

A tale of rights and wrongs:  
Stories and storytelling on the issue of asylum  
seeker boat arrivals to Australia

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## **Declaration of authorship**

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work. All sources and any assistance received in preparing this thesis have been acknowledged.

Mai Hansford  
23 February 2017

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## Abstract

This thesis examines stories and storytelling about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia in 2009–2011. It aims to answer the question ‘Who gets to be heard?’ on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. And further, ‘What stories are told about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals?’. In order to explore these broad questions, research is undertaken in three different sites and focuses on two key incidents. The first site is with members of an activist public advocating for change to Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers. These stories are collected in interviews. The second site is the practices and published newspaper articles of journalists in the media industry. The final site is in a space in between, a site where the activists produce media releases to offer the group’s stories for inclusion in media portrayals.

The logic that underpins the examination of the stories in the three sites in this study is the marriage of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Bormann 1982) – to understand the stories and storytelling processes – with theories from public relations, social movements and media studies specific to individual sites, supporting an exploration of how the stories have emerged in each. In addition, theories of power and hegemony are deployed to examine the relationships between the stories from the different sites. The key finding identifies a national story that dominates in the newspaper articles. However, the thesis also discerns key alternative stories that emerge from the activists’ individual and public relations storytelling. Framing both the dominant national and the alternative stories are engagements with a history of racism, Australian nationalism and facticity (the idea of what constitutes a fact). Despite the marked differences in the stories told by activists and media, their underlying drivers are similar. The thesis illustrates the common yet different use of themes of history, righteousness and connectedness in the three sites.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is 31 October 2016. The Australian media are awash with the news that the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, has announced that his coalition government will introduce legislation in parliament to impose a ‘lifetime ban’ on those who travel by boat to Australia to seek asylum. Regardless of whether and where these asylum seekers finally settle in the world, they will not be allowed to enter Australia on a visitor, work, student or spouse visa – ever.

This announcement is acclaimed by some in the newly constituted Senate.<sup>1</sup> One forceful advocate for this position is Senator Pauline Hanson, who says that it is ‘good to see that it looks like the Government is now taking its cues from One Nation. Just like the last time’<sup>2</sup> (Hanson, cited in Conifer 2016), a reference to the history of the issue in Australia. Hanson, the head of the Pauline Hanson One Nation party, declares that ‘Refugees are not welcome here’ (AAP 2016), extending the remit of the proposed legislation to all refugees in all circumstances. The Labor opposition is less than enthusiastic about the proposal. Its leader calls it ‘a desperate measure by a desperate government’ (Bill Shorten, cited in McIlroy 2016). In response, the Minister for Immigration, Peter Dutton, uses former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s declaration in 2013 to support the Coalition’s stance: Rudd had declared that ‘From now on any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat has no chance of being settled in Australia as [a] refugee(s)’. Indeed, to underline this assertion of bipartisanship the new legislation is to be retrospective, to take effect from the date of Rudd’s announcement on 19 July 2013 (Hunter & Koziol 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> The Turnbull government was returned to office (with a one seat majority in the House of Representatives) in a double dissolution election in July 2016. The Senate was elected at the same time and the composition of the cross-bench (those not belonging to the two major parties, Liberal-National Coalition and Labor) altered to return the Pauline Hanson One Nation Party to parliament with four senators.

<sup>2</sup> Here Hanson is referring to her last stint in the Australian parliament (1996–1998) and the shift in the then Howard government’s asylum seeker policies at that time, said to be in response to Hanson’s electoral support (Marr 2011).

The words that leap off the pages of the daily newspapers at this time are ‘tough’, ‘clear message’, ‘criminal gangs of people smugglers’ and ‘deterrence’. The Immigration Minister declares it a necessary policy change for ‘national security’ and claims he expects the Labor opposition to support it. This language about asylum seeker arrivals, and the policies and sentiments behind it, builds on a long and chequered history of politics and communication about asylum seeker boat arrivals in Australia. Over many decades – with connections back to Australia’s refusal to allow Jewish refugees to enter the country in the 1930s – this issue has maintained its potency in public debate in Australia (see e.g. Gale 2004; Grewcock 2009; Kampmark 2006; Marr 2011). Minister Dutton’s reference to Rudd’s declaration harkens back to the time that the specific context for this thesis emerged – during the Labor governments in 2007–2013 – a time that saw the reignition of the issue on the media and political agendas, a reignition fuelled by the return appearance of greater numbers of asylum seekers arriving to Australia<sup>3</sup> by boat, mostly from Indonesia.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis examines the stories and storytelling about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia in 2009–2011. It does this by focussing on two incidents – one in 2009 and one in 2010 – that occurred during the terms of the former Labor government. These incidents are the ‘standoff at Merak’ and the ‘Christmas Island boat tragedy’.

## **SECTION 1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In its exploration of stories and storytelling this thesis aims to answer the question ‘Who gets to be heard?’ on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia – and further, ‘What stories are told about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals?’. In order to explore these broad questions, research is undertaken in three different sites, focussing on these two key incidents. The three sites are members of an

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<sup>3</sup> I use ‘to Australia’ throughout this thesis rather than ‘in Australia’. ‘To Australia’ encapsulates the migration zone exclusion and Australia’s practices of offshore detention, implying the barriers asylum seekers experience when attempting to enter the country (see Chapter 4).

<sup>4</sup> From 1996 to 2007 (inclusive), the period of the Howard government, 13,663 asylum seekers arrived to Australia by boat, with only 449 of these in the latter years 2002–2007. Between 2008 and 2009, the second and third years of the Rudd Labor government, the numbers arriving jumped from 161 to 2726 (Phillips 2015a, 2015b).

activist public advocating for change to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers; the practices of journalists in the media industry when they represent the issue to the Australian people; and a space in between, where the activists produce media releases to offer the group's stories for inclusion in media portrayals.

Telling stories is part of the human condition (Bormann 1985a; Fisher 1999). Humans interpret events in terms of human actions and characters, weaving these into stories or fantasies as we make sense of what we experience or observe in our world – we are *homo narrans* (Bormann 1985a; Fisher 1985, 1999; Vasquez 1993). As Alasdair MacIntyre (cited in Fisher 1999, p. 266) observes, 'man [sic] is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal'. Throughout this thesis I use the term 'story' as it is conceptualised in Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Bormann 1983, 1985a). 'Stories' are, therefore, understood as the storytellers' accounts of experiences, claims, beliefs or fears (Bormann 1985a), including (although not limited to) personal narration. Storytelling is a meaning-making process for both the teller and the listener/reader – it is a way of creating a shared understanding. This storytelling occurs in diverse contexts, from face-to-face communication to the stories produced by journalists and public relations practitioners and told via media organs such as newspapers and the media releases that inform them. By extension, the activists interviewed for this thesis are storytellers who narrate their stories, in interviews and media releases, as are the journalists who write articles about asylum seekers. Although SCT and its associated method (Fantasy Theme Analysis) have been utilised in a number of studies, particularly in the US (e.g., Bormann, Cragan & Shields 1996; Bormann, Koester & Bennett 1978; Duffy 1997; Endres 1994), as far as I have been able to determine it is novel to this issue and to Australian research.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> To check my own research on this point I consulted Professor John Cragan, one of the three key proponents of SCT. In the bibliography that he has compiled of studies referring to SCT (1970–2014), only one mentions Australia, but it does not use SCT (only mentions its relationship to the theory used by the author), and none investigates asylum seeker stories.

## **SECTION 2. THE THREE STORYTELLING SITES**

The logic that underpins the examination of the stories in the three sites in this study is the marriage of SCT – to understand the stories and storytelling processes – with theories that are specific to the individual sites, exploring how the rhetorical visions (found in the stories) have emerged in each. Unlike most studies about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia – which examine discourse in the parliamentary or media arenas (e.g., Every & Augoustinos 2007, 2008b; Klocker & Dunn 2003; Pickering 2001) – the first site for this study is an activist group, the Refugee Action Coalition NSW (hereafter the RAC), a small activist public located in Sydney, Australia. A further question that arises in relation to RAC, and is addressed in Chapter 5, is whether the stories and storytelling about asylum seekers demonstrate a group consciousness (Bormann 1983, 1985a; Bormann, Knutson & Musolf 1997) within the RAC on the issue. In addressing this question, I combine SCT with theories about public formation from the public relations literature, and theories of motivation for collective action from the social movement literature. This marriage of theories informs my exploration of the stories and storytelling and their influence on the activists' drive for social action on the issue.

The second site is the in between space created by the production of media releases by the RAC. The RAC produces and distributes these media releases to the Australian media in order to participate in public debate on this issue in this forum. I identify this as public relations work. Therefore, in Chapter 6, where I analyse the media releases, I combine SCT with theories about public relations that specifically address the role of media releases as well as the concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1989) for the context of this participation. A further question that arises in this site concerns the relationship between those powerful and political stories identified in the interviews with RAC members and the RAC's public communication on the issue in these media releases – that is, does the group consciousness expressed in the interviews appear in the RAC media releases about the issue?

The third site is the traditional, or 'legacy', media, specifically the newspaper industry. As a complex space that expresses an array of sources, practices and influences, the media system is explored in three chapters in this thesis. Drawing on articles published on the issue of asylum seeker arrivals, in Chapter 7 I ask what prominence the issue has on the media agenda, who gets to speak in these newspaper articles, and how the issue is framed by the ways in which journalists practice their craft. I deploy theories of power (Lukes 1974), agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw 1972) and hegemony (Gramsci 1971) to explore this element of the study. In Chapter 8 I extend my analysis of how the stories emerge in this third site by examining journalism types and story forms as further cultural patterns in media storytelling. In Chapter 9 I again use SCT, this time to uncover the stories in the media articles in the study, many of which coalesce around questions rather than positions on the issue.

This is also a study of contemporary rhetoric (Burke 1968, 1973; Heath, Toth & Waymer 2009). Three key concepts I employ to deepen my analysis are race, Australian nationalism (and values) and facticity, as they relate to asylum seekers. Stories and storytellers in the different sites exhibit these analytic categories in different ways. In regard to race, stories about asylum seekers are intrinsically stories about racialised 'others'. Australia has a long history of racist policies and practices towards 'outsiders', as well as 'insiders' (Indigenous Australians). Race is used in this thesis as an analytic category to examine the storytelling in all three sites. In the case of the activist stories, RAC members link Australia's current actions to these past practices, as well as to international stories of racial persecution such as the rejection of Jewish asylum seekers during World War II. The trajectory of Australia's history of racism, discrimination and immigration has shifted from exclusion to assimilation to integration to multiculturalism. However, this has not been a smooth nor a universally accepted transition. This is reflected in stories about Australia's history of immigration controls and stories explicitly about multiculturalism, including its repudiation, in the media articles in this study.

A second analytic category that is deployed throughout this study is that of Australian nationalism. Australian nationalism, as with many other nationalisms, works to produce a sense of shared culture and identity about what it means to be Australian (Elder 2007). Australian nationalism has been linked to ideas of race and, as a result, operates on a powerful logic of exclusion (Walker 2012). In this thesis, nationalism is used to understand how the storytellers, particularly in the media articles, talk about sovereignty and security and how they use it, like racism, to evoke notions of control, in this case over Australia's borders and those who breach them. Nationalism appears in tension with internationalism – in its relationship to global people movements, in the relationship between Australia and international bodies such as the United Nations, in reference to Australia's international obligations and reputation, and in relation to other countries in the region. Facts are a further category used to analyse stories throughout this thesis. Using the idea of facticity, I recognise the constructedness of the fact category and its malleability. Different stories and storytellers offer facts about asylum seeker boat arrivals and Australia's treatment of them. International and national laws are also understood as facts by the different storytellers, as are demographic information and records of past statements and policies. This category often appears in the context of values, where selected facts – and their relationship to 'truth' – are presented to add legitimacy to value positions. Therefore, in the fact category, facts and values can appear in tandem and in tension.

Spanning these three sites, this study captures not only different stories and storytellers, but also the storytelling processes in which they engage, in an interconnecting communication process. As noted, the focus on whether and how activists' storytelling is constructed and appears in the media is innovative, as these contributions to the public sphere are often overlooked in studies about this issue. This addition is significant because, as public communication scholar Kristen Demetrious (2013, p. 13) says, 'activism is a critical site for interpreting the cultural complexity and power relations of public relations', and, I would add, for critiquing the newsmaking practices in journalism and media industries that contribute to the functioning of the public sphere (Habermas 1989, 2006). Issues of power arise as I

discuss the relationships between the stories in the three sites in this study. It is particularly pertinent when analysing the ways in which power (Lukes 1974) is performed and hegemony (Gramsci 1971) effected in the selection and exclusion of stories in these newspapers. As Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranak and Janet Chan (1989, p. 3) assert, 'News is a representation of authority'. Thus, news construction goes to questions of representation, power and the role of the media in the public sphere. The storytellers in the three sites do not have equal access to the power to affect Australians' perceptions of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals and thus to affect the lives of those seeking a haven from persecution in Australia.

Emerging from the analysis across the sites are three key concepts or themes that have been identified as points of reference used to frame these stories about asylum seekers. The first theme is the idea of resonance and history. History is represented as a key agent in these stories, often alongside claims to credibility or the tendering of facts. Critical histories evoked include Australia's colonialism and its prejudicial policies towards non-white peoples. Two ways in which race and history intersect refer to this colonial history. The first is in reference to 'outsiders' – the 'external other' – whose arrival is controlled by policies explicitly excluding non-white peoples from immigrating to Australia, known as the White Australia Policy (Cooper 2012). This is a remnant of Australia's colonial past. The second way in which Australia's colonial history is told concerns colonial violence against Indigenous Australians – the 'internal other' – and the re-enactment of this violence in Australia's treatment of asylum seekers. After history, a second powerful theme is righteousness, which is the sense of what the principled course of action is. It underpins the storytelling of the activists, and the storytelling by many sources cited by journalists in their articles. This righteousness is evident in appeals to what is 'right' and 'good' in the conflicting positions taken on this issue. Connectedness is another important theme and is expressed in stories about a common humanity and humanitarianism. It appears most strikingly in the RAC's storytelling about asylum seekers, but also plays a minor role in the newspaper articles – both the RAC and the journalist storytellers use evocative human interest stories to encourage readers to connect with what

asylum seekers experience, hope and think. However, this connectedness also appears as a repudiation of the interrelatedness of human experience when asylum seekers are characterised, historically and currently, as 'others', different and apart.

### SECTION 3. THE INCIDENTS

As noted, it is the storytelling about two significant incidents that animates this study. The first, the standoff at Merak, occurs alongside a new era in asylum seeker boat arrivals under the Rudd Labor government, marking a change in government<sup>6</sup>, arrival numbers, policy and communication about the issue. The second, the Christmas Island boat tragedy, features a more immediate and significant level of tragedy than the first. Together, these two incidents provide a rich focus for the storytelling on the asylum seeker issue. The standoff at Merak begins on 16 October 2009 with a request from Indonesian authorities for Australia to send a vessel, the *MV Oceanic Viking*, to rescue 78 asylum seekers from a boat in distress in Indonesia's Search and Rescue zone<sup>7</sup>. On the orders of Prime Minister Rudd, the *Oceanic Viking* takes its passengers to the Indonesian port of Merak. Within days another vessel, an Indonesian fishing boat called the *KM Jaya Lestari 5*, is turned back from its journey to Australia by the Indonesian Navy (at Rudd's request) and is also directed to Merak (Gartrell 2010; Neilson 2010). The Tamil asylum seekers from Sri Lanka<sup>8</sup> on board both vessels<sup>9</sup> refuse to disembark in Indonesia, instead insisting that they be taken to Australia. This creates a standoff between the asylum seekers, the Rudd Labor government and the Indonesian authorities.

This standoff at Merak signals a change in Labor policy and, most noteworthy for this study, in storytelling on the issue. After it took office in 2007, the Rudd government dismantled John Howard's 'Pacific Solution', which had seen asylum seekers who

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<sup>6</sup> Labor won government in 2007 from the long-term Coalition government led by Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007).

<sup>7</sup> Thirteen Maritime Search and Rescue Zones are allocated to coastal states around the world under a convention administered by the International Maritime Organization, a special body of the United Nations (International Maritime Organization 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Just 10 days before the first incident, Australia had suspended its processing of all new asylum claims from Sri Lankan and Afghan arrivals (Neilson 2010).

