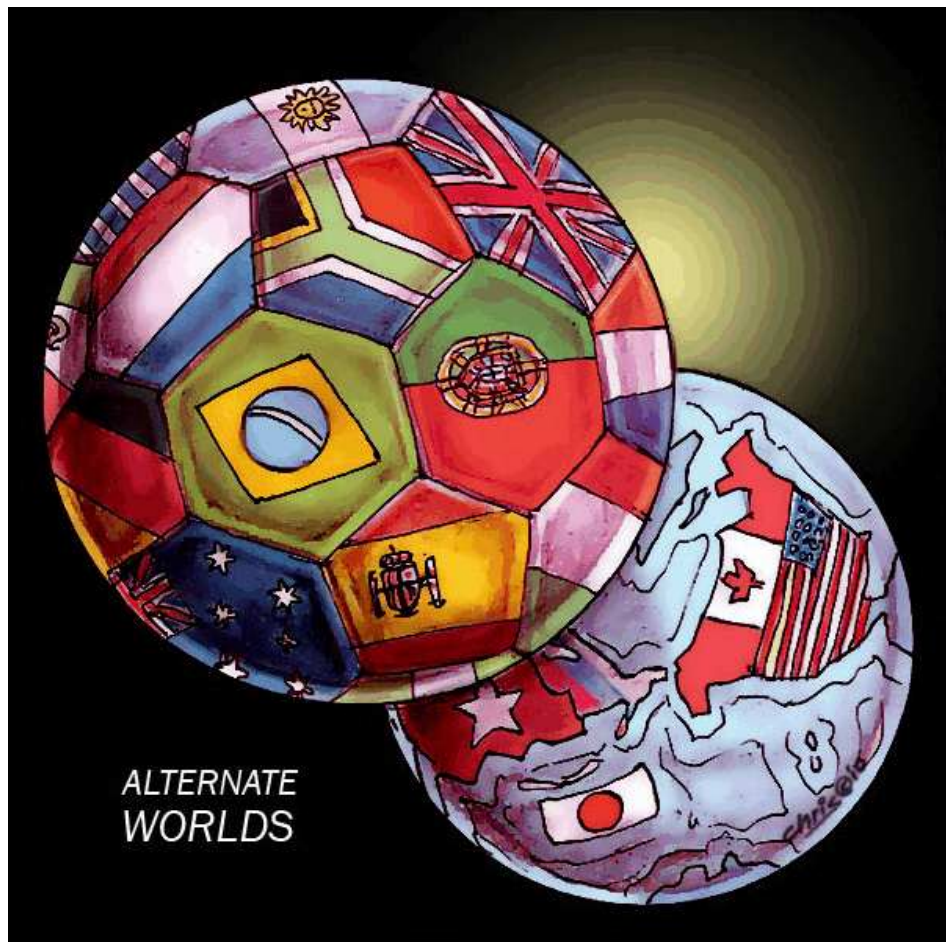


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Football racism evokes ugly past

SPORT

Myrna Tonkinson



Why is it an insult to call someone black? Why does a label like 'black bastard', or whatever offensive noun follows the adjective, have more force than just 'bastard'? Why, after at least three decades since black people in Australia, the United States and elsewhere have embraced the formerly derogatory adjective as a badge of pride, can this word inflict pain and evoke anger?

The events around Timana Tahu's sudden departure from the NSW Rugby League side in the State of Origin contest is just one recent example of the power of racially-charged views and the words that express them to induce strong emotions and engender controversy.

Early reports indicated that Tahu's departure had been abrupt, in response to the utterance of a racist remark by the NSW assistant coach, Andrew Johns, about an Aboriginal player on the Queensland side, Greg Inglis. Tahu's action seemed impetuous, possibly even an over-reaction. After all, it came after only the first match of three in the tournament, and he and Johns had once been teammates.

It is not surprising, then, to learn that Tahu's decision came after a number of incidences of racial vilification. Tahu left, not as a rash response to an unusual event, but after what was, for him, the last straw.

In his public statement, Johns seemed genuinely shocked as well as remorseful that he had upset Tahu; yet his attempt to explain away his outburst as an aberration lacked credibility. I presume he was surprised because his approach to team bonding had not previously been challenged. He had assumed that to use derogatory language that draws on long-held notions about 'race' is still commonplace, that it is acceptable to build solidarity and assert dominance by denigrating the Other.

Johns said he was 'shattered' at having given offence to Tahu. He would probably argue that he has the utmost respect for Tahu, sees him as a mate etc. And he would mean it.

His offensive words indicate not so much personal antipathy as the pervasive belief that skin colour is a reliable shorthand measure of personal and cultural worth.

Racist thinking is still evident in popular beliefs, attitudes and discourse, despite the prevailing scientific view, based on research that includes the mapping of the human genome, that skin colour and other markers of 'race' are relatively trivial indicators of human variation.

Even when they attain great heights in sport, politics and other fields based on their talents, black people may still suffer vilification. The notion that they are not worthy, are irredeemably 'other', is deeply-held by some. So too, though, is the knowledge that racial taunts can evoke an emotional response which might throw players off their game. Such taunts can therefore be a cheap sledging tool rather than evidence of racist conviction.

The Tahu incident recalls the drama in the 1993 AFL season when St Kilda player Nicky Winmar (pictured) responded to the taunts of Collingwood fans by raising his jumper and pointing to his bare skin, reportedly saying 'I'm proud to be black'.

Some observers complained that AFL players are 'not allowed to use the word black' in robust exchanges on the field, while Winmar could point to his black skin with impunity. This ignores the fact that taunts referring to colour carry historical and metaphorical force, conveying common assumptions that would be all too clear to Winmar: that being black made him, to borrow Stevie Wonder's lament, a 'lesser man'.

The call by the NSW Blues coach Craig Bellamy for Tahu, Johns and Inglis to get together and discuss racial vilification assumed that these are misunderstandings that can be fixed by individuals talking to one another. But the evidence suggests that racially derogatory language is deeply embedded in our culture and is often thoughtlessly invoked — even by people who are not crudely racist.

Just last month, the mother of an Aboriginal girl from a remote community who attends an elite boarding school in Perth told me that her daughter and other Aboriginal girls have been upset because, while playing sport for their school, they are sometimes taunted by parents of their opponents. Their account of the content of the abuse was vague, but what stuck, and hurt, was 'they call us black'.

Tahu stated, 'This isn't about me or Andrew Johns, it's about arresting racism and standing up for my beliefs'. His action gives the NRL an opportunity to adopt some of measures that the AFL instituted after the Winmar incident. First implemented in 1995, these include a prohibition on racist abuse, and a conciliation process to resolve complaints of vilification. Such measures seem to have had some benefits (Aussie Rules heavyweight Mal Brown's [cannibal comment](#) this week notwithstanding). But much remains unchanged.

What is most needed is a society-wide awareness that racist beliefs are outmoded, but that their legacy is enduring and painful for those who have been on the wrong side of the exclusion zone. As long as deep inequalities, with their origin in racial thinking, persist, even the most successful members of out-groups will be hurt by epithets that invoke the ugly past.

Hugh Mackay on spirituality vs religion

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

The Christian Research Association is about to publish the results of a major survey into changing patterns of belief in Australia. Researchers quizzed 1718 people, and the results were compared with similar surveys conducted in 1993 and 1999. According to reports in the Fairfax press, one of its [key findings](#) is that while there's a marked decline in adherence to institutional religion, more people are saying they are, nevertheless, 'spiritual'.

In this interview, one of Australia's most respected social researchers, Hugh Mackay talks about this phenomenon of being 'spiritual rather than religious'. He also addresses more general trends and contradictions in belief in this country, the value of progressive thinking in religious institutions, and how both atheism and fundamentalism challenge contemporary religion.

He spoke to *Eureka Street TV* after giving an address at the Common Dreams conference for religious progressives held over four days at St Kilda Town Hall in April this year.

In October 2004, *Compass* on ABC TV presented an in-depth [profile](#) of Hugh Mackay in which he talked about his own family and religious background. He grew up in the very comfortable suburb of Castlecrag on Sydney's north shore, and his family attended a conservative Baptist church.

In his early 20s he rejected Christian belief and practice, only coming back to it in his mid-40s when he started attending the high-church Anglican St James in King Street in the centre of Sydney. He was attracted by the music, and even started singing in the church's choir.

'I do love liturgical music,' he says. 'Though, having been raised in that rather primitive fundamentalist context, of course, I didn't have much exposure to sophisticated sacred music.'

