suffering and dying. Last time I was there, I was carrying bodies to their graves in my arms, even the bodies of friends.'

At this moment his voice broke, and we could both, he more vividly than I, picture him carrying the dead. He could still feel the weight of the bodies in his hands and feel their wounds; they were so present that all he could do was, angry eyed, splutter small pieces of memory. But I had no recourse other than to imagination:

*'In both hands he caught up the grimy dust, and poured it*

*over his head and face, and fouled his handsome countenance,  
and the black ashes were scattered over his ... tunic.’ — The Iliad*

Homer’s *Iliad* is a poem of force, wrote Simone Weil, a poem in which, at all times, the human spirit is shown modified by its relations with force, swept away, ‘blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle’. A host of characters, some great and powerful, some small, are arrayed as the two battle hosts meet before Troy: Hector ‘of the brazen helmet’, Epeigeus ‘the brilliant’, Bathykles ‘the great hearted’ and ‘the godlike’ Sarpedon.

Homer weaves the stories of each in and out of his verses, but all these men are, in the end, consumed by the tides of force and sorrow. The battle passes over them as men fight for their cold bodies, even Sarpedon ‘the godlike’ falling in the dust. Trampled on and fought over, Epeigeus ‘the brilliant’, is brilliant no longer, but simply a body; force has reduced him to a ‘thing’. Each character, in their fear, their bravery and their fierceness, is lost to force and, as the struggle moves on, is forgotten.

Mohan ‘the goldsmith’ and Jimmy ‘who worked on ships’ were also banished by force, like the vivid characters of Homer, snatched and buffeted by violence and suffering. As refugees who somehow made the vast journey across the Indian Ocean, they were lost in what Simone Weil described as ‘force’s vast kingdom’, where all security, identity and everything known or understood about them was vanquished.

On Christmas Island and on the precarious journey, Mohan was no longer Mohan ‘the goldsmith’, but a ‘refugee’, something to be dealt with by people who still retained their identities:

*‘When Zeus bestows from the urn of sorrows, he makes a failure of man,  
and the evil hunger drives him over the shining earth,  
and he wanders respected neither of gods or mortals.’ — The Iliad*

My first thought in Werribee — in this flat landscape where the bus comes once an hour — was of their anonymity. But once ushered into the house-temple, I saw a place where people were beginning to recover what had been vanquished. Living in Werribee, it doesn’t matter that the bus comes once every hour, because, peaceful as it is, their house in a quiet street is a place where identity can be regained.

Here they can begin the long struggle back from force’s vast kingdom, to locate all those things they have lost; and they will do this in unfamiliar territory. They will have to negotiate their way back, to find again a sense of belonging and identity. I am struck by the sadness that I find here, the way hope is embedded in a dark sorrow. To get here has meant a dying to the world that gave them their names and identities:

*‘And you were footless ... staggering ... amazed Patroclus,*

*Between the clumps of dying, dying yourself,  
Dazed by the brilliance in your eyes,  
And the noise like weirs heard far away.’ — The Iliad*

Weeks later I was sitting in a community centre in Flemington with two Somali-Australian girls who had been given assignments at school — ‘Write a short piece about identity and belonging.’ One responded that although she was born in Australia, she isn’t Australian, she somehow doesn’t belong. The other, who was nine when she came to Australia, said she is Australian. But her words were uncertain, like a statement of hope rather than an affirmation of experience.

As she wrote her essay, she talked to me of her early years in Australia, of sitting in a raucous and bustling playground feeling alone, without language or friends; she told me of the blow of despair that feeling alone dealt her. So how to belong? School called her to be ‘hip’, ‘western’, or so it seemed to her. But at home, a different way, based on memory, prevailed. It was easy to feel buffeted between these colliding worlds, of neither one nor the other.

So in the *Iliad*, Andromache weeps not only over dead Hector, but mourns also the fate of her young child, a fate which she thinks is as terrible as death; when Troy falls he too is doomed to be buffeted, swept across the sea and stripped of his memory, his identity:

*‘And you, my child, will go with me,  
To a land where you will work at wretched tasks,  
Labouring for a pitiless master ...’ — The Iliad*

This is a fate from which Andromache can see no return for her son; all that was his will be lost. My friend’s essay and the *Iliad* speak of the same trial — the task of returning from the kingdom of force, of regaining what was yours, or finding something else instead.