<sup>9</sup> There were 78 Tamils taken aboard the *Oceanic Viking* and 254 aboard the *Jaya Lestari 5*.



arrive to Australia by boat 'processed' in offshore detention centres. At the time, this dismantling of the Pacific Solution was made 'to Liberal applause' (Farr 2009a).<sup>10</sup> With the marked increase in boat arrivals in 2009, the opposition coalition took the opportunity to condemn Rudd for being 'soft' on asylum seekers, comparing numbers of boats, deaths, and children in detention under the Howard and Rudd governments and lauding Howard's comparative 'success' in deterring boat arrivals.

The second incident, the Christmas Island boat tragedy, occurs on 15 December 2010. An Indonesian fishing vessel, the *Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) 221*, strikes rocks and is destroyed off the coast of Australia's Christmas Island to the far north-west of mainland Australia.<sup>11</sup> Of the asylum seekers on board, it is estimated that more than 50 drown. The Australian residents of Christmas Island witness the scenes as the boat flounders and is destroyed off the rocks, with many residents trying to help asylum seekers to shore. The examination of the stories and storytelling about this incident includes the Sydney funerals of some of the victims, held on 15 February 2011, which attract considerable media and political interest.

The second incident differs markedly from the first. The first point of difference is that it is a catastrophe with many lives lost – a human disaster – in contrast to the standoff, which is a policy and international relations dilemma. A second point of difference is in the recasting of political characters in the stories and storytelling in the 14 months between the two incidents. Prime Minister Rudd is replaced in June 2010 by his deputy, Julia Gillard,<sup>12</sup> while Malcolm Turnbull is replaced as leader of the opposition by Tony Abbott shortly after the standoff.<sup>13</sup> These recastings, and the circumstances in which they occur, not only bring different characters to the fore but also presage changes in policy positions, and rhetoric, about asylum seekers. The third point of

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<sup>10</sup> During Howard's tenure, his harsh policies towards asylum seekers are tempered by a public outcry over children in detention, errors in detaining and deporting Australian citizens (Cornelia Rau and Vivian Solon) and earlier contretemps such as the *Tampa* incident, which attracts international attention and condemnation (see Chapter 4 for information about this incident).

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 7, Map 7.1, for location of Christmas Island.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Gillard becomes the first female Australian Prime Minister after an internal 'coup' to unseat sitting Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

<sup>13</sup> These new leaders continue in their positions after the federal election held in August 2010 (and during the second incident), with a minority Labor government installed in a 'hung' parliament.

difference lies in the source countries from which most asylum seekers come to Australia. The asylum seekers on the two boats involved in the standoff are Tamils fleeing persecution in Sri Lanka. In contrast, at the time of the boat tragedy the asylum seekers are coming from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, countries affected by Australia's participation in the international coalition engaged in the wars in their region.

A fourth difference is in the visibility of the incidents to the Australian people. At Merak, and in remote detention centres in Australia, asylum seekers are out of sight of the Australian media. This has been a deliberate policy of successive governments (Phillips & Spinks 2013). In contrast, the boat tragedy occurs in full view of Australians on Christmas Island. Many asylum seekers have lost their lives on their journeys to Australia, but this is the first sighting by ordinary Australians of such losses and the event traumatises many who witness it. In addition, footage of the disaster is captured and broadcast by the Australian and world media, thus also allowing Australian viewers on the mainland to see the carnage. Consequently, in the second incident the asylum seekers are no longer 'faceless'. These changes alter the ways in which the actors in the three sites – the storytellers – curate and narrate their stories about asylum seekers.

#### **SECTION 4. ON THE LITERATURE**

This study builds on a substantial body of research about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. The focus of this body of research, and this thesis, is a category of people known, technically and colloquially, as asylum seekers. Despite the term's unambiguous definition in the United Nations *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (hereafter *Refugee Convention*) (UNHCR 2011b), the conceptual characterisations of 'asylum seeker' in public discourse in Australia and around the Western world are diverse and are explored in a number of studies. As Green says about the use of the concept, particularly after the events of 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, it has 'struck a nerve in academia' (2003, p. 7). Australian studies have investigated parliamentary discourse on the issue (e.g., Every &

Augoustinos 2007, 2008a; Rowe & O'Brien 2014), newspaper discourse (e.g., Gale 2004; Kampmark 2006; Klocker & Dunn 2003; McKay, Thomas & Blood 2011; Pickering 2001), government documents (e.g., Brennan 2003; Grewcock 2009; Kampmark 2006; Klocker & Dunn 2003) and public attitudes (e.g., McKay, Thomas & Kneebone 2011). The stories of asylum seekers themselves are not present in these studies, nor in this thesis, except insofar as the activists and the journalists include them in their storytelling – it is the storytelling *about* asylum seekers and asylum seeking that is the focus of this study.

The term 'asylum seeker' has also been examined in Australia and internationally for its intersecting representations as a racialised construct (e.g., Every & Augoustinos 2007; Every & Augoustinos 2008a; Gale 2004; Grewcock 2009; Kampmark 2006; McKay, Thomas & Kneebone 2011; Rowe & O'Brien 2014), in relation to securitisation and risk to the border security and immigration control paradigm of nation states (e.g., Every 2008; Every & Augoustinos 2008a; Kampmark 2006; O'Doherty & Augoustinos 2008; Rowe & O'Brien 2014; Taylor 2015), as deviant and an out-group/other (e.g., Green 2003; Klocker & Dunn 2003; Masocha 2015; Pickering 2001; Rowe & O'Brien 2014), as legitimate/illegitimate, genuine/bogus and legal/illegal (e.g., Bohmer & Schuman 2007; Klocker & Dunn 2003; Nicholls 1998; Rowe & O'Brien 2014), in reference to terror, fear and threat (e.g., Bradimore & Bauder 2011; Klocker & Dunn 2003; McKay, Thomas & Blood 2011), as well as to hospitality and humanitarianism (e.g., Every 2008; Taylor 2015).

The construct of the asylum seeker is predominantly investigated in the scholarly literature for its negative portrayals and perceptions (Masocha 2015), including a preponderance of binary representations (Pickering 2001). Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud (2015), referring to research into the news coverage of 'irregular migration' in the US, France and Norway, found that extremes with similar arguments appeared across the countries studied. He says that 'Similar slogans, arguments, and standpoints seem to pop up in the news from country to country' (2015, p. 773). These trends are reflected in Australia – they are the politicisation of irregular immigration, 'strange bedfellows' in the political spectrum on the issue, and political

initiatives to curb these arrivals (Thorbjørnsrud 2015, p. 773). The similarity identified by Thorbjørnsrud exists despite varying conditions, including the legal status of asylum seekers. The application of the term itself is often questioned in media portrayals; for example, there are frequent implications and assertions that those who come to Australia may be 'economic migrants' (Every & Augoustinos 2008b; Kampmark 2006; McKay, Thomas & Blood 2011) rather than fleeing persecution. In addition, there are some studies that analyse the discourse of those who attempt to challenge the dominance of negative portrayals (e.g., Every & Augoustinos 2008a, 2008b). This study contributes to this latter, small group of studies. The inclusion of the two activist sites, along with the media site, extends the focus to a broader canvas for understanding storytelling processes in the public sphere.

In the following chapters I review the literature relevant to this study (Chapter 2) and the theory and methodology that form its scaffolding (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I provide the background to the issue of asylum seeker arrivals to Australia to create contexts for the incidents and the stories about them. Chapters 5 and 6 report and discuss the stories and storytelling on the issue by the activist members of the RAC in interviews and group media releases. In chapters 7, 8 and 9, I analyse the emergence and substance of the media articles in the three newspapers in the study. In chapters 7 and 8, I explore the storytelling processes in the media industry that generate the stories then analysed in Chapter 9. In the tenth and final chapter I discuss the implications of the findings from the three sites and the relationships between them.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION: STORYTELLING ABOUT ASYLUM SEEKERS**

This chapter sets out the principal literature relevant to this thesis. It is organised in five sections and addresses the key theories and research relevant to the three sites examined in this study. The first and second sections present theories relevant to all three sites. The first section addresses theories of power, hegemony, representation and communication. The second section focuses on the storytelling literature that informs the study. The third, fourth and fifth sections examine in turn the literature relevant to each of the three different sites where the storytelling occurs – that is, the storytellers on this issue. In the third section, with the activist public, the RAC, I explore the literature on the formation of publics. In the fourth, in relation to the media releases the RAC produces and distributes to the media, I consider the public sphere, civil society, and public relations. In the fifth section, for the media articles in the three newspapers in the study, I review relevant theories about the construction of news, agenda setting, framing, gatekeeping and sources.

### **SECTION 1: POWER AND COMMUNICATION**

#### **1.1 Power and hegemony**

Power has a performative role in the construction of dominant discourses on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. It is a process that is relational and ubiquitous: it functions in relations among different disciplines, institutions, bureaucracies and other entities and groups within the state (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 2000, p. 71). Michel Foucault characterises the question of power as both a theoretical enquiry and ‘a part of our experience’ (1982, p. 779). He suggests that a new economy of power relations ‘consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point’ (1982, p. 780). Following Foucault, advocating for asylum seekers in Australia is a form of resistance. For Foucault, competing discourses and resistance maintain power’s fluidity (1986, p. 234).

Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato & Jen Webb (2000, p. 68) contend that one of the most important of Foucault's insights about power is 'that it is more effective when it is hidden from view'. This is consistent both with Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Allan 2010b; Femia 2005; Forgacs 2000; Gramsci 1971) and with the notion of self-surveillance or censorship as it applies to public relations and journalism. Hegemony allows those who are dominant in society to use the means available to convince citizens that, for example, policies about asylum seeker boat arrivals are in their interests – that is, hegemony is what James Watson describes as 'rule by won consent' (1998, p. 19). The expression of power through self-surveillance or censorship is evident in public relations practices that adhere to 'newsworthiness' principles (Gillman 2015; Newsom & Haynes 2014) in order to create the best opportunity for the proffered story to be published in the desired news medium (see Section 5.2 in this chapter for further discussion). I argue that activist publics that follow these principles are self-censoring when they produce their media releases. In addition, the journalists who author the media articles in this study are employed by media institutions – News Corp and Fairfax – that have processes and policies in place to determine 'what is news' (see Section 5.2). However, it is not just about ownership and institutional processes. A further expression of this form of power is in the cultural norms that govern journalism as an occupation. This focus on processes is evident in John Fiske's (1993) explanation of the workings of power. Fiske says that power is

diffused throughout society rather than imposed by one class upon another. Power, then, is a systematic set of predations upon people which works to ensure the maintenance of the social order... and ensure its smooth running. It is therefore in the interests of those who benefit most from this social order to cooperate with this power system and to lubricate its mechanisms (1993, p. 11).

Despite the effectiveness of Foucault's theories of power, this thesis draws instead on a pragmatic theory of power that specifically addresses this 'systematic set of predations'. Steven Lukes's (1974, 1986, 2005) instrumental approach to power offers analytic tools for this research, as it helps explain how aspects of power

contribute to the achievement of goals (Lenski 1984). Lukes (1974) argues that there are one-, two- and three-dimensional forms of power. Lukes' own model is what he calls the three-dimensional 'face' of power in which he incorporates aspects of the first and second dimensions of power and addresses their limitations.

The first dimension refers to power in the hands of those who make decisions in the face of contrary preferences by others (Lukes 1974, p. 11). This dimension is limited to observable behaviour, conscious initiation and explicit decision making and does not take account of power exercised to confine those decisions to particular options, those that are 'safe' (Bachrach & Baratz, cited in Richardson 2006b, p. 30). The second dimension of power introduces agenda setting (see Section 5.3 of this chapter for explanation) and informal measures of influence that are particularly relevant for analyses of journalism and media texts; it adds to the notion of power the means to mobilise bias in the political process (Lukes 1974) with the exclusion, inclusion and prominence of particular stories and frames. Like the first dimension, it is behaviouristic in orientation. Lukes contends that there are structural biases in the system that 'can be mobilised, recreated and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individuals' choices' (1974, p. 21), as implied by the second dimension. In the third dimension in his model, Lukes agrees that the 'bias of the system' is sustained by individually chosen acts but, most importantly, he further asserts that it is 'by the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' inaction' (1974, p. 22) that this can be seen as a systemic phenomenon. Lukes's model proposes that those with power can employ it to modify beliefs and desires in order to secure others' compliance despite their interests – consistent with Gramsci's hegemony (1971, 2006, 2007). It incorporates sociocultural aspects such as norms, values, ideals and ideologies (Lukes 1974, 1986) that contribute to the performance of this power.

By locating these practices of power, Lukes's model may also uncover hegemony accomplished through media discourse and supported or contested by the public relations practices of the activist public in this study. The motivation to locate

practices of power arises when this identification pinpoints a point, place or practice where outcomes can be affected through support or resistance (Lukes 1986, p. 15). This resistance, and the urge to 'make a difference', resonates with Hannah Arendt's contention that 'power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert' (1986, p. 64). Activist publics act in concert to try to effect change. The RAC directs its public relations work to mobilise Australians to resist and counter dominant discourse on this issue in Australia.

## **1.2 Representation and communication theories**

A second key set of theories upon which this work is grounded, and to which it contributes, is the interrelated theories of representation and communication. Stuart Hall (1997) has been a central figure in the development of this field, arguing that visual, written and spoken languages are systems of representation. Representation is understood as 'both the process and the product of media texts' (Bainbridge, Goc & Tynan 2015, p. 230) in this thesis. These systems of representation comprise signs that evoke or capture meanings that readers attribute to them. Signs are anything that can be made to 'stand for', or represent, something else (Peirce 1960; Saussure 1966) – in this sense, 'meaning is based on relationships' (Berger 2000, p. 43) between the sign and the idea or thing it represents. Hall's (1980) distinct moments of encoding and decoding in the creation of texts or discourses recognise polysemy in meaning-making.<sup>14</sup>

However, the free play of signifiers is constrained by the nature of the texts themselves (the signs chosen or omitted and their arrangement by the text creator), the material world the reader encounters (Gottdiener 1995) and the learnings from her culture/s (Hall 1997). Culture and communication are inseparable; as John Dewey asserts, society continues to exist by and in communication (1947, p. 9). Meaning production is, therefore, a product of both the creator of a text, who has selected signs intended to convey meaning, and the 'reader' of a text, who brings to this reading her experiences, understandings and knowledges as resources in the

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<sup>14</sup> Polysemy is generally understood to refer to the multiple meanings that can arise for different readers of a single text, although the term itself also attracts many interpretations (Ceccarelli 1998).



meaning-making process. This recognition of the meaning-making work of the reader/viewer/public is captured in the transactional approach to communication (Barnlund 2008; Lewis 2008; Mortensen 2008; Taylor 1992). Jess Alberts, Thomas Nakayama and Judith Martin exemplify this approach when they define communication as ‘a transactional process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages in specific contexts, influenced by individual and societal forces and embedded in culture’ (2007, p. 21).<sup>15</sup>

## **SECTION 2: STORYTELLING**

Although this study is founded on general transactional theories of communication, the central communication theory employed is Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). SCT was developed by Ernest Bormann (1982a, 1983, 1985a, 1985b) after an extended period of consultation, workshopping and application in a group of scholars at the University of Minnesota. Those who contributed to the development of SCT did so on the logic of grounded theory (Bormann, Cragan & Shields 1994, p. 263). SCT intersects with other communication theories such as semiotics and narrative analysis (or narratology) that focus on the creation and interpretation of texts (Fulton 2005). However, where semiotics has its roots in linguistics/philosophy (Peirce 1960; Saussure 1966), and narrative theory has its roots in literary studies (Bal 1997; Fludernik 2005; Herman 2005; Martin 1986)<sup>16</sup>, SCT is developed from Robert Bales’s (1970) work on group communication (Bormann 1972). In particular, SCT augments its analysis of texts (as stories) with a focus on the storytelling processes that encourage the creation and sharing of meaning. This sharing develops a group consciousness and transforms a collection of individuals into a cohesive group (Bormann 1983). With this orientation, SCT ‘put[s] the audience back into the

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<sup>15</sup> Although this study presupposes the notion of the transaction in communication, it does not cover the gamut of the participants in the transaction – for example, this study does not analyse readers’ interpretations of the stories appearing in the media releases or in the media articles. Instead the focus is on the creation of the stories in and for groups or publics.

<sup>16</sup> Narrative theory is a diverse field. There are now narrative scholars who study storytelling as well as stories, focusing on institutional norms that govern these narrative practices. Many narrative scholars distinguish between the terms ‘story’ and ‘narrative’, while others use them interchangeably.

rhetorical paradigm' (Bormann, Cragan & Shields 1994, p. 268; Bormann, Knutson & Musolf 1997).