He says this is an expression of the mystery and mysticism at the heart of life which is the primary concern of religion: 'That's what I go to religion for. I mean, I go for a sense of, not exactly making sense of life's mysteries, but celebrating the mysteries, contemplating why we're here. I mean it's a mysterious business.'

Having been through two marriage breakdowns, Mackay does not see himself as a haughty detached observer, passing judgement on his research subjects: 'I've never stood aside and said, "Look what's happening to all these peasants who are leading these messy lives, and I'm somehow beyond, above that struggle". Never had that view, I've always known I was in the struggle as well myself, even though I've often felt a bit of a loner.'

Mackay is in high demand as a speaker around the country, and often appears in the opinion pages of major newspapers, and on TV and radio. He has written 12 books, both fiction and non-fiction. His books of social analysis, *Reinventing Australia* and *Advance Australia ... Where?* were best-sellers, and the latest of his five novels, *Ways of Escape*, was published in 2009.

True memories of Bloody Sunday

HUMAN RIGHTS

Binoy Kampmark

It was meant to be a peaceful march. But as we have all too often seen, peaceful protests, whether they be in compounds, on the streets or on sea, can end up as bloody affairs. The date of 30 January 1972, sometimes known as *Domhnach na Fola* (Bloody Sunday), was one such event.



A civil rights demonstration had been organised in defiance of the authorities in the Northern Irish town of Londonderry. The British Parachute Regiment was given the task of controlling it. By the end of the affray, 13 people were dead — another subsequently died in hospital — and 15 were left wounded. It catalysed 30 years of bloody conflict in Northern Ireland. Before the year was out, the British Army had lost 100 men.

Lord Saville's mammoth 5000 page report of that seminal moment of 'The Troubles' has been eagerly anticipated. It constitutes one of the final steps of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Contributions from the legal fraternity have been impressive and plentiful. Lord Saville has been able to call upon his Commonwealth colleagues, the Canadian judge William Hoyt and the former Australian High Court Justice John Toohey.

Thousands gathered to listen to the verdict. Most got what they wanted — the admission that the killings of Bloody Sunday were 'unjustified and unjustifiable'.

Rarely can a report have been rendered with such crystal clear findings. Prime Minister David Cameron issued a formal apology in the House of Commons. The report, he said, had been 'absolutely clear', leaving room for 'no ambiguities'. The civilians who were felled by bullets had been unarmed. False claims had been made by various soldiers about the presence of 'nail bombers'. Some continued to fire as the protesters fled or lay wounded. The regiment should never have been deployed to the Bogside in the first place. Prosecutors in Northern Ireland are considering the possibility of bringing charges against the offending parties for perjury.

Not all are in favour of these findings. For one thing, the sheer length of the inquiry — a staggering 12 years — has made various commentators suspect its veracity, its balance. The cost also has been enormous, some 200 million pounds. Questions have been asked as to whether the inquiry unintentionally compromised national security or breached privacy provisions during the investigations.

Then there are the usual countering arguments: How many Derrys have there been? How many other bloody events committed by the IRA? And wasn't Martin McGuinness, current

Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, armed at the protest? Violence can be labyrinthine and entangling in its complexities.

There is little doubt that another inquiry was required after the problematic findings of Lord Chief Justice Lord Widgery, who, as David McKittrick of *The Independent* explained, did 'more to damage the country's reputation in Ireland than almost any other single act during the history of The Troubles'.

Widgery's 'whitewashing' effort, made 38 years ago, took a mere 558 dismissive words, exonerating the paratroopers while condemning the protesters. 'Some', went the devastating verdict, 'are wholly acquitted of complicity in such an action; but there is a strong suspicion that some others had been firing weapons or handling bombs.' The deluge of violence was duly prepared.

Exposing the use of naked and lethal force against civilians, even if they be unruly in exercising their right of protest, is certainly in the public good. While the unionist and republican factions remain divided on their views of the British army, their differences are unlikely to precipitate any long term effects in light of this report. As Voltaire claimed, 'To the living we owe respect, but to the dead we owe only the truth.' True reconciliation can only ever take place with a true recounting of memory.

Permutations of motherhood

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Mother and Child* (MA). Writer-director: Rodrigo Garc a. Starring: Annette Benning, Jimmy Smits, Namoi Watts, Samuel L. Jackson, Kerry Washington, David Ramsey, Eileen Ryan, Shareeka Epps, Elpidia Carrillo**



‘First a mother bathes her child/Then the other way around.’ American indie folk rock poet Conor Oberst’s line, from his band Bright Eyes’ 2007 song ‘If the Brakeman Turns My Way’, notes a simple truth about motherhood. The relationship is not static, but evolves with time and circumstances. The image of an adult bathing his elderly mother is a romantic ideal of how age can invert the practical aspects while the central bond remains unchanged.

Mother and Child recognises this adaptability, while interrogating the nature of the bond itself. It scrutinises various permutations of motherhood – few of them traditional and not all of them biological – within a highly individualised suburban American society. Like Oberst, its vision of motherhood is romantic. But it is not uncomplicated.

There’s 50-year-old Karen (Benning), who, as a teenager, gave her infant daughter up for adoption. Karen is a nurse, and is carer to her infirm mother (Ryan). Here we see the inversion Oberst alludes to, though there’s a glum dutifulness in Karen’s approach to both professional and personal carer roles. Her outlook is bitter and brittle.

Karen is courted and eventually won over by a friendly orderly, Paco (Smits), to whom she reveals that for her whole life she has defined herself as a mother, despite her daughter’s estrangement. For Karen, the parental bond abides, and is strained miserably by physical absence. She eventually finds in the young daughter of her housekeeper (Carrillo) an object for her motherly instincts, but that is no permanent cure for her grief.

Elsewhere, 30-something Elizabeth (Watts) is forging a successful career as a lawyer. Her attitudes to family and career have been shaped by the fact that she was adopted out as a baby, and that her biological mother has never attempted to contact her. She disdains the very concept of family as an impediment to success. She treats sex and intimacy as playthings, even having had her tubes tied when she was 17.

Upon winning a job with a major law firm, Elizabeth commences an affair with her employer, Paul (Jackson). Paul himself is a widower, and has therefore taken on the role of mother-nurturer to his own adult children. When, against the odds and despite her extreme preventative efforts, Elizabeth falls pregnant, it challenges all her preconceptions about family.

Perhaps her disdain was a mask for the pain of motherly abandonment. She's unwilling to inflict the same pain on her own unplanned-for child.

Meanwhile, young married couple Lucy and Joseph (Washington and Ramsey) are applying to adopt a baby. The biological mother is a precocious teenager Ray (Epps). Ray herself was born of an accidental pregnancy to a single mother and is under pressure to keep the child. Instead she expresses her love for the unborn child — and respects its dignity and its claim to a good life — by putting the prospective adoptive parents through a rigorous interview process. Even still, Ray may be naive in estimating the difficulty of finally giving the child up.

Adoption is shown to be a tumultuous process, as joyful and painful in its own way as pregnancy and birth. Lucy, we learn, is unable to conceive, but suspects that the motherly bond is about much more than biology. Joseph, by contrast, values biology greatly. Perhaps it is ironic that he shares the name of the father of Jesus who, in the biblical story, accepts parenthood as a divinely ordained state that transcends blood. In any case, the gap between his and his wife's values puts inevitable strain on their marriage and on their decision to adopt.

The film's power comes from its storytelling. Writer-director García-a was the main creative force behind the superb US television series *In Treatment*. That series dramatised in virtual real-time eight weeks' worth of sessions between a psychotherapist (played by Gabriel Byrne) and five of his patients. Both *In Treatment* and *Mother and Child* include, intimately but unobtrusively, scenes of charged dialogue that allow the actors to fully explore the emotional states of their characters, and the tensions and sympathies between their own and other characters.

The film's executive producer, Alejandro González Iñárritu, has previously toyed with non-linear storytelling structures in his own films, such as *21 Grams* and *Babel*, in a way that invigorated what may otherwise have been pedestrian stories. In *Mother and Child* the seemingly disparate stories are interwoven in a way that amplifies each story's themes as well as their emotional impact when they ultimately converge.

Mother and Child is both familiar and fresh. It is obvious from an early stage that Elizabeth is Karen's estranged daughter. But the way in which their stories finally merge, and intertwine with Lucy's story, is surprising. There's a hint of providence in the resolution, although the film avoids easy religious allusions. Its one reference to the Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of the Catholic tradition, comes in the form of a virtual throwaway line from an over-zealous young Catholic woman. Anything more earnest could have been seen as a cliché.

