



Christos Tsiolkas: 'It's my generation that I think is screwed up. They're selfish and hypocritical and that's what I want to reveal.'
Photograph: Paul McCarthy for the Guardian

It could be argued that he goes rather too far in the opposite direction – Harry's internal monologue, for example, is a litany of casual racism, female objectification and violence. "Yes, that is a critical response. You can never step over everybody's shoulder and say no no no you're misreading this. I feel that the novel is anchored by Manolis [the Greek patriarch], and by the teenage Connie and Richie [her gay best friend]. These are two generations that offer an optimism. Manolis is my father's generation. He espouses values and beliefs that are outrageous. But he does have a system of honour and I wish we could create a language for it. Also Richie and Connie – I'm sure it happens in the UK – young people are really demonised in the Australian media, but I find that they negotiate relationships now in a way that I find really admirable. There is an acceptance of difference. It's my generation that I think is screwed up. They're selfish, and hypocritical, and that's what I want to reveal.

"But even someone like Harry" – who not only slaps the child, but turns his violence on his wife as well – "can we extend forgiveness there? That was the question that was prominent for me when I was writing him." What was he like to write? A silence. "You know, I've got to say that he was easy, and that scares me. And also – he's in a way the most – upfront? He's the least hypocritical of the characters in

terms of how his interior works." Tsiolkas used as his template a friend from school, also a tradesman like Harry, who admitted that when he was younger "he and his mates would go with baseball and cricket bats and bash poofters. And I remember feeling outrage and shock – I was feeling very ra-ra queer politics at the time – but I thought also – 'He's come and he's said sorry.'" I remember thinking, 'Do I condemn him for ever, or do I try that rapprochement' – and I'm glad I did."

Surely the risk for him, when so many of his characters express such casual misogyny, is that it should rebound on the author; hence the comments from people like Knight. Tsiolkas flushes, and rubs his head. "I would call them lazy readers. I think they are confusing the writer with the character. I think there's a laziness now in how we read. We read for confirmation of who we are, rather than for a challenge of who we are."

He believes this applies particularly to a certain kind of middle-class liberal instinct which, crucially, he shares. "I'm a child of the politics of feminism but because of that I ... I really fear the smugness that can come out of being a middle-class person with a particular education" – is it telling that he often elides class with feminism? I'm not sure – "Our smugness is really dangerous. What it's done is dumbed us down, in terms of how we respond to the questions of the age. I

just have not heard the left-leaning parties in my country or your country actually able to deal with the questions of immigration at all, for example." His own aim is entirely clear: "I think that if I can make middle-class readers angry that is a good thing to do."

As for the boxes the women in his novel occupy – they are cheated on, objectified; if they sleep with many men they describe themselves as sluts, the high-flying career woman has an abortion so that she can write a novel; they do all the cooking, Harry's wife, Sandi, in particular is all submission – "it's a work of imagination, so I wasn't necessarily writing about my immediate world. Because my immediate world is filled with women and men who are queer parents, lesbian mothers – but I was writing about the kind of world that I've observed through my cousins, that I've observed through my work-colleagues, over the fence at the neighbours – does that make sense?"

The Slap was written "in a very bleak time" – during the ascendancy of Pauline Hanson and One Nation politics, during the premiership of John Howard; hence the pervading anger which, he readily concedes, is his as much as it is the characters. "I feel really ashamed of my country. It is awful to feel ashamed of the only country I have." Does the anger have to spill so much into personal relationships? There is not much love – the answer this time is sharp, and immediate. "That's absolutely not true. There are moments of real tenderness. It's not a romantic love because it's not a romantic book. A lot of elitist assumptions are made about the way people read Bridget Jones' Diary, or watch Sex and the City – but actually there's a bourgeois audience that reads for exactly the same reasons, and the books they're reading are not, in the end, very different in terms of the superficiality of the romantic assumptions that underlie them. I've explained why I feel bleak, but I feel there's real love in that novel."

*Article from The Guardian
by Aida Edemariam*

Coca-Cola Amatil boss backs immigration

Australia's reputation benefits from immigration, and entry requirements should be reviewed to make it easier for employers to train overseas staff here, beverages firm Coca-Cola Amatil Ltd says.