Bormann (1982a, p. 54; 1985b, p. 9) contends that telling stories is part of what it means to be human; that is, that the 'communicative essence of human nature [is]... *homo narrans*' (Bormann 1985a, p. 128). In their review of theoretical perspectives on group communication, Jennifer Waldeck and her co-authors note of SCT that its basic assumption 'is that humans, by nature, interpret and give meaning to the signs, objects, and people they encounter' and communicate this through telling and retelling stories (Waldeck, Shepard, Teitelbaum, Farrar & Seibold 2002, p. 9).

At its core SCT suggests that people create and relate stories – 'get caught up in a drama' (Bormann 1985a, p. 130) – as a way of understanding or making sense of the lives they lead. Thus, SCT proponents consider communication 'as creatively constructing, and being constrained by, reality' (Olufowote 2006, p. 452), which is consistent with Mark Gottdeiner's (1995) earlier point (see Section 1.1) in relation to postmodern semiotics – that is, that the material world constrains the free interpretation of signs/texts. Group members 'share narratives and proselytise fantasy to reach a collective understanding and organisation of lived experience' (Olufowote 2006, p. 465). Bormann (1985a, p. 130) maintains that it is this 'sharing' – or 'symbolic convergence' – that creates a rhetorical community and, as Palenchar and Heath (2002, p. 135) profess, gives people 'the power to behave in coordinated and meaningful ways'.

With SCT, scholars have investigated the 'ways communities create their social reality through the sharing of symbols' (Bormann 1982a, p. 52). It has been applied to diverse areas of communication studies and to varied scales of 'groups', including media readers/viewers, as well as to whole nations (Bormann 1972). For example, some studies focus on dyads, such as the relationships between fathers and daughters (e.g., Endres 1997). Others focus on organisations and their publics, such as in analyses of public relations campaigns (e.g., Cragan & Shields 1992, 1995; Endres 1994; Vasquez 1993, 1994), of selling riverboat gambling in Iowa (Duffy 1997)

and of exploring motives for enrolling in Master's degrees (Stone 2002). More studies focus on mass media and social media, such as the use of Cold War rhetoric (Bormann, Cragan & Shields 1996), the 'media effects' of political cartoons in a US election campaign (Bormann, Koester & Bennet 1978), the use of visual signs and symbols in US televised political campaign advertising (Page & Duffy 2009), tracing the saga of Serbia's Radio B92 in cyberspace (Csapo-Sweet & Shields 2000), analysing the sexual etiquette in teenage magazines (Garner, Sterk & Adams 1998) and Chinese netizens' rhetorical visions of Google (Huang 2012). 'Public' or community rhetorical visions are also explored using SCT, including conspiratorial rhetoric about *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Hasian 1997), archetypes in challenging co-dependency (Messner 1997), radical abolitionism and its origins in evangelical religion (Smith & Windes 1993), and analysing public discourse in favour of the hydrogen economy (Sovacool & Brossmann 2010).

The terms 'story' and 'storytelling' are capacious in that they can be used both in a technical sense – as I do in this thesis in reference to SCT (see Chapter 3 for detailed explanation) – and in common parlance to refer to a way of sense-making and communicating. Journalists often refer to the outcome of their work as 'stories' (Allan 2010b; Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey & Richardson 2005), and to the material from their sources and subjects as stories and storytelling. I use the terms in both technical and conversational ways in this thesis.

### **SECTION 3: THE STORYTELLERS: PUBLICS**

This section sets out a third key set of theories that focuses on theory building and research about publics' motivations for collective behaviour. This group of theories is deployed in the analyses of the interviews with the RAC activists, as well as in their public communication on the issue.

#### **3.1 Formation of publics**

The RAC is an activist public. The notion of a 'public' first appears in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century in the work of John Dewey and Herbert Blumer (1948, 1966, 1971). Dewey

(1927) argues that a public arises when a group of people face a similar situation, recognise what is problematic in the situation, and organise to do something about it. This approach was further developed by public relations scholar James Grunig (1978, 1997, Grunig & Hunt 1984), as the Situational Theory of Publics (STP), and augmented by Kirk Hallahan's (2001) Issues Processes Model (IPM). Both public relations theories aim to understand factors that contribute to the development of collective communicative behaviour when an issue arises in the public realm.

STP proposes that three independent variables explain how a personal concern may translate into the formation of a public pursuing collective action: problem recognition, constraint recognition and involvement.<sup>17</sup> Grunig (1978, 1997; Grunig & Hunt 1984) identifies types of publics that arise as these three independent variables intersect: latent, aware or active publics. According to STP, these different publics are more or less likely to seek out or attend to information on an issue (the dependent variable) and would thus warrant different communication strategies to garner their attention. STP does not identify precipitators for the formation of 'activist' publics such as the RAC.

Grunig addresses the first variable, problem recognition, in terms of communication behaviours: people do not stop to think about a situation unless they perceive it as a problem that needs communicative action to resolve or change. With the second independent variable, constraint recognition, Grunig contends that those who recognise obstacles or constraints to the change they seek are less likely to communicate on the issue, depending on their ability to envision the success of their own actions – can they overcome these obstacles? The third variable is involvement or involvement recognition (Kim & Grunig 2011) which encapsulates the motivation to become involved in collective action (Grunig & Hunt 1984, p. 152).

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<sup>17</sup> Grunig's original STP has been developed and extended (e.g., Hamilton 1992; Kim, Grunig & Ni, 2010; Ni & Kim 2009).

Hallahan's IPM revisits and extends Grunig's STP. Hallahan identifies two critical dimensions for understanding and categorising publics: knowledge and involvement. In this study the focus is on the second dimension, involvement. Hallahan contends that involvement is a motivational factor related to personal relevance, or the personal consequence an issue may be seen to have for an individual (2001, p. 35). Hallahan's IPM also fails to canvass activist publics, instead limiting its categories of publics (as a result of applying the two dimensions) to those who are aware, active, inactive and aroused.

Although these PR theories are useful for exploring factors that motivate RAC members to become involved in the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals, the social movement literature has a stronger emphasis on explaining personal motivation than the theories from the public relations literature utilised here. Adding social movement theories to the public relations theories extends the explanatory value of the involvement dimension in Hallahan's IPM. Three classifications from this literature are useful for this thesis.

### ***3.1.1 Motifs***

The first classification is motifs. Three motifs for engagement in Social Movement Organisations are ideology, instrumentality and identity (as identified by Klandermans and co-authors in a number of articles, cited in Stockemer 2012, p. 269). Of the three, the ideology motif is relevant to this study. This motif refers to entrenched values and beliefs that motivate action – activists 'look for a venue where they can live according to their convictions' (Stockemer 2012, p. 269).

### ***3.1.2 Metaphors of protest***

The second classification is metaphors of protest, developed by Martijn van Zomeren and Russell Spears (2009). These metaphors also provide a classification of motivations for collective action. Individuals and groups protest as 'intuitive economists', 'intuitive politicians' or 'intuitive theologians'. Relevant to this study are the intuitive politician and theologian classifications. Intuitive politicians have a

politicised identity that challenges societal power differences; they are keen to act and communicate in the public arena to garner community support for their issue. Community support is seen as crucial to pressure those in power to accede to their demands (van Zomeren & Spears 2009). Intuitive theologians are motivated to protect the values they hold dear; they are driven by moral convictions about what is right and wrong. When their values are transgressed they experience motivated arousal, which leads to moral outrage and action.

### ***3.1.3 Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA)***

The third and last of the social movement theories is a model. Van Zomeren (2013, p. 378) adopts the social psychologists' definition of collective action as 'any action that individuals undertake as psychological group members'. Van Zomeren's SIMCA captures the four core social-psychological motivations for undertaking collective action that have widespread support: efficacy, identity, emotion and morality (2013, p. 379). Of these, identity, emotion and morality are relevant to this study. Firstly, meta-analytic results (van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears 2008) indicate that 'identification with an action group... is an even stronger predictor' (van Zomeren 2013, p. 380) of motivation for collective action than with groups that are interest-based or non-action. Secondly, van Zomeren contends that anger is the most relevant emotion for understanding the motivation for collective action, particularly because it is 'an approach emotion... that seeks to redress injustices' (2013, p. 381). Thirdly, anger is also seen as a likely response to breaches of moral codes or convictions – the morality motivation. Moral outrage is said to unite the advantaged and disadvantaged, a point relevant to the RAC. According to SIMCA, morality 'uniquely motivates the advantaged to act on behalf of the disadvantaged group' (van Zomeren 2013, p. 383).

The coupling of these social movement classifications for motivations with the STP and IPM from the public relations literature provides a framework that facilitates greater insight into the factors that contribute to the formation of this public in my study. The stories discerned from the interviews with RAC activists (Chapter 5) are assessed for how they generate and communicate the problem recognition,

constraint recognition (Grunig 1997; Grunig & Hunt 1984) and the interviewees' involvement in the RAC, and therefore its collective action on the issue.

In this thesis, I adopt the approach of Gabriel Vasquez and Maureen Taylor, who propose that publics are a 'communicatively constructed social phenomenon' (2001, p. 140). I contend that, following Bormann (1983, 1985a), it is in their storytelling that a group consciousness is developed, a public is formed, and an activist public is generated. Therefore, activist publics are created and performed in communication. The approach is summed up in the following quote:

'Activist publics... are both communication constructs and spaces for transformative action. They can be distinguished from publics per se by their organising actions which enable others to participate: activist publics organise and set the framework for action' (Hansford and Smalley 2004, p. 2).

## **SECTION 4: THE STORYTELLERS: MEDIA RELEASES**

This thesis also sits within the field of public relations research. As an organisation within civil society, the RAC produces media releases as part of its strategy to affect media representation in the public sphere on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. These media releases are consistent with the work of public relations practitioners (cf. Newsom & Haynes 2014; Smith 2012; Wilcox, Cameron & Reber 2015; Yale 1991; Yopp, McAdams & Thornburg 2010) in their form and purpose. This section introduces theory and research about public relations in the context of the notion of the public sphere and the role of civil society.

### **4.1 The public sphere and civil society**

The public sphere is a concept often deployed in the fields of media, cultural and communication studies in discussions about the ways we organise our society, our systems of government and their intersections (Cunningham 2004, p. 151). Jim Macnamara (2014, p. 30), in his work on the relationship between journalism and public relations, contends that 'The public sphere provides a more critical framework

in which to examine the role and performance of media than the romanticised notions of the Fourth Estate and journalists as watchdogs'. Jurgen Habermas (1989) conceived of the public sphere as a space where citizens would deliberate on issues of public concern: he explains it as 'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed' (Habermas 2006, p. 73). This space, or zone of speech, encompasses the work of civil society organisations such as the RAC in monitoring, critiquing and communicating about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals (McCarthy 1989). As a 'corollary of a depersonalised state or authority' (Habermas 1989, p. 19), civil society encompasses the rights and participation of citizens in public life and is therefore, as Peter Dahlgren (1995, p. 7) argues, a precondition for a 'viable public sphere'. In this thesis the RAC is situated in civil society, contraposed to other locations such as government and the media.

Nancy Fraser (1992) provides a convincing critique of Habermas's notion of the development of a public sphere. Firstly, Fraser contends that the history of civil society is one of 'competing counterpublics' (1992, p. 116), not an homogeneous public, as Habermas's history (1989) claims. Secondly, in contrast to Habermas, Fraser posits multiple spheres as her preferred model. Fraser's reconceptualisations of the history and the 'ideal' are useful to this study. Fraser points to both the reality and the ideal as contests of multiple voices and multiple public spheres; she refers to the latter as 'sphericules'. These sphericules of subaltern counterpublics are parallel discursive arenas where counterdiscourses occur among peers for those who are otherwise subordinated to a mainstream public sphere (Fraser 1992, 1997). Bohman reflects Fraser's notion of sphericules (1992, p. 140) when he describes the public sphere as 'a public of publics' (2004, p. 140); in other words, these spaces for open and equal discussion in counterpublics contribute to the larger domain in a contest of ideas. In a work published more than forty years after his seminal work on the public sphere, Habermas acknowledges the utility of this modified 'structure' when he says that, with the scale of contemporary societies, it is organisations/groups that participate in the public sphere rather than the individuals he proposed in his earlier ideal (Habermas 2006). However, the location of this 'larger domain' is not explained. Fraser's notion of counterpublics in civil society explains both the internal operation



of the RAC activist public – as a space for open discussion amongst peers – and its external operation with its participation in civil society on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals, competing with other parallel discursive arenas. In a later section of this chapter (5.1) I explore the role of the media in the operation of a public sphere, a role that is significant for the communication processes examined in this thesis.

## **4.2 Public relations, rhetorical studies, activism**

### **4.2.1 Public relations**

As mentioned earlier, the communication from the RAC in the form of media releases belongs in the province of public relations (although Demetrious (2013) proffers the term ‘public communication’ as an alternative to encompass public relations practices by activists *and* corporations). These media releases form only a part of the RAC’s communication efforts: other measures include public demonstrations, information sheets and seminars, media interviews, social media, visits to detention centres and advocacy and support for asylum seekers who need assistance with their asylum claims and court appearances.

Theories and definitions of public relations have tended to cater to resource-rich commissioning entities (e.g., Grunig, L.A. 1992a, 1992b; Oliver 2010; Seitel 2004), a focus that has generated concern about the role of public relations in furthering the reach and influence of these institutions within our media and society. This thesis draws on and contributes to an emerging body of literature that identifies public relations as a ‘set of flexible techniques’ (Moloney 2006, pp. 30–31) also available to interest groups, individuals and causes (cf. Demetrious 2013; Kovacs 2004; Maddison & Scalmer 2006; Soriano 2015; Taylor, Kent & White 2001). Jeffrey Courtright and Peter Smudde define public relations in relation to both communicative action and the goal or outcome of this action: they contend that public relations is ‘a humanistic enterprise of socially dynamic and necessary symbolic action that is meant to inspire cooperation between an organization and its publics’ (2007, p. 268).

It is my contention that the 'organisation' in Courtright and Smudde's definition can be a small interest group with a negligible public profile and minimal resources or a large corporation with a multi-national reach. In this thesis, the organisation is an activist public and its ultimate publics for the media releases are the readers of the targeted publications, with the media as intermediary publics. However, this attribution is contested by Shirley Leitch and Judy Motion who contend that a broader application of 'organisation' in relation to public relations fails to acknowledge power differences – they argue that organisations, in the public relations vernacular, are necessarily large and resource-rich entities (2010, p. 99). This somewhat narrow conceptualisation of organisation fails to give adequate attention to activist groups as organising entities – as organisations. To deny this broader application of the term also disregards activist organisations' sizeable contribution to public discourse through methods that fall within the ambit of 'public relations' practices (see e.g., Maddison and Scalmer 2006). In this study, the 'organisation' is also recognised as a 'public' (Aldoory & Sha 2007; Jiang & Ni 2009), which contributes to Bohman's (2004, p. 140) characterisation of the public sphere as a 'public of publics' referred to earlier. Indeed, I contend, along with others, that all organisations are also publics.

Public relations scholarship has its roots in diverse areas of study. Jacquie L'Etang (2008) describes this as the public relations 'family tree': she includes psychological, sociological, rhetorical, philosophical, organisational, group and mass communication/media studies as branches of this tree. The catalyst for a surge in specialised theories of public relations was the Excellence Study, prompted by four descriptive models of practice proposed by James Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984. Subsequent and substantial empirical research over the following decades produced the Excellence Theory. This theory posits that 'excellent' public relations is two-way and 'symmetrical' (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 1995; Grunig, J. 1992; Grunig 2001; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier 2002; Toth 2007). The Excellence Theory is 'still the principal basis of the contemporary academic and operational paradigm about PR' (Moloney 2006, p. 54), despite its failure to grapple with power and resource differences (Demetrious 2013; Holtzhausen 2000, 2007; Leitch & Motion 2010; McKie 2001;

McKie & Munshi 2007; Moloney 2006), and challenges to its claim to be a normative theory for practice (Demetrious 2013; Holtzhausen 2000; Pfau & Wan 2006; Sriramesh & Vercic 2012). As Demetrious contends, 'rather than promote fairness, the two-way symmetric model promotes pluralistic ideals that advantage business, and at the same time works to marginalise activism further' (2013, p. 23).

This criticism is pertinent to this thesis in that the RAC is an activist public without the resources or institutional power of those it contests in the public sphere – in this case, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, successive Australian governments, some anti-refugee groups and media institutions and commentators. This, then, resonates with Lukes's (1986) approach to locating practices of power (see Section 1.1 in this chapter for discussion), with RAC public relations work being a site for the expression and the resistance to power in a number of forms. It would be antithetical to its purpose (Pfau & Wan 2006) for the RAC to try to develop symmetrical communication with its 'publics' in this case – that is, those it is trying to influence – except insofar as these relationships can be established with allies on the issue.