Granny chic is fashionable exploitation

COMMUNITY

Jen Vuk

'Grandma chic' has graced the fashion scene for some time now, still I was bemused to read that hip young things such as Pixie Geldof (pictured), Lady Gaga and Australian MTV darling Ruby Rose have let it go to their heads. Literally. On the pages of fashion magazines, and up and down runways and the red carpet, the message was clear — keep a lid on your hair dye. Grey is the new black.



For most women, the discovery of a strand (or strands) of grey is hardly cause for celebration, and the sheer range and availability of hair dyes are testament to the lengths, and expense, many go to cover it up.

The reason is obvious. Alongside crows feet and laugh lines, nothing signals the ageing process quite like the shock of a grey lock. As Philip Kingsley, a hair care specialist based in New York, told www.mothenature.com. 'If you're going gray, I guarantee you're not happy about it. I have seen tens of thousands of people over the years, and none of them wants gray hair. It can really make people feel old before their time.'

So it's not surprising that when style icons the likes of model Kate Moss and 13-year-old fashion blogger Tavi Gevinson are spotted around town with silver streaks in their hair, the paparazzi sit up and start snapping. While Hollywood celebrities continue to erase all signs of age, it's intriguing, not to mention perplexing, to uncover a group of young fashionistas thumbing their nose at it.

But is this really the case?

By its very definition, fashion is fickle, mercurial, superficial. In an industry where high expectations sit alongside *haute couture*, the point is to make a headline and a statement — in that order. Consider the recent use of 'bigger-sized' models on catwalks. Sure, names such as Karl Lagerfeld got in on the act, but the occasion was more about pushing the envelope than social boundaries.

Yet it's counterintuitive, and counterproductive, to blame our collective ageism on one industry regardless of how influential or insidious it may appear. While we look to fashion to tell us the latest trends, it merely reflects, rather than challenges, overriding attitudes.

And despite living in a rapidly ageing world (according to the United Nations the rate at which we are ageing worldwide is unprecedented) the overriding attitude towards growing older, in the west at least, remains undeniably negative.

It's no accident that anti-ageing creams and treatments, and books aimed at Baby Boomers, such as Christopher Hopkins' *Staging Your Comeback: A Complete Beauty Revival for Women Over 45* and Charla Krupp's *How Not to Look Old: Fast and Effortless Ways to Look 10 Years Younger, 10 Pounds Lighter, 10 Times Better*, continue to rake in the dollars.

While I, too, have bought into the youthful beauty myth on more than one occasion (a bathroom cabinet full of moisturisers alone is testament to this), the eternal fight against ageing is anathema to me. As a child of migrant parents, I was taught from an early age to respect my elders. I was encouraged to listen to their stories (and not interrupt) and to view each wrinkle as the mark of hard-won wisdom.

I'm not exaggerating when I say that a full head of silvery hair was considered the ultimate badge of honour — something to wear with pride, not embarrassment.

And it got me thinking. How would someone in their twilight years feel about Gevinson, Gaga, Geldof et al. and their artfully arranged silver streaks?

Would they see these young women as the victims of a trend that gives some credence (however unintentional) to ageing? Or would they, more likely, consider the episode as yet another sad example of the way society treats its elderly citizens? Imitation may be the greatest form of flattery, but not when it's undercut by parody.

I'll stop short of saying mockery is at play here, but there's certainly more than a shade of hypocrisy. The sole reason granny chic is on the radar is because it's contrived; unreal. While we admire such actors as Helen Mirren and Jamie Lee Curtis and 43-year-old UK model Kristen McMenamy for their longevity as much as their talents, we're not about to laud them for their head of (natural) grey hair. That would be too brave by far.

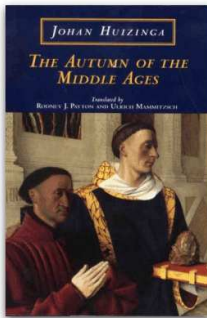
So what message can we glean from this latest fashion faux pas? That it seems it's fine to appropriate old age so long as we don't celebrate it or treat it with the respect it deserves. It isn't enough that, along with wisdom and insight, ageing brings with it glaucoma, arthritis, osteoporosis and invisibility. Now it's ripe for exploitation, too.

And there's nothing chic about that.

Quasimodo comes to Woolies

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews



He was standing in front of the milk shelves at the top of aisle five in the supermarket. I looked away politely and hung back even though I needed to scrutinise the milk shelves myself.

It's a tricky business milk — no longer a matter of the familiar, creamy white liquid closely connected to the life cycle of the cow. What I select is low fat, watery, almost bluish in colour and, rather damningly I've always thought, 'not suitable as a complete milk food for children under two years of age'. As there are many varieties of this delicacy, all differently priced, it takes some concentration to make a choice.

The reason I delayed, respectfully deferring to the bloke already at the shelves, was that he was horribly contorted. His head was bent over his right shoulder as if being crushed down by an invisible hand. The angle of the head more or less concealed the right ear and enforced a distortion of his mouth and right eye. Moreover, he was talking to himself.

In his left hand he was carrying a well stocked 'Green Bag', plastic bags having been recently banned in this paradise of dissent. With his right hand he selected and grasped a carton of milk and, thus laden, he began to make his painful way to other aisles of wonder and delight.

Well, you don't stare at such afflicted people and so I gazed elsewhere until he was on the move. But, as he passed by me, he put the milk carton in his bag, straightened up and removed the mobile phone that had been pincerred between his right ear and his shoulder and into which he'd been speaking as he made his monstrous, doubled-up progress along the aisles.

In an instant, feeling somehow duped and foolish, I allowed my earlier compassion and sensitivity to be replaced by images of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. 'That small left eye over-shadowed by a red bushy brow ... the right eye [disappearing] entirely under an enormous wart; those straggling teeth ... that leathery lip, the grotesquely twisted shoulder.' That would be how I'd remember him and how I would describe him to rapt audiences as I embellished my account of this bizarre modern monster. Quasimodo comes to Woolworths.

In Quasimodo's time, as evoked by Johan Huizinga in his stunning work *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, the affairs of daily life were confronting and stark. 'When the world was half a thousand years younger all events had much sharper outlines than now ... all things in life had about them something glitteringly and cruelly public.' Processions, executions, public

penitence and flagellations, the ubiquitous and ceaseless bells tolling joy, warning or remembrance, the utter darkness of night, the ache of winter — all were part of a pattern visibly endured in their different degrees by rich and poor, saint and sinner.

As the centuries rolled by, the declining unity and influence of the Church, the development of self-consciousness and the idea of personal identity, the growth of individualism, the concept of privacy, and Romanticism's focus on the power of the imagination and the natural world all worked against the blatancy, the sharp either-or contrasts of medieval life to give us our world of complex and guarded personae, introspection, self-esteem and its converse, and privacy of various intensities in thought, word and deed.

When, however, Quasimodo, hunched over his mobile, shuffled around the supermarket, I realised we had arrived at another massive shift in collective consciousness. People conduct their business, loves, sex lives, friendships and enmities at the top of their voices on mobile phones in buses, trains, along the street, and, well, in supermarkets. Between this station and the next, the person in the seat opposite you might drop \$20,000 on the stock exchange and everybody knows.

On Facebook and Twitter people lay out the ganglia of their daily lives and the fugitive shapes of their most ephemeral thoughts. People blog — sometimes very attractively, sometimes not — on the now accepted assumption that anything anyone thinks about any event, problem or figure is of equal interest and moment with anything anyone else happens to think.

On talkback radio, people vent their innermost fears, hatreds, prejudices, considered views and personal tragedies and dilemmas for the listeners in the confident expectation that they will find these outbursts interesting and important and in the equally confident belief that those who don't find them interesting and important are misguided and have failed to realise that any opinion is as good as any other opinion and absolutely everybody is entitled to an opinion about anything at all.

In short, the wheel has turned again and, to slightly paraphrase Huizinga, all things in life have about them, once more, something glitteringly, mindlessly and cruelly public.

What the aluminium can lady thinks

POETRY

Satisfaction enough

1.

Her momentum surprises around street corners,
the pram wheels cross-hatching the blue bitumen
between the hills elbowing the Lismore basin.

Standing on the edge, she migrates the long, thin pole
around the recycling dumpster. Beer bottles clink, aluminium
cans become metal kebabs. I throw squashed bourbon cans
onto the pram. She turns, a thin smile creasing her stern face.

2.

I often wonder what the aluminium can lady thinks about.