Group managing director Terry Davis said on Wednesday that immigration was "a good thing for the country".

Mr Davis said Greek and Italian migrants of 50 years ago had added enormous benefit to Australian society.

"You'd hate to lose that view that we're not an open and embracing culture and an open and embracing society," Mr Davis told reporters after addressing an Australian Institute of Company Directors luncheon in Melbourne.

"What should be the level of immigration is another debate.

"That would depend on the whole range of circumstances in terms of the country to absorb so many people at the same time."

In his address, Mr Davis referred to Coca-Cola Amatil wanting to bring in Indonesian employees to Australia for training but having to pay them much higher Australian salaries.

He said this was not financially justifiable.

"We've got to have a more flexible visa program," Mr Davis told reporters.

He said more flexibility was needed on matters such as the length of stay and the definition of training.

"We need to 'skill up' our neighbours," he said.

"What about all these overseas students that do come here, and in 10 to 15 years' time are in very senior positions overseas?"

"Don't they have a good attitude about Australia? Isn't that what we want?"

Mr Davis acknowledged that no system would be perfect or immune from abuse such as some overseas students training for "hairdressing degrees".

"I don't think you shoot the whole program of the majority of students who go to recognised universities to get recognised degrees," he said.

Mr Davis said overseas students subsidised Australian universities.

Also, as a prospective employer, he wanted the best talent coming through universities, no matter where they're from.

"Do we really not want the brightest and best that come out of Vietnam or come out of China?" he said.

"How are we really going to advance Australia unless we are prepared to say we've got an open mind about talent?"

In answer to a question from his audience on whether he thought it should be easy for overseas students studying here for a university degree to obtain Australian citizenship, Mr Davis said: "Yes, I do."

Mr Davis was also asked what had caught his attention during the current federal election campaign.

"All I look for out of whichever government comes to power is 'no surprise management'," he said.

"I think that what we've seen, and the danger of what politics has become in this country, is the one-upmanship ... the risk is that we end up with poor policies."

Article from the Sydney Morning Herald

NSW SET TO REFORM CLASS ACTION LAWS

The NSW Government announced it plans to introduce new laws to clarify rules surrounding class actions. Class actions, also known as representative proceedings, are lawsuits involving a large number of people with similar legal claims who join together to sue a person or organisation. NSW Attorney General, John Hatzistergos said existing court rules in this State do not provide clear guidelines as to who may commence a class action, in what circumstances, and other issues such as settlement of proceedings, costs, and appeals.

"The NSW Government intends to model the draft legislation on Federal and Victorian laws which provide a comprehensive set of rules on these issues and for each step of a class action," Mr Hatzistergos said.

"This approach will have a number of benefits for the NSW justice system.

"Firstly, it will eliminate the lack of clarity in current NSW court rules which may be discouraging potential litigants from pursuing legitimate class actions.

"Reducing uncertainty may also cut legal costs and court time currently involved in pursuing a class action in NSW.

"Secondly, the Federal and Victorian laws have proven to be a successful model and NSW courts will be able to draw on that experience.

"Finally, having uniform procedures within the major commercial courts in Australia will minimise confusion among litigants," he said.

Mr Hatzistergos also said the laws would make improvements recommended in the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2008 Civil Justice Review and the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department's 2009 Access to Justice Report.

"Taking these reviews into account, the NSW legislation will give the Supreme Court the power to order that unclaimed damages from a successful class action be distributed to a charity of public interest beneficiary," Mr Hatzistergos said.

"It may not always be possible to locate all members of a class action and in these circumstances the funds could be put to their next best use, rather than being returned to the party or company that was sued in the class action."

Mr Hatzistergos said the NSW Government continues to encourage alternative dispute resolution instead of court proceedings. "However as class actions are an important vehicle for improving access to justice, particularly for people who cannot afford to pursue a case on their own, it is also important to have clarity in the law when class actions do proceed," he said.

The Government will release a draft of the Bill along with a discussion paper for public consultation later this year.

*Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
Minister for Industrial Relations*