Some of the absences David McKie (2001) identifies in the field of public relations<sup>18</sup> have since been addressed in studies that apply to public relations theories about, for example, dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller 2012; Kent & Taylor 2002), relationship management (Ledingham 2003), postmodernism (Holtzhausen 2000, 2002), discourse (Motion & Weaver 2005a), complexity (Gilpin & Murphy 2006) and feminism (Aldoory & Toth 2001). In addition, some recent critical scholarship has begun to apply social theories to public relations (e.g., Coombs & Holladay 2007; Edwards & Hodges 2011; Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson 2009; McKie & Munshi 2007; Moloney 2006) to grapple with the socio-cultural consequences of public relations practice in the public sphere, encapsulated in Smudde's acknowledgement that public relations can express and create many 'templates for thinking, speaking and acting' (2007, p. 207). This reflects the recent 'modest' (Elmer 2011, p. 48)

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<sup>18</sup> McKie and Munshi (2007) attribute this to the dominance of the Excellence Theory.

sociological ‘turn’ (Edwards & Hodges 2011, p. 3) in scholarship in the field (see Edwards & Hodges 2011; Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson 2009; L’Etang 2008).

#### **4.2.2 Rhetorical studies**

Rhetorical studies examine ‘the rationale for suasive discourse’ (Heath 2001, p. 31). Although the term ‘rhetoric’ has pejorative connotations, the subject has a long heritage (Burke 1951, 1968, 1973). Rhetoric champions the contest of propositions, with the ideas and their expression tested in a process of statement and counterstatement (Heath 2001). Fawkes (2012) identifies rhetoric as one of the five key approaches in contemporary public relations theory (along with systems, relationship, critical and political economy theories). In public relations scholarship, rhetorical studies have been driven by Robert Heath (1992, 2001, 2006, 2007) with a number of scholars following in his wake. These studies range from the applied to the critical; from strategies to help organisations survive crises to research into how public relations rhetoric enables particular ideologies to flourish (Ihlen 2010, p. 64). SCT, the communication theory deployed in this thesis, is portrayed as a rhetorical approach to communication (Bormann, Knutson & Musolf 1997) and one that traces the creation of ‘rhetorical communities’ (Bormann 1985a).

The key premises of Heath’s (2001) rhetorical approach are, first, that arguments, ideas or, as in this thesis, rhetorical visions, are in contest in an open forum; the value of those ideas or visions is compared and the more attractive or ‘better’ ideas gain support. Secondly, our worldviews are shaped in and by the symbolic properties of communication, the subject of study using SCT. Thirdly, the rhetorical approach is participative, in that it claims the limit of one position is another position. The flaw in the first and third premises is that access to these fora for participation in the public sphere is not equally available, as discussed in a later section of this chapter (Section 5), and, thus, the public communication of these positions is not open or equal to all – such as activist publics like the RAC – particularly in the case of legacy media such as the newspaper publications in this study (Anderson, Petersen & David 2005; Cottle 2003; Habermas 1989, 2006; Langer 2003; van Dijk 2009; Wolfsfeld 2003). Chapter 7 provides more detailed analysis of source access.

#### **4.2.3 Public relations and activism/activists**

Although 'activism' itself has a 'long and distinguished history' (Carragee & Frey 2012, p. 3), ten years into their work in this area Michael Smith and Denise Ferguson declared that the 'role of activists in public relations scholarship and practice is still unclear and evolving' (2010, p. 396). For example, neither STP nor IPM, as public relations theories of public formation, specifically address the formation or communication behaviours of activist publics like the RAC. However, the Communicative Action in Problem-Solving (CAPS) model, proposed as an extension of STP in 2009, refers to activists as members of an active public who are 'hyperactive' in communicating about situations to people who have resources and power (Ni & Kim 2009, p. 220). With this emphasis, CAPS focusses on activists' communication as *reactions* to powerful organisations/publics. Jeong-Nam Kim, James Grunig and Lan Ni (2010) build on the CAPS model to analyse the information-seeking and sharing behaviours of active publics, claiming that activist publics enter the 'collective effectuating phase' where information is transmitted to develop group 'solutions' to problems. This is consistent with what Smith and Ferguson (2001, 2010) offer as criteria for what constitute 'activist groups': that is, that they are organised, have goals, and use communication to reach their goals. However, CAPS (Kim, Grunig & Ni 2010; Ni & Kim 2009) tends to focus on decision-making processes within publics rather than communication.

Demetrious contends that the communication campaigns of activist organisations – in her case, 'grassroots activism' – are 'seemingly undescribed in public relations literature' (2013, p. 2).<sup>19</sup> Along with Demetrious's case studies, this thesis contributes to addressing this absence. Demetrious locates activists within social movements that are 'purposeful collective action which advocates with socio-political intent' (2013, p. 34). She cites Foucault (2005) in asserting that their function is to challenge social and political unities and 'expose: "gaps, its discontinuities, its entanglement, its incompatibilities, its replacements, and its

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<sup>19</sup> There is interest in the role of the Web in facilitating activism *per se* (e.g., Illia 2003; Sommerfeldt 2013; Taylor, Kent & White 2001).

substitutions” (2013, p. 34). She presents two sub-divisions of activism identified by Verity Burgmann (1993): interest based and issues based activism (2013, p. 35). This categorical difference is reflected in the discussion earlier in this chapter (see Section 3.1) explaining the typologies of motivations from the social movement literature that spur involvement in a public.

Where activism is discussed in the public relations literature, it has tended to be from an organisation-centred approach (Coombs & Holladay 2007, p. 50), where the organisation is a powerful entity and activists are ‘hostile intruders’ (Demetrious 2013, p. 2). Public relations practitioners have been advised about what to do in the event of activists agitating against their organisations (e.g., Grunig, J. 1989; Grunig, L. 1992a). Since David Dozier and Martha Lauzen (2000) called for scholars to ‘rethink’ activism and abandon the constraints of organisation-centred models, some more recent work has engaged the notion of ‘activism’ in more diverse ways. Postmodern public relations scholar Derina Holtzhausen went so far as to claim that public relations practice is itself ‘a form of activism’ (2007, p. 357; see also Berger 2005). Whereas Demetrious (2013) situates activism firmly in civil society, Holtzhausen contends that ‘activism is no longer the prerogative of civil society’ as she says that ‘activist’ has been appropriated to refer to ‘people who feel strongly about an issue and actively advocate on behalf of that issue’ (2007, p. 375), regardless of the sites for their advocacy. Her work suggests that public relations practitioners within organisations can perform an activist role, bringing the concerns and perspectives of internal (staff) and external publics to the attention of those in power in the organisation, and agitating for change on their behalf (Holtzhausen & Voto 2002). However, the location of Holtzhausen’s (2002, 2007) ‘activism’ brings the discussion in the literature back to the workings of the profession of public relations in and for larger, powerful, entities, marginalising the public relations work of activist publics.

This study, like Demetrious’s, broadens ‘the analysis of public relations activities beyond the narrow scope of professional practices and institutional sites [and] allows for a more liberal and creative understanding of communication practices’ (2013, p. 5). I agree with Demetrious’s assertion that activism provides a ‘critical

social site' (2013, p. 7) for interpreting the power relations and complex cultural factors in the conduct of public relations. In line with this, this study examines the power relations that influence which stories about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia become part of the media's agenda setting and framing of the issue (see Chapter 7).

## **SECTION 5: THE STORYTELLERS: MEDIA ARTICLES**

This section surveys concepts and theories from media studies and journalism to provide the broader context of the appearance of articles on the issue of asylum seekers in the three newspapers selected for the study.

### **5.1 The media and hegemony**

The third and last site of analysis in this thesis is print journalism. As noted in Section 4.1 above, the relationship between the public sphere and civil society raises questions about the role and power of the media. Stuart Cunningham claims that deploying the concept of the public sphere in contemporary Australia facilitates a debate about 'how progressive elements of civil societies are constructed and how media support, inhibit, or indeed, are coterminous with such self-determining public communication' (2004, p. 151). Indeed, as Demetrious asserts, 'the "media" in society has unusual potency, as it is a constant and intense point of cultural intersection in modern lives' (2013, p. 3). Two concepts provide context for this discussion: the concept of the mediasphere (Scolari 2012) and its relationship to the public sphere, and the concept of hegemony as it is realised in media representations.

Firstly, those who refer to a mediasphere tend to proclaim that the public sphere is entirely enacted within the media we encounter (Cunningham 2004). However, Colin Sparks asserts that few writers would actually go so far as to claim the existing media 'actually embody the formal criteria that Habermas specified were characteristic of the public sphere' (2004, p. 140). Dahlgren highlights one of these missing criteria when he points to the need to recognise the place of sociocultural interaction in the

operation of the public sphere. He asserts that this means that ‘the space of a public sphere is – and must be – larger than that of media representation’ (1995, p. 18). Nonetheless, since the time of Sparks’s and Dahlgren’s writing, media have changed dramatically, and the production and distribution of words and images have become readily accessible to many people in the Western world, as has sociocultural interaction in social media, thus adding weight to the arguments of the ‘mediasphere’ proponents.

Secondly, Habermas (2006) argues that any public sphere in contemporary society would be embedded in the so-called mass media;<sup>20</sup> this raises problematic issues about the influence of ownership, access and representation, leading to what he terms a ‘refeudalisation’ of the public sphere. This links to earlier discussions of power and representation (see Section 1.1 in this chapter); that is, in this refeudalisation media are understood to serve a hegemonic function in society. As Thomas McCarthy attests in his foreword to Habermas’s work on the public sphere, ‘[t]he press and broadcast media serve less as organs of public information and debate than as technologies for managing consensus and promoting consumer culture’ (1989, p. xii). Habermas (1989) maintains that media owners and those with ready access to the media, such as politicians, have the power to reconfigure the social in this forum and to exert hegemonic power. Together, the media constitute an institution with organisational practices of journalism that routinise ways of gathering, constructing and portraying news (Butsch 2007; Dahlgren 1995). This corresponds with Lukes’s model (1974), which locates the exercise of power in these practices. In their hegemonic role, media display action, policy and opinion without genuinely developing or presenting debate (Habermas 1989). The significance of the hegemonic function of the media is amplified when considered in conjunction with the mediasphere debate; that is, if the media do constitute the public sphere in contemporary society, the question of who has access and legitimacy in media representations becomes of crucial importance to the functioning of a democracy.

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<sup>20</sup> Although some scholars contend that, with the uptake of social media and the internet, the descriptor ‘mass’ is less applicable to all media in 2017, the discussion in this section is about what was, and still is, described as the ‘mass media’ and its relationship to the notion of the public sphere.



## 5.2 News, news values and newsworthiness

News has a number of functions: it is used for circulating knowledge or information, for communicating with different and multiple publics, and for legitimising the positions, views or knowledges promoted (Motion & Weaver 2005b). Judy Motion and C. Kay Weaver characterise news as a contest of credibility for ‘epistemic authority’ (2005b, p. 251). Defining what is news is also contested; two paths to defining news in the academic literature are the instrumental or functional approach and the critical approach.<sup>21</sup>

An instrumental approach is demonstrated by Wynford Hicks when he claims that ‘News is easy enough to define. To be news, something must be factual, new and interesting’ (2016, p. 9). However, Tony Harcup and Deirdre O’Neill point out that, although journalists may talk about ‘what is news’ as self-evident, they operate with ground rules in daily practice, mediated by the subjectivity of individual journalists (2001, p. 261). These ground rules exist in practice rather than codes, although they can be understood in terms of ‘news values’ and ‘newsworthiness’ principles. News values were uncovered in Johan Galtung and Marie Ruge’s 1965 study – ‘*the study of news values*’ (Harcup & O’Neill 2001, p. 264). This work (Galtung & Ruge 1965, 1973) formed the basis for later studies that identify news values and newsworthiness principles, which have since been adopted in journalism and public relations textbooks (e.g., Bainbridge, Goc & Tynan 2015; Wilcox, Cameron & Reber 2015). The newsworthiness principles applied by both journalists and public relations practitioners (Gillman 2015, pp. 282–284) are that, to be news, items need to illustrate impact, proximity, prominence, human interest, novelty, conflict or currency (although some writers vary the terms used).<sup>22</sup> By applying these

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<sup>21</sup> A third approach sees news as a cultural form, the outcome of ‘the treasure house of tropes, narrative forms, resonant mythic forms and frames of their [journalists’] culture’ (Michael Schudson, cited in Ettema 2010, p. 289).

<sup>22</sup> Impact refers to the size or scope of the consequences of the information; proximity refers to the extent to which readers of the news will be in an environment close to the event; prominence is about how well-known the people or organisations involved may be; human interest provides ‘a human face to a harder, more complex story’ (Gillman 2015, pp. 283–84); novelty captures unusual or sometimes bizarre occurrences; conflict can apply to large or small, violent or non-violent instances of conflict; and currency is when an issue or event generates subsequent stories that are about similar

newsworthiness principles to the design of their media releases, public relations practitioners cater to journalistic practices and styles (Newsom & Haynes 2014; Wilcox & Reber 2013). They are attempting to match the expectations of both the journalist and their readers regarding 'what is news' in the publication (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber 2015).

The second approach to what is considered news is the critical approach. In this approach, and in this thesis, news is understood as 'a "construction of reality" rather than a picture of reality' (Whitney, Sumpter & McQuail 2004, p. 402), and this construction is achieved through routines, rituals, themes and associations in communication. Traditional forms of media, including print, television and radio, clearly contribute to interpretations of what issues are important for citizens and publics in a community by representing and framing – as well as omitting – ideas, events, debates and opinions in their media texts. This representation has implications for citizenship and social and cultural power. Alison Anderson and her co-authors claim that liberal democratic theory and critical theory are both concerned with 'issues of news representation and source access' (2005, p. 189). Indeed, as Simon Cottle says, 'whose voices and viewpoints structure and inform news discourse goes to the heart of the democratic views of, and radical concerns about, the news media' (2003, p. 5).

Alain De Botton (2014) asserts that, although 'news' claims to report on the world, it does this by keeping its own mechanics of construction hidden from view. News is based on 'assumptions' that express 'the ideology of the news producers or those who employ them' (Watson 1998, pp. 115–116). Critical discourse scholar, Teun van Dijk, contends that newsmaking activities express 'ideologically controlled news structures' (2009, p. 199). As examples, he refers to research into racism and nationalism in the news. He claims that 'the press continues to be part of the problem of racism, rather than its solution' (on this, see also Hall 1990; Rhodes 2005)

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issues or concerns, largely because the earlier story was 'news' and has gone on to generate interest in similar stories.

and that nationalistic ideologies prompt the media to 'defend the nation against invaders and foreign influences', military, economic and cultural (2009, p. 201).

This ideology in newsmaking is developed and displayed in linked processes of gatekeeping, agenda setting and framing as well as in news values and norms (O'Neill & Harcup 2009). These processes and norms exhibit what Lukes (1974) refers to as the bias of the system, a system with the power to secure others' compliance to the preferences of the powerful on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. As van Dijk asserts: 'The elites that control the access to, and the contents and structures of public discourse, and that of the mass media, in particular... also are able to control the formation and reproduction of the very ideologies that help sustain their power' (2009, p. 202).

This thesis takes a critical approach to the production of news. However, the instrumental approach, where newsworthiness principles are applied in the construction of news, demonstrates the power of journalists/editors to create what de Botton calls the 'new planet in our minds' (2014, p. 10). That is, the instrumental approach folds in to the critical approach, and identifying where the former is evident adds fuel to the critical analysis.

### **5.3 Agendas, frames and bias**

Like the other sites examined in this study, the key theory, SCT, is augmented here with additional theories useful for the analysis of newspapers. The first is agenda setting. Agenda setting refers to the proposition that media selection and representation of issues correlates strongly with public perceptions of the importance of these issues (Kiousis, McDevitt & Wu 2005; McCombs & Shaw 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007; Zhang, Shao & Bowman 2012). Agenda setting is assessed in relation to the prominence and space accorded the story or issue in the media. It has extensive support for its basic hypothesis (Bryant & Miron 2004, p. 687). Craig Carroll and Maxwell McCombs assert that the central theoretical idea of agenda setting and its effects is this 'transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda' (2003, p. 36).

Agenda setting research seeks to understand the influence of the mass media<sup>23</sup> on public awareness and opinion through media inclusion or exclusion of particular issues, events and opinions. The presumption here is that influencing the public agenda or perception of the issue may then influence how the issue is addressed by politicians representing members of the community. Dahlgren thus refers to the output of media institutions as ‘the most tangible and immediate expression of political attention to the public sphere’ (1995, p. 12). Agenda setting research, therefore, has a predictive function; it aims to predict and explain the effects of the media on what issues people think about (first-level agenda setting) and what attributes they see as important (second-level agenda setting or framing)<sup>24</sup> (Carroll & McCombs 2003; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs 1998; Weaver 2007).