I imagine

that on the road: her set eyes read the worlds of nature —
the sky as upturned colander, shaking droplets of rain;
the branches of the spotted gums lining with bird alphabets;
that at home: she rests the pram at the back door,
aches striping her ankles; she switches the kettle on,
her breath heaving, her feet crossed on a chair
which for now is satisfaction enough.

—*Peter Mitchell*

The physicist's wife considers

She clutters the kitchen bench
with a myriad of glasses. Designed
originally for the evasion of tax,
the enclosed air twist of stems

will determine their value
independent of him — in this
the only expanse he would (at
times) leave to her, his wife.
The assessor is late
moving smoothly from apology
to rhapsody ...

multiple spirals
paired filaments
double knopped
what a pity almost
a set ... and two
with a mercury twist

She need only appear to listen

the rotation of ...

Always — he described himself
as a Master — one who could
trust in his skill with heat
and blow to hollow tools
(with such precision)
that a liquid state emerging
from extreme pressure
was notated into elegance.

Sealed in a silence resonant with glass,
another writes a persuasive formula
while she cradles a vessel having
no memory of wine.

The scent of dying basil ...
a shadow leaves her hands ...
a void.

*oh! how lucky
more resilient
than one would imagine and
now ... have you decided?*

Using old papers edged with equations
she boxes them all herself
avoiding the cost — twenty-eight dollars.
— *Kathryn Hamann*

Rudd's great big mining myth

POLITICS

John Ralph

The proposed Resource Super Profits Tax is generating considerable interest and debate. I wrote an article which was published in [*The Australian*](#) on 25 May, despite being somewhat reluctant to become involved in the debate, having retired some time ago from corporate life.



However, I was motivated to write the article because of my concern that the consequence of implementing the new tax, as currently proposed, could lead to a change in the way external investors and lenders view Australia in relation to sovereign risk. Australia has enjoyed a very good reputation over many decades. Any downgrading from this strong position will have consequences, not just for the mining industry, but for the Australian community generally.

Where sovereign risk is perceived to be an issue, two consequences follow. Capital becomes more difficult to obtain to fund activities in the nation generally, and it becomes more expensive, including for the funding of budget deficits, because the perception of sovereign risk gets priced into financial transactions. It is this factor that mostly concerns me because of its implications for the community over a lengthy period into the future.

Collecting a higher level of taxation from the mining industry for government to disburse for other worthwhile purposes may be perceived as a positive contribution to the Catholic principle of the 'common good'. However, if a badly designed and executed change results in much reduced government revenue in the future and a higher cost of funds that Australia, as a capital importing country, requires, then the contribution to the common good is negatively affected. Such an outcome would impact on the whole community, because borrowing will be more expensive.

Governments have the power to change regulations, including taxation, and to trade off future investment and jobs for a larger tax take in the shorter term. But the consequences need to be understood and appreciated, and the community needs to be fully informed about them.

There are flaws in the currently proposed model that will have unnecessary adverse impacts on future activity in the mining and associated industries. While markets remain strong, current mines would continue to operate under the proposed new tax arrangements because the capital is already sunk. But future capital expenditure will be constrained because only very rich ore bodies will be viable with an effective tax rate of 57 per cent, and only if funding, which depends on the confidence of lenders, can be raised for such projects. Also, exploration expenditure will fall, further restraining future investment growth.

The Government's model is a theoretical approach that does not stand up to scrutiny in the real world. It is based on the so called 'Brown Tax' concept developed in 1948 in the USA, but never implemented.

Essentially, the Brown model proposes that governments share in the natural resources of the nation by taking a 40 per cent joint venture interest in every mining development. Government would contribute 40 per cent of the capital required for development and construction, receive 40 per cent of profits and bear 40 per cent of losses. This arrangement would not affect the return on capital to the mining company on its 60 per cent investment, but merely reduces the size of the investment available to it from 100 per cent to 60 per cent.

The model proposed by the Australian Government is that the Government would take 40 per cent of profits over the bond rate and underwrite losses to the extent of 40 per cent, if these are incurred subsequently. This is perceived as sharing the losses as in the Brown Tax but there is a fundamental difference between the two proposals. Under the current Government proposal, the mining company has to find the funding for 100 per cent of the project versus the 60 per cent envisaged by Brown.

There is another crucial difference between the view adopted by the Government and its advisors, and the value of this arrangement to the industry. The Government's theoretical approach is that its underwriting of future losses is equivalent to the Brown sharing in the risks associated with the investment. They clearly felt that this would be regarded favourably by smaller operators and make it easier for them to raise funds.

But the companies live in the real world and realise that, in fact, the opposite is true. The potential partial underwriting of losses would not come into the calculation of return on investment, nor in the assessment of economic viability by financial institutions, but the tax rate of 57 per cent would, and it would make it that much more difficult for all companies, but small companies in particular, to raise funds for development.

So what is apparently seen as a positive by the Government is not regarded as such by the companies. Thus, it would seem to be sensible, and in everybody's interest, to eliminate this complicated element from the proposal.

It would also, in the event of a downturn in the economy leading to losses in the mining industry, eliminate the possibility of the Government facing the unpalatable prospect of having to make substantial payments to mining companies at a time of belt tightening in the rest of the economy, with pressure already on government revenues at the same time.

Another flaw in the model is the claim that the level of future investment would be insensitive to the RSPT, irrespective of the rate at which the tax was imposed. It was astonishing that this should be an outcome of the modelling, until KPMG Econtech, the consultants engaged by Treasury to do the modelling, explained that they were instructed by Treasury to make this assumption and include it in the model.

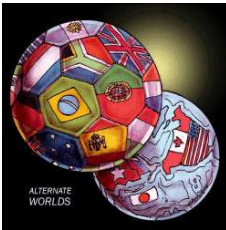
Currently mining companies generally pay royalties to State governments on an *ad valorem* basis. The proposal is to replace the royalties with a tax based on profits. State governments have favoured royalties based on revenue because there is less volatility than there would be if they are based on profits. In principle, most industry participants would prefer a profit based system, provided the rate was seen to be reasonable, in preference to an *ad valorem* based system, because it lowers the investment risk. The issue for the Government in such a change is that its revenue would be subject to greater volatility. In economic downturns, it could be receiving less additional tax than it would be disbursing to rebate royalties paid to the States.

An incidental point worth noting, is that members of superannuation funds have a substantial part of their funds invested in the Australian resource industry. While current mining operations will continue, the additional RSPT payable will reduce the capacity of companies to pay dividends. The lower profits and dividends will also negatively impact the market value of these investments, as will the lower growth expectations. It is not only the foreign and local direct investors who will feel these impacts, so will employees who are members of superannuation funds.

Planet Football's alternative world order

SPORT

Michael Visontay



First, a small but important heresy: It doesn't really matter if Australia gets knocked out of the World Cup in the first round. It won't matter because Australia is already addicted. The horse has bolted: it flew out of the gates in Germany 2006 and has been on the loose ever since.

The hype surrounding Australia's prospects in South Africa has camouflaged the wider importance of the event. For whatever reason, football has become the world's most popular game and the month-long fiesta that begins this week is the largest collective experience on earth.

That irks fans of other codes, especially Australian Rules, which inspires a devotion that almost eclipses the roundball game. In April I attended a sport and media conference at La Trobe University. Everyone who got up to speak at the last session declared, as a matter of course, which AFL club they supported. This identification would astonish even the most rusted-on Manchester United fan.

Yet for all that, Aussie Rules is local, proudly parochial. The global character and appeal of football endows the World Cup with three levels of significance that cannot be denied.

First, it brings out our collective inner child. Sport is ultimately about the spirit of play, one of our enduring links to childhood. Playing makes us feel young. Whether it's play-acting or playing cards or playing sport, it is a form of escape from reality and responsibility.

The World Cup demonstrates that given the right excuse or pretext, people from all walks of life will fork out lots of money to go out and forget about life, and pretend they are young again. In 2006, it felt like the whole world had descended on Germany to have fun, forget about the things that divide us and celebrate a way of feeling united with others. In an era when house prices are the currency of political debate, and community has been superseded by the individual, this is not to be under-rated.

Second, football presents us with an alternative world order. In the conventional scheme of things, the United States is the centre of the world, with Russia, the EU, China and Japan trying to keep it in check.

If someone dared suggest a scenario where the political and economic superpowers were minor players, not even second-rank nations, they would be laughed out of the room. Yet that is exactly the landscape of the 'football world'. Europe is the central nervous system, led by England, Spain, Italy and Germany, with South America (Brazil and Argentina) pulling the other main lever of power.