Weil wrote that ‘the idea of a person’s being a thing is a logical contradiction’. Yet, as Weil knew, what is impossible in logic often becomes true in life: people, and especially refugees, become ‘things’ in the narrative of politics. And so the television footage of packed boats and eyes staring at cameras with looks that murmur, ‘here we are’:

*‘We to whom Zeus  
Has assigned suffering, from youth to old age,  
Suffering in grievous wars.’ — The Iliad*

The *Iliad* is a pure and lovely mirror, in which shadows and pictures of suffering flicker and come into focus. In its verses, the ebb and flow of battle and story does not obscure the human suffering at the poem’s heart. Herein lies its power, for, as Weil wrote, ‘the sense of human

misery is a precondition of justice and love’.

Neither can the ebb and flow of politics and of our daily lives obscure the human suffering at the heart of the asylum seeker debate. To turn away from this suffering is to participate in bolstering force’s vast kingdom, to become judges divorced from justice by indifference.

*Of both these sorts of men, who sit*

*Quietly on a fence in the storm’s eye,*

*The flood covers them equally. — The Iliad*

## Technophobe Tony's broadband back-step

EDITORIAL

*Michael Mullins*



When the benefits of the internet became apparent more than a decade ago, some conscientious consumers were reluctant to get connected. They feared it would divide the nation between those who could afford to own a computer and those who could not. Fortunately computer and internet connection prices tumbled and most Australians have some form of access.

Now the 'digital divide' is determined by speed of access. Any internet connection will allow us to send and receive email, browse the web, and do a certain amount of social networking. But a fast broadband connection allows us to do much more than simply browse the web at a fast pace, or watch high definition movies. It has health and education benefits that can save lives and give us access to world class education resources. It offers vast improvements in business productivity. In all, it adds up to a quantum leap in personal and economic wellbeing.

These days, references to the digital divide in Australia usually refer to geography. Those in rural locations are the ones who are disadvantaged, and they will remain so until there is large-scale investment in infrastructure such as Labor's National Broadband Network (NBN). A network such as the NBN depends upon public funding because it does not make sense for business, which needs to turn a profit. The geography of Australia is such that the building of roads or any communications infrastructure depends upon public expenditure that will never be recouped. It is about nation building, rather than profit and loss, and that is the task of governments.

Broadband policy is the only major point of difference between Labor and the Coalition in the lead up to this Saturday's federal election. Therefore it is natural that voters should think carefully about it before they head to the polling booth. Labor is proposing the NBN as a vital part of its vision to equip the nation for the future. The Coalition believes a minimalist approach will be enough to satisfy the majority of voters.

In an ideal world, an election campaign should prepare voters to cast their vote in accordance with their particular values. Regrettably this campaign has been notable for its negativity and distractions. The media usually determines the agenda of the campaign, and is therefore responsible for much of its negativity.

But individual journalists have nevertheless been successful in revealing some essential truths about the prospective leaders. Tony Abbott [told](#) Kerry O'Brien in a 'gotcha' moment on the 7:30 Report: 'I'm no Bill Gates here and I don't claim to be any kind of tech head in all of this.'

This was Abbott's fundamental declaration that he does not understand broadband, and does not care enough about it to get a thorough briefing. Instead he trivialised it on the *7:30 Report* and got his shadow spokesperson to announce the policy, as if it is a minor matter.

While it is likely to shape the country's economic future, and is of crucial importance to small business, Abbott appears to view the NBN as an expensive toy for tech heads. The election does not depend upon the tech head vote, and the Coalition's no-frills broadband alternative will be enough to satisfy city dwellers who believe that their current internet connections are fast enough for their purposes.

But it will ensure the nation remains divided between those with and without fast broadband access. It's enough to make you think that the NBN really *is* the answer, and there could be some substance to the loathed 'Moving Forward' slogan that wrong-footed Labor early in the campaign.