The next useful theory is framing. Whereas agenda setting makes some issues more salient in the media agenda and, thus, the public agenda, framing theory posits that ‘how an issue is characterised in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences’ (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007, p. 11). Robert Entman, the key scholar in framing theory, defines framing as ‘the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation’ (2007, p. 164). Thus, framing theory and research link ‘methods of understanding content and techniques of measuring effects’ (Harmon & Muenchen 2009, p. 13). Framing has its roots in sociology and psychology: Erving Goffman’s (1974) sociological perspective examines the ways in which people interpret new information from media using schemata developed from previous experiences; Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (cited in Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007) explore framing’s psychological origins by presenting scenarios in different ways to examine how people’s choices are influenced by different frames. Framing is, therefore, ‘both a macrolevel and a microlevel construct’ (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007, p. 12).

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<sup>23</sup> Although the broadcast or ‘mass’ media were the focus for agenda-setting research originally, this has expanded with more recent changes to the media landscape away from broadcast alone.

<sup>24</sup> The key scholar in agenda-setting research, Max McCombs (2004), contends that second level agenda-setting is similar but not identical to framing.

Framing theory is applied in media studies to investigate how journalists organise and present stories, as well as to individual interpretations of these stories that contribute to opinion formation on an issue (Slothuus 2008). It is this assumption of influence on the reader that motivates framing research. With frames, media direct readers' attention to particular aspects of an issue or story and not to others: frames are 'structures that draw boundaries, set up categories, define some ideas as out and others in, and generally operate to snag related ideas in their net in an active process' (Reese 2007, p. 150). By excluding particular sources and perspectives on an issue media contribute to subsequent spirals of silence (Noelle-Newman 1994)<sup>25</sup> for media, political and public agendas. In addition, by employing particular frames in media texts, journalists may have the effect of priming readers to associate issues about asylum seekers with other events, concepts or issues that evoke negative (as well as positive) connotations.

Entman explores bias as an organising concept to understand power in public discourse and in the operation of the media. He identifies bias in the media in three ways: distortion bias, content bias and decision-making bias (2007, p. 163). These refer to, firstly, news that distorts or falsifies reality, secondly, news that favours one side over another in a political conflict and, thirdly, the motivations and mindsets of the journalists who produce the biased content. Entman's research identifies what he describes as 'a net advantage for conservatives across a range of issues and groups' (2007, p. 170) in the US and suggests that those favoured by the bias become more powerful and more confident in their power. In contrast, those excluded, misrepresented or underrepresented in frames and framing 'become weaker, less free to do (or say) what they want' (2007, p. 170). Thus, framing and bias intersect when the frames of the underrepresented are excluded because of the bias of the system (Street 2011, p. 50). As Lynn Zoch and Juan-Carlos Molleda argue, 'the ability to frame the news is an exercise in power' (2006, p. 283). Consequently,

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<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Noelle-Newman's (1994) theory proposes that what the media cover, and how they cover issues, influences people's perception of the acceptability of their own views. If their views differ from those in the media, they refrain from voicing them – they fear isolation and are silenced by this absence in the media. This theory has been supported by a number of studies (e.g., Brasted 2005; Campbell 2007; Indermaur 2006; Stoycheff 2016).

in this study I link Lukes's (1974, 1986, 2005) three-dimensional model of power (see Section 1.1 in this chapter) to theories of agenda setting/building<sup>26</sup> and framing – that is, Lukes identifies the power of the journalist/editor to make decisions about what is included in the newspaper (agenda) in his first and second dimensions of power, and includes the effects of this inclusion/exclusion or bias on readers' understanding or interpretation of the issue in his third dimension, as well as the effects of the frames in the stories themselves.

Agenda setting and framing are important theories and areas of research for this thesis because they identify influences on the storytelling about asylum seeker issues in the media, the construction of news, communication and, ultimately, the social construction of reality. This identification informs an understanding of the impact of dominant frames in the media about the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia and the significance of the presence or absence of stories from asylum seekers and their advocates that counter the prevailing rhetorical vision(s) in the media.

#### **5.4 Gatekeeping**

Gatekeeping describes the media's role in either providing or refusing access to its storytelling apparatuses (Gillman 2015; Grunig & Hunt 1984; Macnamara 2012b; Shoemaker, Vos & Reese 2009). It refers to the news-gathering stage of production where journalists, editors and producers have the power to select, exclude and shape stories they present to their publics, and thus their representation of the mediated world. They can deny or grant access to their communication organs through the use or neglect of sources and their material. Jackie Harrison refers to gatekeeping as 'symbolic mediation' (2010, p. 191). The outcome of this mediation is that some sources are included and some are not; some stories are represented and some are not. Although the control this role confers has been much diminished by the uptake of the internet (including social media) – a process referred to as

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<sup>26</sup> More recently the concept of agenda setting has been augmented by the notion of agenda building (Zoch & Molleda 2006) which emphasises the mechanisms of story construction (see Section 5.5 in this chapter).

‘disintermediation’ (Poster, cited in Macnamara 2012b, p. 100) – the role of the media in giving and denying access to different sources is significant for this study.

## 5.5 Sources

‘Source’ is the term used to describe those people and organisations that provide information, opinion or perspectives on an event or issue in the news (Berkowitz 2009; Franklin & Carlson 2011; Franklin, Lewis & Williams 2010; Macnamara 2014; Williams 2015). Some scholars refer to this interaction as the co-construction of news (e.g., Domingo & Le Cam 2015, p. 138), which corresponds with the notion of agenda building (Zoch & Molleda 2006). Rather than assessing the influence of the media agenda on public and political agendas, agenda building and source network research explore influences on the development of stories that appear on media agendas. They ask ‘who influences the media agenda?’. In this study, the RAC produces media releases (see Chapter 6 for analysis) to position itself as a source for journalists at its targeted media outlets.

Journalists use sources to learn about what is happening in their communities, to add expert information or perspectives on an issue and to give a human face to the news item they are constructing (Gillman 2015). Concern about media framing raises the issue of sources: as Priscilla Murphy and Michael Maynard assert, ‘The way an issue is framed has a good deal to do with who is doing the framing (2000, p. 135)’. ‘Source’ studies may examine both access to media and the subsequent influence of some sources whose perspectives, frames or stories are incorporated into the news stories – that is, the process and the content in news production (Stromback & Nord 2006, p. 149).

Contact between journalists and sources may be instigated by either party. Within journalism and media studies, the interaction between sources and the news media is an important area of research (Anderson et. al. 2005, p. 188). This research tends to be predicated on the impact of these interactions on citizenship and democracy (Habermas 1989, 2006). Cottle (2000) asserts that studying news sources is important for our understanding of power relationships such as those that shape the

news agenda and the parameters of public debate (see also O'Neill & O'Connor, cited in Matthews 2013), a point also addressed in Lukes's (1974) model of power. In reference to this potential, researchers have examined who gets in the news (e.g., Brown, Bybee, Wearden & Straughan 1987; Richardson 2006a) and compared, for example, elite versus non-elite sources for their inclusion in stories in the news media (e.g., Lee 2001; Schindeler & Ewart 2014). Similar binaries in this research field are assessing formal versus informal sources, and official versus unofficial sources, incorporated in news stories (e.g., Manning 2001; Miller 1993). In addition, researchers have investigated the relationships between journalists and their political sources (e.g., Eriksson & Ostman 2013; Stromback & Nord 2006), between journalists and 'expert' sources (e.g., Albæk 2011; Schneider 2012) and between journalism and public relations (e.g., Davis 2003; Sallot & Johnson 2006). This last category is a significant body of research (Macnamara 2014), examining the influence of public relations work on the construction of news. Despite journalists' demonstrated reliance on media releases (Bacon & Pavey 2010; Sissons 2012), the relationship between journalism and public relations has been marked by hostility; that is, 'while condemning public relations, journalists simultaneously embraced it' (DeLorme & Fedler 2003, p. 113). This creates what Macnamara calls a 'culture of denial that masks complicity and mutuality in these processes that need to be made transparent' (2012a, p. 36).

Journalists and their sources negotiate what Herbert Gans (1980) describes as a 'dance' in their 'symbiotic' relationship (Bentele & Nothhaft 2010; Stromback & Nord 2006, p. 147): as gatekeepers, journalists are in control of the access sources have to the legacy media agenda and frames but they are also reliant on sources for information and texture for their stories. When those sources are powerful – in that they have information vital to the journalists – the gatekeeper role is reversed. This is particularly the case with official/government sources that can withhold information. The question Stromback and Nord pose in their study of the relationship between political sources and journalists in Sweden is, 'who leads the tango?' (2006, p. 148).



Libby Lester (2010) investigates the media strategies of elite and non-elite environmental sources in the media portrayal of the death of Australia's biggest tree, 'El Grande', at the hands of a government agency. She characterises the media representation of the debate as a 'competition for space' and asserts that 'it is necessary that sources be conceived of as occupying fields in which *competition for access* to the media takes place, but in which material and symbolic advantages are unequally distributed' (2010, p. 593). Those who do achieve this access can be classed as 'primary definers' of both the media agenda and the frames they use (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts 1978, p. 57). The primary definers concept has been very influential in the field (Lester 2010), although not without criticism (e.g., Schlesinger 1990).

Hall et al. (1978) explain primary definers of the news as those 'accredited' sources journalists turn to for stories. Journalists rely on these sources for two reasons: firstly, because of the time and resource pressures of news production, which have only increased since Hall et al.'s 1978 publication; and secondly, the notions of 'impartiality' and 'objectivity' that underwrite journalism practice and 'give rise to the practice of ensuring that media statements are, wherever possible, grounded in "objective" and "authoritative" statements from "accredited" sources' (Hall et al. 1978, p. 58). Hall et al. explain that these accredited sources, or primary definers, are representatives of major institutions that have authority or representative status – power and position – and journalists' preference for their information is structured into the process of news production. News 'beats' or rounds are examples of this preferential structure; that is, journalists are assigned to cover police, courts, stock exchange, parliament and other places of institutional power in their daily efforts to fill the 'black hole' (Smith 2003) of newspaper coverage. In Lester's El Grande study she characterises the media as an active player in 'suppressing' the transfer of 'symbolic power' to the environment movement in the news coverage of the conflict that ensued from the actions that killed the tree (2010, p. 602). Instead the accredited sources from the government were accorded the primary definer role. This example goes to what Hall and his co-authors describe as the 'ideological role of the media' (1978, p. 59).

Although elite, official and formal sources have been the dominant primary definers in many studies (Miller 1993; Smith 1993), there are exceptions, as well as cases where these definers do not go unchallenged (Marchi 2005). One such exception is Sarah Van Leuven and Stijn Joye's (2014) study, in which they found that media releases from non-government organisations (NGOs) influenced Belgian media coverage of international aid issues more than government releases on the issue. They attribute this to the NGOs' ability to give eyewitness accounts to journalists and their practice of providing background information on the issue. Van Leuven and Joye's study raises the issue of the 'expert' source. The authors found that the two international NGOs in their study, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and Consortium 12-12, developed different source relationships with the Belgian media. MSF created an authoritative position as 'an expert source on the ground' (Van Leuven & Joye 2014, p. 175) whilst Consortium 12-12 maintained a mobilising role in short term efforts to raise funds after significant international news events.

Erik Albæk (2011) investigated the interaction between journalists and their expert sources. He found that in 90 per cent of cases the contact with the expert was at the journalist's instigation, and in only 1–2 per cent at the expert's. Thus, journalists seek out sources to legitimate their news stories. Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan contend that news itself represents authority and the use of sources in news stories 'constitutes an authoritative vision of social order' (1989, pp. 3–4). They contend that sources are selected by journalists as 'people who are recognised socially to be in the know' and this choice also acts to further the reputation of the newspaper as an authoritative, respectable voice. It is the intersection of these cultural practices and reasoning that creates the dominance of formal, elite sources in media articles.

Those people and organisations that have established journalist/source relationships over time contribute to what Øyvind Ihlen (2009) refers to as the institutionalisation of news. That is, 'the older and more institutionalised an organisation is, the better its chances of being established as part of the "naturalised" source network of journalists. With institutionalisation comes symbolic capital' (2009, p. 75). This

symbolic capital translates into influence for those who attain it: that is, studies show clear linkages ‘between public relations materials, media coverage based on the materials, and beneficial outcomes for the sources’ (Waters, Tindall & Morton 2010, p. 243). It is this influence that is sought by non-elite, non-official sources such as the RAC when they produce media releases on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia examined in this study.

## **Conclusion**

Together, these literatures are employed to explore the key research question in this thesis – ‘Who gets to be heard?’ on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia – and its associated question, ‘What stories are told about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals?’. The following chapter, Chapter 3, sets out the central theory that frames this exploration, and the methodology and methods designed to locate, collect and analyse the data that animate this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter sets out the theory, methodology and method that underpin this thesis. It is organised in six sections. The first explains the epistemological foundation for this thesis, and its signal theory, Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). The second section accounts for the methodology used in the thesis. In the third section I describe the research design, explaining the methods used for data collection and my rationale. The fourth section continues with research design, explaining the methods used for data analysis from the three sites. In the fifth section I refer to the ethical stance taken in this thesis, as well as to my role as researcher. The sixth and final section acknowledges the limitations of the study.

### **SECTION 1: THEORY/EPISTEMOLOGY**

A number of concepts, theories and relationships set out in my Literature Review (Chapter 2) constitute the theoretical framework for this study. As explained in that chapter, this thesis employs theories of power, representation and the public sphere to situate communication, specifically storytelling, in three sites on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals in Australia. As explained, these theories are supplemented by others from public relations, social movements, journalism and media studies relevant to each site. In this chapter, I focus on the key theory about stories and storytelling that animates this thesis – SCT. I expand on the overview provided in the Literature Review, providing detail relevant to the methods used for collection and analysis of data.

#### **1.1 Social Constructivism in the interpretivist paradigm**

Interpretivism is the enquiry paradigm for this study. Paradigms are disciplinary matrixes that encapsulate a constellation of beliefs, values and perspectives that express a worldview or frame of reference – paradigms are ‘in all cases human constructions’ (Guba & Lincoln 1998, p. 202). The interpretive paradigm ‘sees the

world as an emergent social process which is created by the individuals concerned' (Burrell & Morgan 1979, p. 28). This is the principal frame of reference for this thesis. Interpretations of the social world are understood as constructed, reconstructed and evolving: social reality is 'accomplished' in everyday life (Holstein & Gubrium 2005, p. 484). The analytic emphasis in this study is focused on the question of how social reality is constructed through storytelling and stories that circulate in the community; that is, within an activist public and within the public sphere as mediated by the media. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln argue that, in such a pursuit, 'voice and reflexivity are primary' (2005, p. 35). In reference to voice, this study also adopts a critical orientation to those media practices and processes that prevent or enable citizens to voice their concerns about this issue in the media.

Within the interpretivist paradigm, the particular orientation to communication I adopt in this thesis is social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann 1967). Social constructivism tends to challenge the realist assumptions of traditional social sciences, stresses the ways in which thinking and doing are contingent on cultural forms, and has discourse – in this case, storytelling – as its central organising principle (Potter 1996). Both interpretivism and social constructivism refer to the importance of context – explored throughout this thesis – for assessing how people come to understand and build their social realities. Stories and storytelling are powerful ways in which people come to understand and communicate about issues that arise in their communities, such as the boat arrivals of asylum seekers to Australia.

## **1.2 Symbolic Convergence Theory**

SCT (Bormann 1972, 1985a) sits within the interpretivist paradigm. As noted, it is the central communication theory that provides the framework for investigating stories and storytelling in the three sites in this study. SCT also has a social constructivist orientation. That is, SCT posits that 'sharing fantasies [in storytelling]... is an important means for people to create their social realities' (Bormann 1982b, p. 289).

Ernest Bormann, John Cragan and Donald Shields maintain that SCT enables the study of 'both the logical and the imaginative elements of rhetoric' (1994, p. 262).

SCT is structured in terms of basic, dramatic, structural and critical evaluation concepts. I have chosen to focus on some elements of the theory and not others in this thesis. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, given the nature of this study, I use SCT in conjunction with a number of other theories relevant to individual sites in the study, creating a sometimes complex interweaving of theories and their applications. Consequently, I have chosen to focus on the SCT concepts most useful to this study. Secondly, SCT has been criticised for its complexity (Bormann, Cragan & Shields 1994); by selecting the most appropriate elements for my study, I reduce unnecessary complications and hope to aid in making clear this theory's overall usefulness. The key elements of the theory employed in this thesis are fantasy, fantasy theme, rhetorical vision, sanctioning agent and master analogue.