Contrast this pecking order with the other great global sporting event, the Olympic Games. The United States, the Soviet Union and more recently China have dominated the medal tallies. The Olympics have followed politics much more faithfully than has football.

The appeal of planet football is that culture has trumped geopolitics and demography. In the Olympics, the countries with the biggest populations win the most medals. Not in the World Cup. This perverse state of affairs has created some delicious ironies, most notably the United States being regularly seen as an underdog.

America's unusual status is one of the unifying pleasures of football fans around the world. It allows them to fantasise about how things could be different; it makes them feel more important. As a South American football official once told an English interviewer: 'you (Europeans) have history; all we have is football'.

Which brings me to the third point about this World Cup. Europe has history, South America has football, but South Africa — as yet — does not have either. The coming month is an opportunity for the new government to show the world that all the negative publicity about security and infrastructure is just that — hype. The World Cup confers on the host country, more so even than the Olympics (a one-city event), an opportunity to shine.

Irrespective of how the national team may fare, it is the nation that is really being tested. The world has flown in for a giant party. It's now up to the hosts to prove that they know how to give one.

As for the Socceroos, well, if they finish second in their group, it would set up a clash with England in the next round, a tall order but mouth-watering prospect. If that doesn't happen, we'll always have cricket and the Ashes.

New old ways of understanding justice

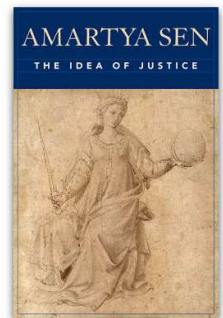
BOOKS

Alexander Lewis

Amartya Sen: *The Idea of Justice*. Belknap Press, 2009. ISBN 9780674036130. [Publisher website](#)

Justice and injustice seem like the most basic of concepts, yet they unfold with labyrinthine complexity.

Take the problem with which the Nobel-prize winning and philosophically-minded economist Amartya Sen opens his book *The Idea of Justice*: three children squabble over a flute. Carla has worked diligently to make the flute; Anne is the only one who can actually play it; but poverty-stricken Bob has no toys or instruments at all.



A utilitarian, aiming to maximise the best possible usage would favour Anne; an egalitarian, toyleless Bob; a libertarian would favour Carla, because she actually made the flute. Depending on your 'theory' of justice — utilitarian, libertarian, egalitarian — each of them has a claim to the goods. You end in stalemate.

This thought-problem is a barb aimed at a particular way of doing political and moral philosophy which has been dominant ever since the American political philosopher John Rawls published his famous wrist-breaker, *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

Rawls was concerned with the question of political justice. He identified justice as fairness. Fair procedures were identified with justice. Rawls invented a hypothetical state called the 'original position'. In this state nobody would know their gender, race, social position or wealth. Rawls argued that people there would opt to follow two principles. They would extend freedom as widely as possible without infringing on the freedom of others. And they would ensure that any inequalities in income tended to benefit society's worst off.

A society governed by these principles, Rawls said, would be just.

The literary critic Harold Bloom once said of Sigmund Freud that his influence was so pervasive as to be inescapable — you could be a Freudian or an anti-Freudian, but you could not be un-Freudian. The same applies to Rawls' grand theory — it set the terms of debate for philosophers of political justice.

But this discussion, Sen maintains, has become mired in an approach he calls 'transcendent institutionalism' which seeks to devise a set of perfect institutions to achieve justice. Rawls and his followers define justice as whatever results from following these principles. They not only cannot escape theoretical dead ends like the flute example but, more importantly, their

absolutism makes them incapable of dealing with the ramshackle world of practical justice.

Sen concludes elegantly: 'If a theory of justice is to guide reasoned choice of policies, strategies, or institutions, then the identification of fully just social arrangements is neither necessary nor sufficient.'

Sen would replace this approach with what he calls 'comparative justice', a program for discussing competing ideas of justice and fairness that is more suited to addressing real problems like income inequality and global development. Sen finds figures that are traditionally seen as philosophically marginal, or not even part of philosophy, to be most useful to his approach. John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith are more helpful in discussions of global justice than Kant.

Rawls said his preoccupation with justice arose from his experiences as a soldier in World War II. For Sen, it was the Bengal famine of 1943 that cost millions of lives, despite being easily preventable. 'What moves us, reasonably enough, is not the realisation that the world falls short of being completely just — which few of us expect — but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate.'

Sen suggests that we might never know what perfect justice is, but we certainly know injustice when we see it. This is not to follow Rouchefoucauld's maxim that 'The love of justice in men is simply the fear of injustice': one of Sen's targets is the conception of people as fundamentally self-interested schemers.

Sen suspects that there is something deeply wrong (although Rawls himself was an unquestionably brilliant and decent person) about an approach to justice that relies on imaginary worlds and thought-experiments. Amid this intellectual bloodlessness, the prominence of Rawls' theory in the academy may owe less to its intrinsic philosophical merit than to it providing a limitless mine for academic conferences and papers.

In a famous passage in India's national epic, the *Mahabharata*, the God Krishna admonishes the warrior Arjuna, who begins to have doubts on the eve of battle. To Arjuna's protests that victory is not worth the carnage of the war, Krishna replies that the hero must do his duty, and not value consequences above right action.

In a small footnote midway through this new book, Sen relates a charming little anecdote from his high school days. Studying this episode in Sanskrit class, a young Sen asked his teacher 'whether it was permissible to say that the divine Krishna had got away with an incomplete and unconvincing argument'. His teacher replied: 'Maybe you could say that, but you must say it with adequate respect'. Sen is scrupulously polite, and it is always a pleasure to see him assault the entire academic establishment with the utmost judiciousness and respect.

This goes deeper than a rhetorical pose — it embodies Sen's proud Enlightenment

conviction that mutual dialogue and public reason must be the foundation for moral action. Sen quotes the 15th century Indian philosopher Abul Fazl that 'the rule of the intellect must be the basic determinant of good and just behaviour'. The professional pessimist John Gray has owned to being unconvinced that being smarter made anyone better, but Sen argues forcefully that 'lack of smartness can certainly be one source of moral failing'.

In 400 pages, Sen covers democracy, reason, human rights (an outstanding chapter), and ultimately the relation between theory and action. The discursive tangents of the book are as interesting as the main thesis. Instead of giving yet another tired rehash of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau etc. Sen uses vibrant, colourful examples from history, philosophy, and literature, in particular from the Indian tradition. Instead of Hobbes' brutal state of nature, Sen discusses *matsyanyaya*, a term from Sanskrit philosophy meaning 'fish-world' — where small fish are easy prey for big fish.

It is very difficult to discuss Sen's arguments in a short review, and as Sen himself puts it, 'every summary is ultimately an act of barbarism'. There is much to disagree with, but nothing to easily dismiss. This is an immensely rich book, demanding in the best and most deserving way, and ought to be read by anyone interested in the most important moral debates of our times.

Am I Catholic enough?

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



One of the pleasures of writing for online journals is to read the quick responses to what you have written. They provoke you to further thought.

Some who have commented on my articles in *Eureka Street* have asked why I do not address such central Catholic questions as abortion and gay marriage, why I do not defend Catholic teaching, and why I so often endorse minority left-wing causes. The implication is that I value my like-minded friends over my faith.

These are fair questions about which I have often thought. My response to them is necessarily personal, not given on behalf of *Eureka Street*. I hope it may spark further conversation.

In the first place, I am comfortable with the broad lines of Catholic teaching on areas such as sexuality, respect for life at its beginnings and its end, and the importance for society of the traditional form of marriage. Although I am critical of the detailed conclusions that some draw from this teaching and of the alienating language in which it is often presented, its consistent focus on respect for human dignity in all aspects of human life informs my own understanding.

That is where I stand. If people reject me because I have these views, I don't much care. Nor do I preen myself if people applaud me for them. Both rejection and applause are shallow responses. There is more to life than being a groupie. My publishing hero is Dorothy Day who lost half the circulation of the *Catholic Worker* with an editorial in which she argued that Catholics should not support Franco's armed uprising against the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, and lost another third when she condemned the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

My critics are right to say that in *Eureka Street* I write often on some issues but neglect others. There are many reasons for this selectivity. In the first place I know more about some things than others, more about refugees and church history, for example, than about moral theology and science. I am happy to leave many subjects to the better informed.

More important, though, I stay away from some topics because I cannot reasonably hope to evoke from my readers the response that I wish. When writing for *Eureka Street*, which is written in a public language for a public audience, I want to find a perspective and arguments on particular issues that will encourage readers to move beyond their initial judgments, to reflect on these issues, and then to reach their own conclusions. But in trying to do this I, like

any writer, am at the mercy of my readers. I must consider not only what I want to say, but also what the reader will hear.