Fantasy is a cornerstone concept in SCT; according to Bormann (1985a, p. 130), fantasy is the notion of a storyline or narrative thread, a 'creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events that fulfils a group psychological or rhetorical need'. The use of the term 'fantasy' does not imply unreality, as in common parlance (Brilhart & Galanes 1998, p. 146). Instead, Bormann points to the word's roots in the Greek word *phantastikos*<sup>27</sup> which means 'to be able to present or show to the mind, to make visible' (1982a, p. 52). The use of the term 'fantasy' 'capture[s] the constructed nature of the theme' (Page & Duffy 2009, p. 111). Fantasies are stories about real or fictitious people outside of real-time experiences (Bormann 1985b). A fantasy theme is the main idea of the fantasy, what it is about; that is, it is the 'content of the dramatizing message' (Bormann 1985b, p. 5). Fantasy theme is another key SCT concept deployed in this thesis. Fantasies and fantasy themes may contain symbolic cues such as words, gestures, images, or slogans (Bormann 1985a, p. 130).

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<sup>27</sup> However, most English-language sources (including the Oxford English Dictionary) give the root as *phantázein*.

A fantasy theme can be observed and recorded as capturing the nature and content of a shared group consciousness.

Bormann (1985a) proposes that members of a community become engrossed in a narrative that serves to foster individual as well as shared meanings particular to their group. These stories or dramatising messages, and their symbolic cues, capture the group's attention and are taken up in storytelling in and by the group, creating a rhetorical community (Bormann 1983). This process is known as fantasy chaining, where 'group members contribute to the fantasy (or story), resulting in excitement and group involvement around the message' (Waldeck et al. 2002, p. 9). Members experience similar emotions, celebrating and vilifying characters in the story in similar ways; thus, they come to what Bormann calls a 'symbolic convergence' (1985a, p. 130). With this convergence around a fantasy theme, members display inside cues where the storyteller uses a verbal (or nonverbal signal) to allude to a previously shared fantasy. Allusions to shared fantasies or stories are akin to the operation of schemata in cognitive psychology (Mandler & Johnson 1977).

The key structural concept in SCT is the 'rhetorical vision', which describes the integration of fantasies and fantasy themes into 'a composite drama that catches up people into a common symbolic reality' (Cragan & Shields 1992, p. 201). The rhetorical vision produces a broader view on the issue, unifying individual schemata or scripts into a coherent group consciousness (Bormann, Knutson & Musolf 1997). This group consciousness is what constitutes the group.<sup>28</sup> A rhetorical vision may be indexed by a key word or label afforded a character, object or event. In SCT, a rhetorical vision has five elements: *dramatis personae*, or the characters in the vision; plotlines, that provide the action such as a quest story or a conspiracy; scene, which is the location of the action; sanctioning agent, that legitimises the rhetorical vision; and master analogue, which is a deeper structure that captures the explanatory power of a vision (Cragan & Shields 1981, 1992; Endres 1994).

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<sup>28</sup> This is consistent with the notion of a public as constituted in communication (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001; Hansford & Smalley 2004, see Section 3.1 in Chapter 2).

In addition to the key concepts of fantasy, fantasy theme and rhetorical vision, this thesis draws on the concepts of the sanctioning agent and master analogue to further explore the rhetorical visions in the three sites. A sanctioning agent provides a reference to an institution, higher power, or concept – such as justice – that can be drawn on to justify or support the import of the story or vision (Cragan & Shields 1992). In this thesis, the sanctioning institution might be the United Nations, and a concept may be ‘resonance’ or history in relation to the issue. Master analogues drive rhetorical visions. Three master analogues are proposed in SCT: the pragmatic, social and righteous (Endres 1994; Heath & Palenchar 2002). These master analogues may reveal something of the motivations of the participants in the vision. The pragmatic refers to efficiency or expediency as the driver of the vision; the social refers to relational factors like humaneness, trust and friendship; and the righteous refers to a judgement of what is right and wrong, just and unjust, moral and immoral. Two of Martijn Van Zomeren and Russell Spears’s (2009) three metaphors of protest from the social movement literature (see Chapter 2, Section 3.1) echo the orientations described in SCT’s pragmatic and righteous master analogues – the intuitive economist metaphor accords with the pragmatic master analogue, and the intuitive theologian with the righteous.

Different theories and methods contribute to the collection and analysis of stories and storytelling in the three sites examined in this thesis: members of the RAC activist public, the RAC media releases, and newspaper articles. The rationale for the employment of these different theories and methods lies in the differences between personal storytelling, organisational storytelling and occupational (within the context of a media organisation) storytelling. The first method is an interview, which is about the generation or expression of a personal narrative. Interviewees tell their stories of the issue, their relationship to it and to the RAC. Consequently, for the analyses of interview stories (Chapter 5) SCT is paired with STP/IPM (Grunig 1978, 1997; Hallahan 2001) and the social movement models of engagement in collective action (Stockemer 2012; van Zomeren 2013; van Zomeren & Spears 2009) referred to in Chapter 2. The RAC media releases (Chapter 6) represent the RAC organisation’s



public construction of the issue, events, policies and people in the form of stories. This construction has been developed from the group consciousness on the issue discerned in the interviews. For this site, SCT is therefore paired with the concepts of civil society and theories of the public sphere and public relations to understand the context for the development and distribution of the RAC's media releases. For the media articles (chapters 7, 8 and 9), to reiterate, SCT is paired with Steven Lukes's (1974) model of power and Antonio Gramsci's (1971, 2006, 2007) concept of hegemony. In addition, I use agenda setting/building and framing theories from media studies, and concepts from journalism studies such as news practices and forms, to illustrate the performance of power in these practices and institutions. These media articles present the journalists' and the institutions' story constructions in the media and the public sphere on the issue of asylum seekers.

## **SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY**

As this thesis is located within the interpretivist paradigm, I have employed qualitative methodology as the driver for the selection of methods used in most of this study. However, I also include a quantitative component. I discuss both methodologies together as they work in concert to address the research questions for this study. This thesis presents a qualitative case study (Stake 2005) that researches and analyses a particular case, in depth and in context, for the purpose of eliciting stories from the different sites. SCT has provided the central method (Bormann 1982b; Foss 2009). Qualitative research methodologies occupy a complex historical field and have a 'turbulent' history (Hamilton 1998) that cuts across disciplines, fields and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 2). Multiple theoretical paradigms employ qualitative research methods and strategies; qualitative research has as its *raison d'être* a deep understanding of the phenomena studied and consequently methods employed 'facilitate studies of issues in depth and detail' (Patton 2002, p. 14). It focuses on words (rather than numbers), researcher involvement, participant viewpoints, small-scale studies, an holistic attention, flexible procedures emphasising process, and is located in natural settings (Daymon & Holloway 2002, pp. 5–6). It is 'a research paradigm which emphasises

inductive, interpretive methods applied to the everyday world which is seen as subjective and socially created' (Anderson 1987, p. 384).

Denzin and Lincoln claim that qualitative methodologies are distinguished from quantitative methodologies on five different dimensions (2005, p. 100): firstly, their contemporary entanglements with positivism and postpositivism; secondly, acceptance of postmodern sensibilities; thirdly, their methods of capturing the individual's point of view; fourthly, their focus on the constraints of everyday life; and finally, the value they place on securing rich descriptions. Nonetheless, qualitative and quantitative research methods 'are not in contraposition to each other' (Ebrahim & Sullivan 1995, p. 196). In this case, they provide access to different types of knowledge. Quantitative research is generally concerned with measurement, causality, generalisation and replication. Its deductive approach emphasises testing of theories, embodies a view of social reality as external and objective, and is often identified with the positivist or functionalist paradigms (Bryman 2008, p. 22).

In contrast, qualitative research employs in-depth explorations of particular cases to compile rich descriptions, adopts a subjectivist orientation that acknowledges multiple perspectives, and seeks to develop understanding rather than generalised principles. Despite its interpretivist roots, this case study uses quantitative content analysis in the assessment of the media articles (see Chapter 7) to understand the prominence of stories and prevalence of sources that appear in the media agenda on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. This 'counting' then provides the context for the qualitative content analysis that uncovers rhetorical visions that appear in the data (see Chapter 9) and reveals aspects of journalistic practices (see Chapter 8) that create or prevent the appearance of frames for the portrayal of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals in the three newspapers in this study.

## 2.1 Quality

The quality of quantitative and qualitative research is assessed against different criteria. Quantitative methods require reliability and validity to ensure rigour and likely substantiation of any claims to generalisability (della Porta & Keating 2008). Whereas reliability assesses the consistency and replicability of the measurement (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine & Newbold 1998, p. 18), validity presumes reliability and refers to the extent to which a measure actually measures what it is supposed to measure (Dane 1990). For the quantitative component of this study (reported in Chapter 7), reliability was realised with the use of inter-coder checking; I made the initial frequency measurements and a second coder checked and entered the results.<sup>29</sup> Validity of these measures is established firstly from the reliability of the data measurement (Judd, Smith & Kidder 1991, p. 51) and, secondly, by the study's measurement of what it sets out to measure – the appearance and quantifiable characteristics of the media articles on the issue.

In contrast, qualitative research is judged on the standard of 'whether the work communicates or "says" something to us' (Vidich & Lyman 1998, p. 44) based on our notions of reality. However, criticisms of qualitative research have prompted the development of several quality schemata of criteria as alternatives to reliability and validity in quantitative research. For example, Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (cited in Bryman 2008) suggest trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. However, others, such as Lucy Yardley (2000), step away from attempting a direct correlation with quantitative measures and instead proffer principles. This study adopts Yardley's four 'flexible principles' (2000, pp. 219–24) for achieving quality in qualitative research:

- Sensitivity to context: contexts for the study are specifically addressed in chapters 4, 7 and 8.

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<sup>29</sup> I have a physical disability and therefore sought assistance for the entering of the coding data which required repeated, and problematic, use of a computer mouse.

- Commitment and rigour: rigour is achieved through thorough data collection and analysis, and commitment through substantial engagement with the subject matter.
- Transparency and coherence: the research methods are clearly specified – transparent – in this chapter and the arguments for their use presented. A reflexive approach is demonstrated with an effort to explain any role my participation in the activist public plays in the research project. For coherence, this research design ‘connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p. 28).
- Impact and importance: this study illuminates the stories evident in the data and reveals agendas and frames in the media texts, as well as whose stories are told – who gets to be heard. It reveals the performance of power in journalism practices and has implications for understanding the representation of the issue in the public sphere.

### **SECTION 3: RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODS**

Research methods are ‘ways of acquiring data’ (della Porta & Keating 2008, p. 28). The methods used in this thesis draw on the conceptual framework outlined in Section 1. In central position is the concept of stories and storytelling, which drives the project, its methodology and its methods.

This thesis conforms to Yin’s characteristics of the case study method: that is, it investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context; the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not clear; and multiple sources of evidence are used (1992, p. 123). This thesis is ‘both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry’ (Stake 2005, p. 444). Robert Stake (2005) identifies three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. This research is an intrinsic case study, as its purpose is ‘better understanding of this particular case’ (2005, p. 445). I use mixed methods to illuminate the case from different angles. In that sense, the ‘case study [form] could be said to be a meta-

method' (Johansson 2003, p. 4). Rolf Johansson (2003) claims that the case study form bridges the methodological gap in the social sciences, facilitating a pragmatic marriage of methods that can include qualitative and quantitative methods of analysing data. This marriage of methods is adopted for this study; quantitative methods are used to provide information that supplements the qualitative research. This creates a stronger research design (Morse & Niehaus 2009).

This study deploys two methods for collecting empirical materials: interviews and document retrieval. I then adopt two methods for analysing the consequent materials: the content analysis strategies of Fantasy Theme Analysis (Bormann 1982b; Foss 2009) and quantitative content analysis (Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000). In the next section I explain each of the data collection methods. In Section 4 I explain the data analysis methods.

### **3.1 Data collection**

#### **3.1.1 Interviews**

Ten members of the organising cadre for the RAC activist public were interviewed for this study. The interview method was chosen for three reasons: firstly, to uncover the stories related by the the interviewees, for the purpose of assessing problem recognition, constraint recognition and group consciousness; secondly, to learn the motivating factors for their individual involvement in the issue; and thirdly, to determine the relationship, if any, between the rhetorical visions discernible in the interviews of individual members and those in the media releases produced by the group. Interviews 'deepen the inside knowledge of the community under study' (Bray 2008, p. 309). They have a number of advantages: they allow for clarification of questions and elaboration of responses; they enable collection of non-verbal data observed in the process of the interview; and they can encourage more full and open responses (Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000, pp. 102–3).

### **The interviewees**

Members of the RAC's organising cadre were chosen for interview because it is this group that devises the RAC's public communication on the issue (per researcher observation). A core group of attendees participates in most meetings and makes decisions about the actions, events and communication of the organisation. The interviewees were drawn from this core group and selection was informed by the participation of the researcher in these meetings (see Section 5 in this chapter for explanation). In addition to these criteria, I selected equal numbers of women and men, and a representation of the two major socialist groups participating in this cadre as well as those without declared political affiliations. This gender and political selection is justified on the basis of the composition of the larger body of meeting and activity attendees.

### **The interviews**

These interviews were semi-structured (Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000, p. 101) and varied in length from 1.5 to 2.5 hours. This interview design enables interviewees to express their views as widely and openly as possible while still addressing the research aims. This format also reflects the storytelling orientation of the study in that it enables storytelling to occur in the interaction between the researcher and the interviewees (Patton 2002, p. 14). Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein argue that personal narration or storytelling is 'an important source of experiential data' that reflects 'the narrative quality of lives' (1998, p. 163). The interviews were conducted individually and in person. In accordance with the ethics approval requirements for the study, they were conducted in public venues.<sup>30</sup>

### **Interview structure and questions**

In the interviews I sought the following information from participants:

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<sup>30</sup> One interviewee asked to be interviewed in my home for her convenience.

- Demographic profiles.
- Participation in this and other activist groups.
- Perception of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia and communication about the issue.
- Stories (and their elements) that members relate to account for their interpretation of the issue and their involvement.
- Interpretation of the context for the contemporary situation for asylum seekers.

After a preamble reminding interviewees of the scope and purpose of the project, and their option to withdraw at any time, questions used to elicit information were as follows (a full list, including prepared follow-up questions, is provided at Appendix A).<sup>31</sup>

- Personal relevance

Tell me what helped you form your views? Some people talk about the importance of personal relevance for people to be involved in an issue. Is that your experience?

- What is the issue? Problem recognition

What would you say is the story about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia? Tell me what's going on.

- Dramatis personae

Who are the main people or entities involved in the issue over time, and what can you tell me about their involvement (politicians, etc.)? [If the interviewee gives a name] What would you say about his/her/its involvement?

- Communication on the issue

Terms that are used in media coverage include 'boat people'. What is your

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<sup>31</sup> The order in which these questions were posed was dependent on the flow of the individual interview.

perspective on 'boat people'? Tell me what you think when you hear talk of or read about 'people smugglers', 'illegals', 'queue jumpers'? What is your response?

- Constraint recognition

What would you see as obstacles to achieving humane policies for asylum seekers?

What are obstacles for activists? What would stand in the way of these changes?

- The incidents

I am going to ask you about three incidents or developments that occurred between 2009 and 2011.

- i. On 16 October 2009, the Australian Customs vessel, the *Oceanic Viking*, rescued 78 asylum seekers in Indonesian waters. The vessel took the asylum seekers back to Merak in Indonesia. Another boat carrying asylum seekers, the *Jaya Lestari 5*, was redirected back to Indonesia, also to Merak. If you remember this incident, tell me in your own words what happened and why.
  - ii. On 15 December 2010, *Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) 221* sank off the coast of Christmas Island and approximately 50 asylum seekers drowned. Again, tell me about the incident.
  - iii. The then-Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced on 6 July 2010 that she was proposing a regional processing centre for asylum seekers. After failing to secure an agreement with East Timor, she announced on 7 May 2011 that Australia was close to signing a bilateral agreement with Malaysia. Again, tell me about this development.<sup>32</sup>
- Would you please provide me with demographic information such as your age, education, gender identification?
  - How would you describe your involvement with the RAC?

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<sup>32</sup> After the interviews were completed the scope of the project was reduced by eliminating the third incident/development included in these questions.



### 3.1.2 Documents

A variety of sources, dates/events and units of analysis (Dane 1990; Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000) were analysed in this study.