In my judgment, any article in *Eureka Street* that simply expounds or defends Catholic faith in Catholic theological language will leave too many readers fixed in the judgments with which they come to it. They are likely to barrack for it or against it without reflecting on the issues it raises. Such articles work well in magazines written for a Catholic audience open to such language, and I do write occasionally on such topics there.

But for a public magazine, articles concerned with religious faith work best when they explain the logic of faith and practice in a public language, or when an exploration of Christian faith illuminates issues that are of interest in the broader society. These are the kinds of article we publish most often.

It is particularly difficult for a Catholic priest to make space for reflection when writing about church authority, sexuality or gender, as on topics like abortion, gay marriage or women's ordination. Many readers instinctively assume that the writer is a dutiful hack of an authoritarian church, who is buying into issues on which no man, particularly a celibate one, will have anything pertinent to say. Such instinctive perceptions, even though unfair, crowd out any space for reflection, and make writing on these issues something best left to others.

I am happy to write for a magazine that carries many articles about minority groups whose dignity as human beings is not respected. To insist on the dignity of those most disregarded in our society is a thoroughly Catholic thing to do. Those who endorse Catholic teaching on sexuality and on the value of human life should rejoice when they see such insistence. Human dignity is seamless, and conversation about any aspect of it opens out to other aspects.

I don't care much for being called predictably reformist and progressive. Such labels don't help conversation. They often insinuate that the world is divided into secular lefties who don't take sin seriously and Catholic conservatives who do. But it is precisely because I have a realistic understanding of human sinfulness and of the impact of greed on society that I attend to the ways in which people are marginalised and that I plead for a better society. If to do all that is to be reformist and progressive, it is also a thoroughly Catholic thing to do.

Criminals and other animals

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Animal Kingdom* (MA). Writer/director: David Mich d. Starring: Guy Pearce, Joel Edgerton, Sullivan Stapleton, Jacki Weaver, Luke Ford, Ben Mendelsohn, James Frecheville, Laura Wheelwright. Running time: 112 minutes**

As I write I am listening to Australian/British pop duo Air Supply’s 1980 hit ‘All Out of Love’ and thinking how it will never sound the same again. Two weeks ago I regarded this song with indifference as a saccharine soft rock ballad. Now I associate it with a chilling bleakness and a sense of dread like a lump of tar in my gut.



Animal Kingdom has that effect. This dark, powerful Australian film subverts expectations in a way that is not always kind. Its transformation of this song is one notable example — but more on that later.

From the outset the film toys with viewers’ perceptions. In the opening shot, a teenage boy in school uniform sits on the couch next to an apparently sleeping woman. He stares slackly ahead at a television game show until, a moment later, paramedics make their way into the room. The boy continues to be distracted by *Deal or No Deal* as they try vainly to revive his mother. Clearly this is not your typical single-parent household.

Later that night, Joshua (portrayed with intense introversion by debutante Frecheville) phones his grandmother and tells her, somewhat nonchalantly, ‘Mum’s gone and OD’d, and she’s died.’ Grandma Janine Cody (Weaver) is sympathetic, but not surprised — it would appear this has been a long time coming. She invites Joshua (‘J’) to come live with her and his uncles. For the as-yet innocent teenager, a more destructive course could not have been plotted.

Animal Kingdom is a portrait of the vicious inhabitants of J’s extended family and their criminal world. It’s a place where, as signalled by the film’s title, base appetites are indulged, and where the instinct to survive — and, by extension, to dominate or be dominated, as the situation demands — is barely curbed by any impulse towards civilisation. The film reveals the family’s downfall, as well as J’s own topple from innocence.

It lacks the flash and bang of Nine’s *Underbelly* franchise — more subverted expectations? — but this is to its credit: in their place it offers a gloomy suburban realism that is augmented by the ominous truth, spoken by J in voiceover, that all crooks must live with the knowledge that they’ll eventually come undone.

J’s outlaw uncles include jacked-up drug dealer Craig (Stapleton), and youthful Darren

(Ford). When we first meet them, they and their criminal associate Barry Brown (Edgerton) are being stalked by a couple of smarmy cops, who are trying to flush out the gang's absent ringleader, J's uncle Andrew (Mendelsohn). The Codys' altercations with corrupt police soon provoke bloodshed, which escalates as the film progresses.

Janine presides over it all with an almost sexualised affection for her 'boys'. As Den mother she at first appears wholly to be a nurturer, but she is herself a deadly creature, especially when her young are in danger. When Janine smiles, she's also baring her teeth.

Then there's Andrew, who first reappears as a shadow skulking in the kitchen and gets no less frightening in full daylight. He is a hunted and harried animal and all the more dangerous for it. In *Animal Kingdom's* most extraordinary scene, J's girlfriend Nicky (Wheelwright) is seen curled up asleep on the Codys' couch. Like J she is an innocent, and at this moment we feel affection for her. But as the camera pans around, with dawning horror we learn we have been sharing Andrew's leering perspective. Mendelsohn is a fine actor in career best form, and in his stillness we are left in no doubt as to the nature of Andrew's thoughts — or of just what kind of beast he is.

The scene — soundtracked by and forever transmuting that aforementioned Air Supply song — foreshadows the film's most appalling atrocity.

This is a memorable but not uplifting film. Its one ray of hope comes in the shape of Pearce's Detective Leckie, white knight with a broom-bristle moustache who looks every bit like a young Jim Gordon, the upstanding Police Commissioner of Batman's otherwise corrupt world. His attempts to enlist J as witness against his family are tempered by a fatherly desire to save him. But only J can finally decide if he wants to be saved in this way.

Hard days of not working

NON-FICTION

Barry Garner



My stepchildren don't ask for much, which is handy, because I haven't got much. I've been on the pension for eight years and, aside from four hours cleaning a week, it's what puts food on the table. But there is not much left over for the stuff teenagers like.

Sometimes I feel guilty. Sometimes I feel like I don't do my bit and that I'm a blight on society. Am I disabled? Or am I just lazy? Is Bipolar Mood Disorder real? Is my tremor real? A little voice in my head still says I'm just over-emotional and weak. That little voice haunts me sometimes.

I come from a long line of hard workers. Three generations of Wharf Labourers, in the days when the docks meant hard physical labour. I remember my grandfather and father talking about work: about Appleton Dock and Station Pier, and the names of the ships they unloaded. Their work was a big part of who they were.

They headed off on shifts that sometimes turned 'double header', which meant they'd work 16 hours straight. They kept turning up day after day, year after year. Sometimes I wonder what the old boys would make of me. What would they say to a bloke who doesn't work? Would they be as generous as the government is? Or would they just not mention it? Would they see me as a failure? Or is that just me projecting my self doubt?

My three brothers are hard workers. They're all in the building trade, and God knows that's a tough game. During the past eight years while I've done nothing, the boys have kept right on working. Building, producing, earning. I love and respect my brothers for who they are and what they've achieved, but sometimes feel like a weak link in the chain.

Like their forbears my brothers often talk about their work. They say they hate it and that getting up each day is a struggle, but I know deep down they wouldn't have it any other way. They don't rely on the government. They're supporting themselves.

A day's work is a ritual to them. Their trade is a type of religion, while the endless cycle is almost a prayer. Down the street I see workers in overalls, and for some reason I can't look them in the eye.

When I get a bit despondent my wife Carolyn tries to reassure me that I do enough. She tells me that my cleaning job at the church and being a good husband and stepfather are really important work. I love these roles, I love her encouragement, but even so I often think I should be doing more. My brothers love their wives and kids, and on top of that do a full week's work. The two things are done in tandem by millions of people every day. So why can't I do

it? What's so special about me, that I can't be a full time worker?

I used to be a worker. I left school at 15 and worked continually till I was 45. So I remember the steady beat of full time work. But it now seems that I was someone else then. Who am I? Often late at night I ponder that question. But how can I find the answer without a job title to define me?

The year before last I got a full time cleaning job. I lasted six weeks. Six weeks that almost sent me back to the psych ward. I gave it up. Went back on the pension and licked my wounds. I'd had this idea that if I could work full time I could spoil my family a bit. Buy my wife flowers, get the kids an iPod. But it just didn't pan out. Now I do my four hours work, take my pension and try not to listen to that little voice.