#### Selection of sources

In addition to the interview transcripts (from interviews above) the documents chosen for analysis are drawn from two further sites:

- Media releases produced by the RAC and appearing on its website.
- Media articles appearing in three newspapers in Australia.

These sites represent different contributors from civil society and media to the public discourse on the issue. The data allow an examination of the stories these sites and sources communicate about the issue, the relationship, if any, among the stories in these sites, and the dominance of any particular stories.

#### Selection of dates/events

Having selected the two incidents (see Chapter 1 for full explanation), I matched the collection dates of media releases and media articles to cover their timing. The first period of data collection begins on 10 October 2009 and ends on 21 November 2009. It captures the standoff at Merak involving asylum seekers aboard the *Oceanic Viking* and the *Jaya Lestari 5* and their eventual disembarkation.<sup>33</sup> The second period begins on 4 December 2010 and ends on 23 February 2011. This collection of media releases and newspaper articles captures the Christmas Island boat tragedy and the Sydney funerals of some of the asylum seeker victims.

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<sup>33</sup> I examined articles within this period with one exception – an article appearing in the *Daily Telegraph* on 6 October 2009 by Steve Lewis was employed to illustrate a point in Chapter 8.

## **RAC media releases**

The media releases collected for this study are those that were distributed to the organising group email list within the RAC at the time, as well as to media outlets. These emailed releases were checked against those published on the RAC website and were found to be identical. The media releases published online were thus used in this study for convenience of format and access and for their status as public communication on the issue. The periods for collection of the media releases are identical to the periods and events used in the collection of the media articles (see below). In total, 22 media releases were collected for analysis – five in the first period and 17 in the second.

## **Media Texts**

Three newspapers in Australia were chosen for media data collection: a broadsheet metropolitan daily, the *Sydney Morning Herald*; a tabloid daily in the same city, the *Daily Telegraph*; and a national daily broadsheet, the *Australian*. This selection gives a reasonable scope of newspaper ‘types’ in Australia (broadsheet versus tabloid)<sup>34</sup>, and circulation (metropolitan and national), as well as variety in newspaper ownership. On this last point, the *Sydney Morning Herald* is owned by Fairfax Media, and the other two papers are owned by News Corp, a Rupert Murdoch company. As of January 2016, Rupert Murdoch’s companies owned approximately 70 per cent of newspapers in Australia (AMAA 2016; ACMA, cited in Johnston 2016), so the inclusion of two papers from his stable is proportional to this dominance of the broader newspaper landscape in Australia. The choice of a Sydney tabloid and broadsheet is consistent with RAC being identified as a NSW-based coalition with its activities concentrated in Sydney. This selection allows for comparisons of stories across the broadsheet/tabloid distinction, the metropolitan/national distribution, and Fairfax/News Corp ownership. The newspapers selected for this study were collected in physical and online forms. For convenience (e.g., word searches), the online versions were used for the analyses in this thesis.

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<sup>34</sup> The distinctions between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers are discussed in Chapter 7.

The significance of the choice of media texts for this study lies in the relationships of influence between media, public and political agendas (McCombs & Shaw 1972) and the place of newspapers in this process. Newspapers were selected for this study because of their pivotal role in expressing and setting the media agenda on issues such as asylum seeker boat arrivals. Research about news media and their influence is integral to media and journalism studies (Perloff 2013; Sparks 2010). Writing about news as culture, James Ettema says research in this field spans the work of journalists as stimuli for media effects, as textual and visual artefacts that communicate myths, and as spaces ‘for performance of socially sanctioned rituals’ (2010, p. 291).

Regarding the public agenda, Brian Loader and Dan Mercea (2011), in their research on the internet and democracy, claim that people’s shared depictions are drawn from media – this notion of shared depictions is akin to ‘group consciousness’ in SCT. Journalism scholars Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitsch refer to news in a similar way: ‘news shapes the way we see the world, ourselves and each other ... [It can be] a singularly important form of social glue’, binding us together as an “‘imagined community” of co-readers’ (2009, p. 3). Loader and Mercea further assert that ‘the media remain the main stage where public discourse is formed’ (2011, p. 763). In this role, the legacy or traditional news media are still a significant space for influence and cultural import (Street 2011); citizens learn and exchange views in response to what appears (including originally from social media) in the legacy news media (Castells 2007; Loader & Mercea 2011; Park, Phillips & Robinson 2007).

The decline in newspaper sales and circulation is well-documented (Mitchell & Holcomb 2016; Siles & Boczkowski 2012)<sup>35</sup> and is explained by a number of factors – most significantly, the increasing use of the Internet for information, discussion and collaboration (ABS 2016) and the consequent ‘fragmenting’ of the media landscape

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<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, statistics for newspaper consumption in Australia in 2013 indicate that 67 per cent of those surveyed read newspapers online and on paper (AHRC 2013), a significant portion of the Australian population.

(Maier 2010, p. 548), with its economic implications for legacy media outlets (Siles & Boczkowski 2012), particularly print media in their physical forms. In regard to the impact of this decline on influence over agendas, Scott Maier (2010) conducted a content analysis of nearly four thousand news stories to assess whether and how online news sites differ in coverage from legacy media in choice and depth. He found that 60 per cent of the top news stories on the news websites in his study cover the same issues as those in legacy media, which he claims confirms consistent agenda-setting across online and legacy media. This correspondence among media agendas was also found in Hong Tien Vu, Lei Guo and Maxwell McCombs's 2014 study of news reports and public issue agenda networks in 2007–2011 in the US. They found that online news media agendas strongly correlated with agendas of legacy media outlets (p. 682).

This continuing relevance of newspaper agenda-setting functions is evident in two further ways. Firstly, newspaper agendas are seen to have more influence on the political agenda than those of other media entities, influencing policy makers in the governmental/political sector (Allan 2010b). This is related to the notion that the media agenda either mirrors or, at the least, influences what the Australian people care about – the public agenda – and that policy makers in the government pay heed to media agendas for this reason. Secondly, newspapers are very influential within the legacy media space, as their content often impacts on what is included on radio and television, a process known as amplification (Watson 1998). That is, television and radio programs use those issues covered in newspapers as talking points, often relaying the 'headlines' of the day, for example, and seeking listener/viewer responses to issues appearing in prominent positions in newspapers. Journalists who write articles or columns for newspapers are also interviewed on radio and television on the issues they have covered. This complex web of influence provides a rationale for the selection of newspapers in this study – that is, newspapers 'nurture a civic agenda' (Maier 2010, p. 549).

### **Selection of units of analysis**

Articles about the issue in these periods were identified on the basis of the inclusion of any of the following key words: asylum, asylum seeker/s, refugee/s, boat people, detention centres, border protection and people smuggler/ing. A Factiva search yielded 557 articles in the first period and 522 in the second. However, I excluded 142 articles from the first period as I deemed them to be incidental mentions of the key words, without a focus on the issue. In addition, I excluded four articles from the non-incidental group as repetitions, with 411 articles remaining. For the period that captures the second incident, the initial search results were reduced from 522 to 332 articles by excluding 190 further incidentals from this period. Thus, although the initial search yielded 1099 articles, the corpus for this study has been reduced to 743 articles.

## **SECTION 4: DATA ANALYSIS**

The methods deployed in this study enable an investigation of the production of stories and knowledge. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is 'probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents' (Bryman 2008, p. 529) and is the dominant method used in this study. Within this broad category, I employ Fantasy Theme Analysis (Bormann 1985a, 1985b; Foss 2009) as a method of analysing content for stories and storytelling processes.

### **4.1 Content analysis**

Content analysis is an unobtrusive, flexible and transparent research method (Bryman 2008, p. 288). It is employed to identify, enumerate and analyse occurrences of specific characteristics of communicative texts in any medium (Dane 1990, p. 170). Content analyses can be qualitative or quantitative (Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000): this flexibility is useful for this study where a qualitative approach (Fantasy Theme Analysis) is the driver but quantitative methods are required to elicit some necessary information about the media articles.

#### **4.1.1 Fantasy Theme Analysis**

Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) is the method associated with SCT. It is 'designed to provide insights into the shared worldview of groups' (Foss 2009, p. 97). It is employed in this study to determine the shared worldview or group consciousness evident in the interviews with RAC members as well as the worldviews, or rhetorical visions, they use to communicate to the media on the issue (media releases). It is also deployed to analyse the rhetorical visions present (and absent) in the media articles in the three newspapers.

In this study, fantasy themes are tracked across the interviews, the media releases and the media articles. Bormann strongly advocates tracking fantasy themes across discourse situations 'because only then can genuine thematising be established' (cited in Jackson 2000, p. 195). The following procedures were followed in the FTA (Foss 2009; Jackson 2000):

- Ascertained symbolic cues such as catch phrases and slogans used in the different interviews, media releases and articles.
- Isolated fantasies by identifying references to settings, characters and actions.
- Assessed recurrent fantasies that comprised fantasy themes.
- Sought to identify patterns in the fantasy themes. Frequent themes were established as major themes and the rest as minor themes.
- Identified rhetorical visions that were composites of related fantasy themes.
- Analysed the rhetorical visions for the sanctioning agents they employed.
- Analysed the rhetorical visions for the master analogues they expressed.

I introduced an additional step in the analyses of the interview transcripts. In step two (identifying references) I identified 'topic areas' (Novek, cited in Foss 2009, p. 114) related to whether and how a problem was identified, constraints acknowledged, and involvement in the issue expressed. These elements refer to STP, IPM and social movement types of motivations for involvement as described in Chapter 2 (Section 3.1).

#### **4.1.2 Quantitative content analysis and mixed method**

As mentioned, I add an element of quantitative content analysis in the analysis of the media articles. Lawrence Frey, Carl Botan and Gary Kreps explain the difference: ‘coding units into nominal categories yields qualitative data; counting the number of units in each category yields quantitative data’ (2000, p. 243). The quantitative component of this study comprised recording the following data on the media articles:

- Publication name.
- Dates of publication.
- Location (page no.) of article placement.
- Name of journalist/s to whom the article is attributed.
- Length of article.
- Sources attributed in the article by the journalist.
- The order in which the source attribution appears.

Although Anders Hansen, Simon Cottle, Ralph Negrine and Chris Newbold (1998) maintain that objectivity in content analysis is an ‘impossible ideal’ that just serves to ‘mystify’ the means of knowledge production in research, the elements listed above could be labelled ‘objective data’ in that they require little in the way of inference – that is, this information was collected rather than produced from analysis. However, the following qualitative analysis followed from this initial data collection:

- Categorisation of the articles according to an assessment of whether each is a news article, opinion, analysis, or opinion/analysis (see Section 2.2 in Chapter 7 for explanation). These were coded by the researcher and her assistant and checks were made for inter-coder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken 2002), as explained above.
- Categorisation of sources after recording all sources cited in all articles.
- Categorisation of sources according to the sector they represented – government or civil society.

- Categorisation of article writers to distinguish newspaper reporters from journalists, columnists and guest columnists, editors and agency material (combined).

In addition, I measured the frequency (Dane 1990) of occurrences of certain characteristics:

- The four categories of articles: news, opinion, analysis, opinion/analysis.
- Prominence of positions in the newspapers, according to page groupings (e.g., p. 1, then pp. 2–4, etc.) and length of articles.
- Articles produced by each publication on the issue.
- The number and nature of guest columnists.
- How often categories of sources appeared.
- The prominence of particular sources (first source to ‘fifth or later’ source).

These frequency and prominence calculations provide information and measurement (Jensen & Jankowski 1991) that enable a discussion about agenda setting and framing in the media (chapters 7 and 8) on this issue.

## **SECTION 5: ETHICS**

I conducted the interviews to avoid harm, respect the contexts of the consent to the process, and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This approach conforms to Clifford Christians’s model of research ethics ‘in which human action and conceptions of the good are interactive’ (2005, p. 158) rather than ethics being extrinsic to the research process. As I knew all the interviewees from my own participation in the RAC (see below), I was careful to avoid any coercion, or appearance of coercion, in seeking their agreement to participate, and they were all given the opportunity to follow-up after the interviews and to withdraw at any stage. Material from the interviews, including personal information about interviewees, was de-identified and pseudonyms were used in the interview analysis chapter (Chapter 5). I did not reveal to the interviewees who else in the group was



invited to participate. The interviewees gave me written permission to use their names where they appeared in the public documents used in the study, such as the media releases (Chapter 6) and media articles (chapters 7, 8 and 9), in accordance with the ethics requirements of the University of Sydney.

### **5.1 Researcher's role**

At the time of the interviews I had for three years been a participant in the activist public from which the interviewees were drawn. Participant observation requires the researcher's involvement with the people she is studying 'in their natural environment and over an extended period' (Bray 2008, p. 305). My role in this study conforms to these characteristics, in that I attended weekly meetings of the coordinating group and participated in events, discussions and decision making. However, despite my own considerable professional experience in public relations, I did not participate in the development or production of communication material for the group. This was a decision based on my plan to analyse the media releases produced by the RAC.

To better explore my role as a researcher in this activist public, I begin by reflecting on Raymond Gold's 1958 (as described in Bryman 2008, pp. 410–411) schema for classifying participant observers in ethnographic research. He defines four roles: the complete participant, who is a fully functioning member of the social setting but whose role as a researcher is hidden; the participant-as-observer, who is a full participant and an acknowledged researcher; the observer-as-participant, who gathers material from observations in real time but without genuine participation; and the complete observer whose observations are made unobtrusively and without interaction. Although the 'participant-as-observer' role is closely allied to my research behaviour, none of Gold's roles accurately captures my role in this activist public, for several reasons. Firstly, direct observations from field work do not form a part of this work. My observations from full participation in the group are limited to background for interviewee selection (see Section 3.1.1, above), and any influence on the data analysis that ensues from immersion in the activist public and the issue.

Secondly, for the first six months of participation in the group I introduced myself as a researcher when round-the-table introductions were performed. However, as most attendees to the organising meetings were regular participants, I discontinued this practice. Therefore, in relation to participation, 'participant-as-observer' is the closest role in this schema to that which I performed.

However, a variant of participant observation, known as 'observant participation' (Bray 2008, p. 308), is a more apt description of my role in this activist public and in this research; that is, observant participation encapsulates my personal involvement outside of the study and the emphasis on participation rather than observation. With this participation I was immersed in the activist public and in the issue so that I became a part of the community. This familiarity with the issue and the RAC members is advantageous for gaining the confidence of interviewees and, I argue, facilitates better understanding and feasible inferences from the interviews: as Bray maintains, 'by taking part in social interaction, the researcher is able to make better sense of it' (2008, p. 306). However, this empathetic, subjectivist advantage is balanced, when producing analysis, by the need for a critical stance that does not sacrifice independent thinking. In the words of Daniel Bertaux, 'the researcher can only "do [her] best" to be as attentive and open-minded as possible' (cited in Bray 2008, p. 309).

## **SECTION 6: LIMITATIONS**

Qualitative research, such as in this study, has limitations. Unlike much quantitative research, qualitative research is not generalisable (Frey, Botan & Kreps 2000); I cannot extrapolate from the conclusions made in this case. In addition, my own role as researcher is both a strength and a weakness. My 'inside' knowledge of this activist public allows me to understand the complexity of the contexts for the operations of the group, the stories and the issue. However, it also means that I am 'present' in the research, and this presence has the potential to influence what I examine, the way I examine it and my interpretations of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: BACKGROUND TO THE CASE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The stories and storytelling that are the focus of this thesis – at the time of the standoff at Merak and the Christmas Island boat tragedy – were not unheralded. The contexts for the two incidents examined provide insights into the development and appearance of the stories and storytelling about them (chapters 5, 6 and 9). The three sections in this chapter set out these contexts using international, national and local frames. Each frame draws on different legal systems, values, communities and histories. The international, national and local frames reflect the broad to the specific in this study – from global people movements, to Australia’s practices, to the functioning of the Refugee Action Coalition NSW (RAC). The international section is introduced first to provide the global perspective on the issue. It explains the international conventions that prescribe signatories’ – including Australia’s – agreed responses to asylum seeker arrivals. The second, national, section sets out Australia's history as an immigrant nation, describing the progression of legal and procedural frameworks for migration in 2009–2011. In this section I also provide the contemporary context for asylum seeker policies, with reference to three significant incidents/developments in 2001 that set the scene for the two incidents examined in this study. These earlier incidents provide a sense of the tenor of Australia’s policy developments and debate on this issue leading up to the standoff and the boat tragedy in 2009–2011. The third section addresses the local level for this study; that is, the activist public at its centre, the RAC. This section explains the development of this organisation, its membership and its affiliations. This third section includes material gleaned from the interviews with members of this activist public.