Organic carrots and grocery store ethics

ENVIRONMENT

Alison Sampson

How much do I pay for my garlic? Well, unless I'm exhausted and harried and desperate just to grab a bulb and be done with it, a lot. Like [Sarah Kanowski](#), I am convinced that spending more on my groceries will be better in the long run: better for our farmers, better for our health, and better for the earth.



Many farming practices worry me. Cousins of mine framed an old photograph of the lake which abuts their property. It's a pretty enough photograph, which is why they framed it; but I find it haunting. The lake is now dead, poisoned by decades of fertiliser run-offs, and the pressure to produce enormous crops is such that the lake continues to be poisoned year after year.

My cousins hoot at alternative farming methods; they cannot see how withholding fertilisers or turning land over to reed beds and indigenous plants in an effort to neutralise the salinity will allow them to produce large enough crops. So they farm the way they always have, degrading their land and making scathing comments about organic farmers and pretentious city folk, and I despair.

Even so, their comments grate. Exactly how much can I spend on groceries before I am, indeed, utterly pretentious, even immoral? Conventionally grown nectarines cost \$2 a kilo; local organic nectarines, \$8. People in my own city are hungry, people across the world are starving, and here I am buying local organic olive oil, ten times the price of a good oil from Crete. My daughters won't eat a floury apple from a supermarket, nor a tasteless carrot. 'Buy the good apples,' they beg — they mean the heirloom varieties at \$7 a kilo.

Yet even as I wince at the register and think of the hungry, I can't be convinced that buying food from farms which degrade soil and water is cost-effective, or that farm workers should be regularly exposed to airborne pesticides and other toxins. In the long run, we will all be hungry if we don't look after the land, or the rivers and lakes which give it life.

And I have to agree with my daughters — the good apples are good. There is a reward for buying local and organic: the food can be magnificent. Fresh in a way rarely experienced in a supermarket, local organic produce can taste like a Platonic ideal of Apple, Peach, Pear. I remember the first time I tasted, really tasted, a carrot. Crisp, juicy and unbelievably sweet, it was both deeply familiar and wholly new. I realised that every other carrot I had eaten in my life was nothing more than a shadow. This was Carrot; a revelation.

Organic food also comes in great variety. Many organic farmers plant diverse crops to find

which are best for their microclimate, or more pest and disease resistant. As consumers of these crops, we get to try a dozen varieties of potato, two dozen apples, peaches speckled and striped, a watermelon flecked with stars.

We also learn to eat seasonally, which means trying different foods when our staples run out. When there are no local potatoes, I've learned to love baby turnips, crisp celeriac or fennel instead. When brown onions are out of season, I use leeks or spring onions, or tight brown shallots. Even my muesli mix varies. I've become more flexible, and open to new foods.

Going organic is a journey. At first it was an intellectual decision, but now I take delight in knowing my onions, my potatoes, apples and carrots. Even so, we're not purists. I can't give up my avocados; and, with three young children, there are times when I stagger into the grocery store and grab what I need to feed everyone quickly.

Some days, I weigh a bulb of local organic garlic and worry that I've lost my sense of proportion. But then I remember the dead lake — and I want to dream a bigger picture. In my picture, pure water, clean air and more fertile land are valued. The world is not something to be exploited, but a place that is good. And in this vision of goodness, where apples are crisp and the scent of thyme threads through the quiet of the evening, we are invited to be not just consumers, but stewards.

Abbott and Australia's new poor

POLITICS

Brian Lawrence



In a recent interview on ABC radio's *AM* program Opposition Leader Tony Abbott said 'low and middle income families with kids are Australia's new poor'.

Abbott is half right. He is right in regard to low income families who are dependent on a safety net wage for their standard of living. They are newly poor because of changes that have occurred in the Australian wages system over the past decade or so; a period which should have delivered better outcomes.

One in six Australian workers is paid no more than the prescribed minimum safety net rate of pay set for their work classification. These workers haven't the capacity to bargain for higher rates and are typically non-union members.

From December 2000 to December 2009, safety net wages declined relative to community wages. In that time Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (AWOTE) increased by 53.2 per cent, to \$1,223.30 per week, and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 29.1 per cent.

Yet over the same period safety net workers who are now paid more than \$645.00 had real wage cuts and all safety net workers fell behind average wages. Workers on the Federal Minimum Wage (FMW), now at \$543.78 per week, received an increase of 35.8 per cent, and those now on \$835.00 per week only received 19.3 per cent.

The position of low income safety net-dependent families has declined relative to better paid working families even after taking into account income tax cuts and increases in family payments.

The disposable income of a single breadwinner FMW-dependent family of four (including two children of primary school age) has increased by 47.6 per cent to \$742.75 per week, including family payments of \$245.58. A similar family which is dependent on a wage of \$645.00 per week has had an increase of 44.7 per cent.

However, the AWOTE-dependent family has had an increase of 62.3 per cent in its disposable income and is now at \$1,117.78 per week. Family payments have been pushed into the middle income groups. The loss of safety net-dependent families relative to the AWOTE middle income family has varied; for example, \$74.22 per week at the FMW and \$103.32 at a wage of \$645.00 per week. This shows that Abbott's claim is half wrong.

The standard of living of low income families has even fallen behind that of pensioners. Following the recent pension review, the aged couple pension is now \$528.50 per week. The

costs of children, plus the costs of working, put our FMW-dependent working family on a lower standard of living than pensioners. Parents cannot raise and educate children on \$742.75 per week. Family payments fall well short of providing for the needs of dependants.

Abbott may wish to move to a 'single person' wage, with the Commonwealth supporting families through family payments, but the Commonwealth's budgetary position won't permit any significant progress in this direction. Neither side of politics will commit to the further transfer of family costs to the public purse.

In the *AM* interview Abbott lamented that 'you can't give what you haven't got' and that his priority is to 'get the deficit and the debt under control'. This cannot be an excuse to do nothing at all. We are in this situation because of the failure of wages policies to protect low paid workers and their families.

The heavy lifting for low paid workers and their families has to be done by the wages system. It has to return to a fairer relationship between safety net wages and community wage levels and it must take into account the needs of workers with family responsibilities.

This will require that major players in the wage-setting debate acknowledge that the safety net wages system has failed low income workers and their families. Abbott has to accept that this largely occurred under the Howard Government.

The Rudd Government must do more: its submissions to this year's [national wage review](#) failed to address the needs of low income working families and failed to give any sense of direction as to how the new wages system might respond to those needs.

Fair Work Australia's decision last week to award an increase of \$26 per week across all classifications from 1 July 2010 was modest given that there was a freeze of safety net wages in 2009. Despite this increase, the real value of safety net wages has declined since the last decision to increase safety net wages, in July 2008.

In July 2010, the National Minimum Wage (the FMW's new name) will have risen by less than the relevant published CPI increases: 4.8 per cent compared to 5.4 per cent. It is worse for those on higher classifications. A worker on \$700.00 per week, for example, will only receive a 3.7 per cent increase, which is a real wage cut of \$11.80 per week. By comparison, over a similar period AWOTE has increased by 11.9 per cent, well ahead of the CPI and despite the Global Financial Crisis.

We have a systemic failure which ensures that each year brings a widening gap between safety net wages and community wage levels.

If Abbott concentrates on what is demonstrably right in his *AM* interview and proposes a fairer wages strategy for low income working families, he will have moved beyond the rhetoric about working families and promised some hope for the working families he rightly calls the 'new poor'.

After wonderland

POETRY

P. S. Cottier and Jeff Klooger

Alice looks back

Since furniture regained its proper size

and animals ceased to speak;

since teapots evicted rodents

and the Queen became so very *nice*

I find myself looking back

more and more and more.

Everything now is normaler and normaler,

and normalcy has its limitations.

I play patience, play it out,

wishing that the cards would rise

and assume that manic thinness,

that monarchy would lose itself

in ordering the loss of heads

for no known reason.

But we have assumed the robes,

the tight beige robes of logic.

Mathematics begets statistics,

measuring the mundane.

One day we'll hear again

of these parallel places,

rabbit holes or worm-holes,

and falls into other worlds.

For now, I corset myself in common-sense

and stuff memory into quotidian hats.

—*P. S. Cottier*

Tipping the balance

There are laws of shouldn't and laws of can't:

an apple falls if it wants to or not,

a careful driver keeps within the limit

though deadly speed lurks poised at the point of his toe.

Now suppose the world were topsy-turvy

and laws of must became mere laws of might
and vice versa. At secret diving pools

brash outlaws leap from towers,

twist and pike and pause mid-air

before returning to their perch to dive again

and never once to splash.

In lonely airport lounges tired businessmen dream

of a wondrous world where assignations

with women not their wives

bring frisson to their work-a-day lives.

Addicted to youth, the furtive few who refuse to age

move from town to town and change their names

to keep their frightful, selfish crime from public gaze.

Defying all conventions, freedom fighters

turn government bullets round mid-flight,

disarm all bombs at will, and lob grenades

through feet-thick solid walls.

Commuters, never late for work, buy train and tram tickets

because they must, and bully boys

who in some other world might have been transport cops
are left without a job at all, while weaklings,
not respecting strength, kick sand in the faces of muscle men.
Since no-one cheats and no-one steals and no-one kills
police and courts are left to catch and try
those who will not breathe or eat or never die; though
disrespect for prison rules means convicts stroll
through jail-house walls and keep the chasing hounds at bay
by choosing not to leave a scent.
Law-makers, whose power knows no bounds, resist the public calls
to make all arrogance and lies against the law.
No tax-evaders, no dole cheats; and only the law-abiding
need rug up against a winter's chill or shield themselves
from UV rays. A better world, you think?
But the world as it is is all we have:
the reckless and the powerful can flout all man-made laws,
while half the things that kill us can't be stopped.
Still, wondering costs nothing. To tip the balance back in dreams
is only human and feeds a hunger that shouldn'ts and can'ts
cannot assuage. This is a proper job for poetry;
while in our trudging, waking lives
we dine on the plodding prose of what we can and will.
—Jeff Klooger

Sympathy for Israel and Palestine

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

Public conversation about the military actions of Israel is always noisy and combative. Large statements of principle, contradictory telling of stories and *ad hominem* arguments make evaluation difficult. In reflecting on the [events](#) of the past week I found myself returning to my first visit to Israel over 30 years ago.



Before going to Israel, I had come to see for the first time the extent of the horror of the Holocaust, especially by reading many diaries and reflections of survivors. I was deeply sympathetic to all that the new State of Israel represented. My sympathy was heightened by the terrible events at the Lod Airport shortly before I arrived, and by the massacre at the Munich Games that took place during my visit.

I was deeply impressed by Muslims whom I met. As I waited at country bus stops, they often invited me to take coffee with them and revealed themselves as people of a deep local culture. I came to see that two peoples had claims, bound to history and to religion, to live on the same land. But it seemed likely that when a culture that values time as a space for meeting met a culture that values time as an opportunity for building, the latter would inevitably push out the former. My sympathy for the Palestinians grew.

On Mount Tabor (pictured), traditionally identified with the site of Jesus' Transfiguration, I saw that inherent in the State of Israel was a conflicting logic with a potential for tragedy.

The mountain looks out over a broad plain along which most of the invading armies of history with their spears, their horses, their chariots and their tanks, have made their way to and fro. The logic of the land is that possession is everything, and that possession is secured only by armed force. The logic of history is that over centuries armed powers wax and wane, and that alliances fade. A permanent presence on the land could be won only by a society based on generous values that made connections with surrounding peoples.

The conflicting demands of these two logics are the soil for tragedy.

Seen from this perspective all Israel's recent engagements with its neighbours seem to embody more and more forbiddingly the imperative of survival by virtue of armed force. The building of walls of separation, the extension of settlements on occupied Palestinian land, the unapologetic military strategies that exact a high civilian death toll, the restrictions of food and building supplies to Gaza, the demand for loyalty made of Palestinians living within Israel, the interception of unarmed ships carrying relief supplies, the use of passports bearing the names of citizens of friendly countries in order to carry out assassinations of foreign nationals

in other nations, might be all defended as strategies necessary for survival.

But these justifications themselves indicate an understanding of Israel as a people whose one goal is its own survival and which places no weight on values like moderation, compassion, brotherhood, negotiation, and respect for difference.

In the intermediate term there is no reason to believe that this single-minded focus on survival through superior military force will be ineffective. And it is impossible not to sympathise with people who put such a high value on their own survival and that of their families.

But the survival of a people is measured in centuries, not in a single lifetime. If the effective demonstration of superior force is such a dominant value, what will nurture the bonds and the values that promise Israel a continued existence when it depends on the good will of its neighbours? The ruined fortresses of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem bear witness that military power alone does not guarantee survival in the region.

Such broad considerations make it easy to be pessimistic about the future of Israel. But there are many signs of hope. The courts are incorruptible, and many Israeli thinkers demand more of Israel than do its foreign friends. They, rather than the generals, deserve our support.

Human Rights Act door still swinging

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



When the Rudd Government announced its Human Rights Framework in response to the National Human Rights Consultation, I described it as a welcome though incomplete addition to protection of human rights in Australia. Many human rights activists have been very despairing about the government's response. I am more sanguine. Let me explain.

Our report contained 31 recommendations, 17 of which did not relate to a Human Rights Act. We knew from the beginning that it would be a big ask for a Rudd style government to propose a Human Rights Act. After all, the Coalition was implacably opposed; the Government does not control the Senate; and the Labor Party is split on the issue with some of its old warhorses like Bob Carr being relentless in their condemnation of any enhanced judicial review of politicians.

Even though most people who participated in the consultation wanted a Human Rights Act and, more to the point, even though the majority of Australians randomly and objectively polled and quizzed favoured an Act, no major political party in the country is yet willing to relinquish unreviewable power in the name of human rights protection. So the 14 recommendations relating only to a Human Rights Act were put to one side.

This does not mean that the government has closed the door to further judicial review of legislation and policies contrary to human rights. In deciding not to open the door within a defined doorway (a Human Rights Act), the Government has just left the door swinging. How so?

In accordance with our Recommendation 17, the Government is putting in place a rights framework which operates on the assumption that the human rights listed in the seven key international human rights instruments signed voluntarily by Australia (including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) will be protected and promoted.

In accordance with Recommendations 6 and 7, Parliament will legislate to ensure that each new Bill introduced to Parliament, as well as delegated legislation subject to disallowance, is accompanied by a statement of compatibility attesting the extent to which it is compatible with the seven UN human rights treaties. Also Parliament will legislate to establish a parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights to scrutinise legislation for compliance with the UN instruments.

So the Executive and the Legislature cannot escape the dialogue about legislation's

compliance with UN human rights standards. Neither can the courts, because Parliament has already legislated that ‘in the interpretation of a provision of an Act, if any material not forming part of the Act is capable of assisting in the ascertainment of the meaning of the provision, consideration may be given to that material’. Parliament has provided that ‘the material that may be considered in the interpretation of a provision of an Act’ includes ‘any relevant report of a committee of the Parliament’ as well as ‘any relevant document that was laid before, or furnished to the members of, either House of the Parliament by a Minister before the time when the provision was enacted’.

When interpreting new legislation impacting on human rights in the light of these relevant documents from the Executive and from the Parliament, the courts will assuredly follow the course articulated by Chief Justice Murray Gleeson in one of the more controversial refugee cases of the Howard era.

Gleeson said: ‘[W]here legislation has been enacted pursuant to, or in contemplation of, the assumption of international obligations under a treaty or international convention, in cases of ambiguity a court should favour a construction which accords with Australia’s obligations.’ He added, ‘[C]ourts do not impute to the legislature an intention to abrogate or curtail fundamental rights or freedoms unless such an intention is clearly manifested by unmistakable and unambiguous language. General words will rarely be sufficient for that purpose.’

So even though there be no Human Rights Act, the courts are now to be drawn into the dialogue with the Executive and the Parliament about the justifiable limits of all future Commonwealth legislation in the light of the international human rights obligations set down in the seven key UN instruments.

That’s not all. The Government’s human rights framework notes that ‘the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977 enables a person aggrieved by most decisions made under federal laws to apply to a federal court for an order to review on various grounds, including that the decision maker failed to take into account a relevant consideration’.

Retired Federal Court Judge Ron Merkel in his submission to our inquiry pointed out that the High Court has already ‘recognised the existence of a requirement to treat Australia’s international treaty obligations as relevant considerations and, absent statutory or executive indications to the contrary, administrative decision makers are expected to act conformably with Australia’s international treaty obligations’.

Ultimately Australia will require a Human Rights Act to set workable limits on how far ajar the door of human rights protection should be opened by the judges in dialogue with the politicians.

We will have a few years now of the door flapping in the breeze as public servants decide how much content to put in the statements of compatibility; as parliamentarians decide how

much public transparency to accord the new committee processes; and as judges feel their way interpreting all laws consistent with the parliament's intention that all laws be in harmony with Australia's international obligations, including the UN human rights instruments, unless expressly stated to the contrary.

There is no turning back from the federal dialogue model of human rights protection.