### **SECTION 1: INTERNATIONAL**

#### **1.1 Global people movements**

One of the key phenomena to shape the subject of this thesis is the movement of ‘huge numbers’ (Grandi, cited in UNHCR 2016, para. 11) of people from their homes

in a number of troubled locations around the world. These global people movements include those asylum seekers and refugees who make their journeys to Australia on boats. Refugees fall into the broader sociological phenomenon of the forced migrant. Forced migration occurs when people are displaced from their homes by conflict, development or disaster; such migrants are 'overwhelmingly from the developing world' (Grewcock 2009, p. 40). Refugees represent only a minority of forced migrants included in the United Nations categories that cover 'persons of concern' (UNHCR 2012b, p. 1).

There were an estimated 43.5 million persons of concern to the UN in the world in 2011<sup>36</sup> (UNHCR 2012b), at the end of the second period examined in this thesis; these figures (collected only by participating countries) are conservative, at best. Over 16 million of these persons of concern were refugees and asylum seekers: 10.4 million were refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate (UNHCR 2012b); 895,000 were asylum seekers whose claims had not yet been assessed; and another 4.8 million people were also refugees under a separate mandate for Palestinians (UNRWA n.d.). Of the remaining persons of concern, the majority were people displaced within their countries of origin – Internally Displaced Persons<sup>37</sup> – and the rest, 'stateless persons'.<sup>38</sup>

Global people movements increase at periods of intense local conflicts (such as the current situation in Syria), incidents of environmental disasters (such as famine through drought or tsunamis from earthquakes) or development displacements (such as people forced to move by infrastructure projects or deforestation) (Grewcock 2009).

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<sup>36</sup> In 2015 this figure increased to 65.3 million forcibly displaced people (UNHCR 2015a).

<sup>37</sup> Internally Displaced Persons are excluded from figures describing refugee numbers because a criterion for refugee status is that the person must have left his or her country of residence and crossed an international border (OCHA 2004, p. 1).

<sup>38</sup> Stateless persons are people who have no recognised nationality. The consequences of statelessness are that access to education, healthcare and freedom of movement can be denied (UNHCR n.d.a).

## **1.2 The United Nations and United Nations Human Rights Commissioner for Refugees**

A pivotal international institution that figures in the central issue in this thesis is the United Nations (UN). The UN was formed in 1945 within weeks of the end of World War II. It was preceded by the League of Nations, established in 1921 after World War I, a body that has since been dismissed as ineffectual (Hanhimaki 2008, pp. 11–12). The creation of the UN is described by foreign policy specialist Stephen Schlesinger as ‘affecting the survival or demise of humanity’ (2003, p. xv). The UN’s mission is to pursue security, human rights and the advancement of socio-economic, environmental and health conditions for the world community. The provinces of its 193 (United Nations n.d.a) member states cover the entire globe (missing are the Vatican City, Kosovo and Taiwan): it is ‘the only truly global organisation in the history of mankind’ (Hanhimaki 2008, p. 5). Despite its detractors, membership of the organisation has almost quadrupled from the initial 51 nation state signatories at its inception. Australia was one of the early state signatories.

Within the UN, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the body (and position) that oversees the institution’s involvement in the plight of displaced persons around the world. It was established in 1950, after World War II. At that time, the majority of an estimated 20 million refugees sought sanctuary in Europe rather than the rest of the world (Hanhimaki 2008, p. 128). Originally created for a three-year term to resettle and repatriate these refugees, the UNHCR’s authority was extended repeatedly, until the time limit was finally removed from its charter in 2003, a clear indication that global movements of refugees remained an ongoing issue for the world community. Its mandate is to lead and coordinate action for the international protection of refugees who fall within the scope of the Statute of the UNHCR, as well as to pursue durable solutions for them (UNHCR 2011c, p. 11). This includes monitoring and supervising the application of the *1951 Refugee Convention*.

### **1.3 United Nations Conventions relevant to refugees**

#### **Who is a 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'?**

The terms 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' are defined by the UNHCR in internationally recognised agreements. Refugees are those people who, 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' have left their countries of nationality or residence and, because of their fear, are not able to return to or seek the protection of that country (UNHCR 2011b, p. 14). An asylum seeker is defined as 'someone who says that he or she is a refugee but whose claim has not yet been assessed' (AHRC 2008, p. 1).

Clearly, an integral part of this definition is that refugees are fleeing persecution; this flight becomes part of 'people movements', whereby asylum seeker populations pursue safe havens away from the source (usually a locale) of this fear of persecution. The UNHCR asserts that asylum seekers should be treated as refugees until the assessment process is complete and they are found not to meet the criteria contained in the definition; that is, asylum seekers are entitled to the same rights and protections as refugees until they are shown *not* to be refugees. 'The formal recognition of someone, for instance through individual refugee status determination, does not establish refugee status, *but confirms it*' (UNHCR 2009a, p. 2; emphasis added). This direction on the treatment of asylum seekers as refugees under the UN Convention is significant when reviewing Australia's treatment of those asylum seekers who attempt boat journeys to its shores.

#### **International Conventions and Protocols**

Asylum seekers and refugees have their conditions and rights defined and protected by a number of measures in international conventions and protocols. Australia is a signatory to all of these instruments. Two agreements are specific to refugees: the *1951 Refugee Convention* and the *1967 Protocol*, which removed the time and geographical limits included in the 1951 agreement. These UN agreements and treaties codify international cooperation in the field of asylum and resettlement.

With this, signatory states recognise that asylum seekers need special protection and states agree to behave in ways ‘that these refugees may find asylum and the possibility of resettlement’ (UNHCR 2011b, p. 11), including receiving refugees in their territories.

### **Which states are signatories?**

Australia is one of 148 states (including Nauru as at June 2011) that are participants in one or both of the principal instruments for protection of refugees. As of 1 April 2011, 144 states were party to the 1951 Convention, 144 to the 1967 Protocol and 141 to both the Convention and the Protocol (UNHCR n.d.c, p. 1).<sup>39</sup>

### **What do these conventions do/say?**

The international conventions that play a role in this thesis are formal international stories about the agreed conduct of nations in relation to asylum seekers. These international stories – or rhetorical visions – play a key role in RAC storytelling and yet are almost entirely absent from the newspaper articles on the issue. The principal protection provided to refugees by the central international story, the *1951 Refugee Convention* and *1967 Protocol*, is the protection in Article 33 against return to the place where they fear persecution: *non-refoulement*. This principle maintains that ‘no Contracting State shall expel or return (*refouler*) a refugee, against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears persecution’ (UNHCR 2011b, p. 5). The importance of *non-refoulement* is emphasised by an introductory note to Article 33 that asserts that there can be no reservations made to this principle nor to the definition of the term ‘refugee’. In addition, *non-refoulement* is ‘generally considered a principle of customary international law, and is thus binding on States even if they have not signed or ratified the relevant refugee or human rights conventions’ (UNHCR 2011c). The human rights convention referred to here is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which, in Article 14, declares that ‘[e]veryone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from

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<sup>39</sup> Three states parties are signatories to the 1951 Convention but not to the Protocol. They are Madagascar, Monaco and St Kitts and Nevis. Three states parties are signatories to the 1967 Protocol but not to the Convention: Cape Verde, the United States of America and Venezuela.

persecution' (United Nations n.d.b). In the 46 articles of the *1951 Refugee Convention* there are many other protections, including the rights to non-discrimination, to engage in wage-earning employment, to have access to courts, and to enjoy the same rights and obligations as nationals of the country in which refugees resettle. However, the refugee is not accorded the generalised *right* to asylum in signatory nations (Grewcock 2009, p. 31). Refugees are entitled to ask for asylum but nation states have the right to refuse. Australia was instrumental in ensuring this limitation was inserted when the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was drafted by the United Nations after World War II (Brennan 2003, pp. 1–2).

#### **1.4 Effectiveness of UN – internationalism versus nationalism**

The effectiveness of the UN is tested in the tension between nationalism and internationalism – between international agreements such as the *Refugee Convention* and the national laws and practices that prosecute the intent of these instruments. That is, signatory states determine how and whether UN conventions are applied in their territories; thus, the functions of these conventions are limited by 'the prerogative of the nation state' (Hanhimaki 2008, p. 4). Consequently, differences arise in the application of *Refugee Convention* articles. In response to these differing applications, the UNHCR and the Graduate Institute of International Studies convened an expert roundtable in Geneva in 2001 to provide more detailed guidance to states on aspects of the agreements. Particularly pertinent to Australia is the roundtable's review of Article 31, 'Refugees unlawfully in the country of refuge'.

Article 31 of the *1951 Refugee Convention* provides the following:

1. The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their *illegal* entry or presence, on refugees who, *coming directly* from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened in the sense of Article 1, enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves *without delay* to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.
2. The Contracting States shall not apply to the movements of such refugees *restrictions* other than those which are necessary and such



restrictions shall only be applied until their status in the country is regularized or they obtain admission into another country. The Contracting States shall allow such refugees a reasonable period and all the necessary facilities to obtain admission into another country' (UNHCR 2011b, p. 29; emphasis added).

The relevance to this thesis of the outcomes of the Expert Roundtable's review lies in several factors. Successive Australian governments have made distinctions between 'legal' and 'illegal' methods of arrival of asylum seekers to Australia (see Article 31.1, above, italicised passage) and between the modes of transport adopted. Australia has also long maintained that Article 31 allows it to expect asylum seekers to seek refuge in the many countries/nations they traverse on the long journey to Australia (see Article 31.1, 'coming directly'). In addition, Australian practices of detention (see Article 31.2, italicised passage), and the rhetoric that surrounds them, have referred to deterrence as a goal in the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, which includes detention of children and unaccompanied minors. Consequently, the following clarifications by the Expert Roundtable provide important context for a review of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers in relation to the *UN Refugee Convention*.

- That refugees shall not be penalised because they have arrived illegally in a signatory country (specific considerations 10 (a) Feller, Türk & Nicholson 2003, p. 255)
- That refugees do not need to have come directly from the place where their life or freedom was threatened (specific considerations 10 (a) Feller et al. 2003, p. 255). This is counter to the wording of Article 31 (1) but points to individual circumstances that might delay or thwart a direct path to the country of refuge or destination. 'Article 31 (1) was intended to apply, and has been interpreted to apply, to persons who have briefly transited other countries or who are unable to find effective protection in the first country or countries to which they flee' (specific considerations 10 (c) Feller et al. 2003, p. 255). Without this clarification, refugees could be denied asylum and protection simply because

they had spent some time in other countries on their way to their country of destination (see specific considerations 10 (d) Feller et al. 2003).

- That refugees may have been prevented from presenting themselves ‘without delay’ to the state authority and that the availability of advice about this should be taken into consideration (specific considerations 10 (f) Feller et al. 2003, p. 256).
- That detention *should not be* ‘for the purposes of deterrence’ (specific considerations 11 (c) Feller et al. 2003, p. 256), ‘punishment, or maintained where asylum procedures are protracted’ (specific considerations 11(d) Feller et al. 2003, pp. 256–257).
- That families should not be separated and that unaccompanied children should never be detained (specific considerations 11 (f) Feller et al. 2003, p. 257)
- That procedures for assessment should be expeditious and that procedural safeguards such as ease of access to legal and review processes be enabled (specific considerations 11 (h) and (i) Feller et al. 2003, p. 257).

Thus, the dialectic between nationalism and internationalism is apparent in Australia’s approach to the arrival of asylum seekers: despite its signatory status, its practices are designed to curtail, deter or disrupt asylum seeker arrivals, rather than to enable those who flee persecution to seek a safe haven in Australia. Michael Grewcock (2009, p. 57) refers to the characteristics of the Western framework of ‘organised exclusion’ seen in Europe, North America and the southeast Asia/Pacific rim: they are, firstly, deliberate pursuit of border protection strategies as a ‘major domestic political issue’ and employing military personnel and tactics (see *Tampa and Pacific Solution*, Section 2.2 in this chapter); secondly, a ‘qualified commitment to multiculturalism’ that calls attention to ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ migrants (see Australian laws and processes Section 2.3); thirdly, a ‘war’ on people smuggling that is characterised as transnational organised crime (see *People Smuggling and Bali Process* sections 1.9 & 1.10); and fourthly, the use of buffer zones and external processing venues which Grewcock calls ‘the externalisation of border control’ and the routine use of detention, removal and interdiction (see *Detention*, Section 2.4 in

this chapter). Strategies of exclusion have become the norm in Australia and the model for a number of Western states to 'manage' asylum seeker arrivals.

Despite the limitations on the UN's power to enforce its conventions, it remains a significant world institution for the maintenance of global conversations and actions about the issues at the heart of its charter: security, human rights, and the advancement of socio-economic, environmental and health conditions. In this thesis, this international arbiter plays a significant role in the storytelling on the issue in the activists' rhetorical visions (chapters 5 & 6) that refer to the UN as an institutional 'touchstone' for the measure of Australia's actions and policies on the issue.

### **1.5 Other relevant conventions**

Although a number of protections and provisions are embedded in the *Refugee Convention* and *Protocol*, clearly even signatories do not adequately or consistently apply these protections, and so asylum seekers have resort to a number of other conventions to seek protection, assistance and better conditions. This was a point made explicit by the 2001 Expert Roundtable, whose findings recommended several of the following relevant conventions for this purpose (Feller et al. 2003, pp. 255–257). These conventions are pertinent to asylum seeker arrivals to Australia, as they address the sea journeys often involved, the rights of children and families and other complementary protections.

### **1.6 Which states are *not* signatories – travel paths**

The motivations for asylum seekers to make their journeys all the way to Australia are often queried by politicians, anti-refugee advocates and journalists, with the implication that it is not refuge from persecution asylum seekers are pursuing but simply a lifestyle change or economic advantage (Every & Augoustinos 2008b; Kampmark 2006; McKay, Thomas & Kneebone 2011). These asylum seekers have sometimes been referred to as 'economic migrants' (Hatton 2009, p. F183), a term of abuse in these circumstances (Burnett & Peel 2001, p. 486). This debate captures the 'push' versus 'pull' factors argument in the explanation for movements of people

around the globe (Castles, de Haas & Miller 2014, p. 28), one that arises in Australia in relation to asylum seeker arrivals.

**Table 4.1 Collection of relevant international instruments and legal texts**

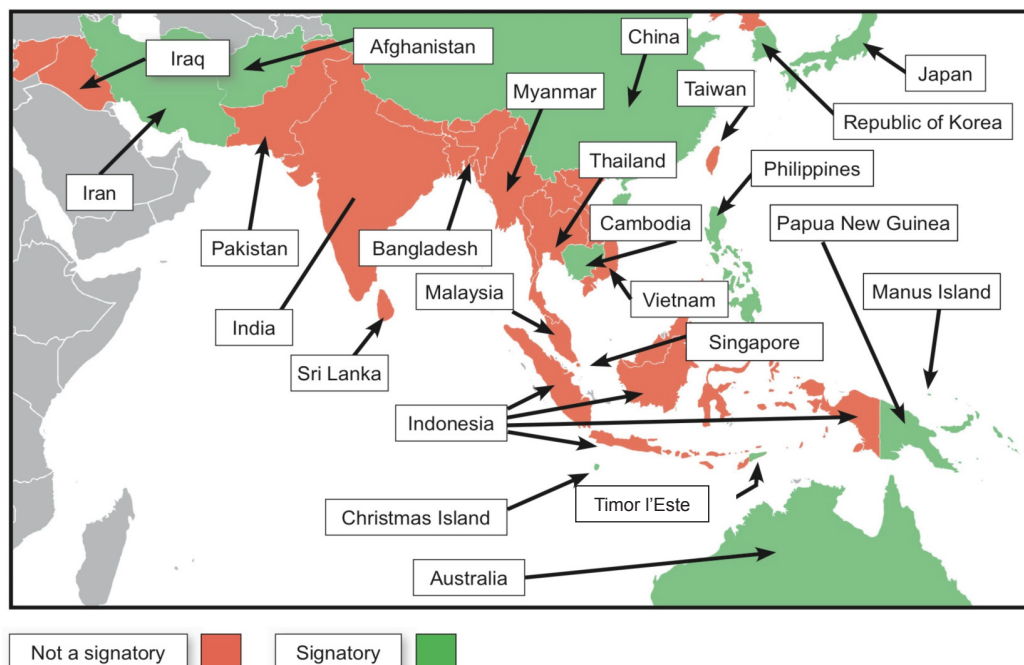
Year	International instrument
1948	<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i> of 10 December 1948
1954	<i>Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons</i> of 28 September 1954 Enacted in 1960
1966	<i>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</i> of 16 December 1966
1974	<i>International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)</i> , 1 November 1974, as amended
1979	<i>International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR)</i> , 27 April 1979, as amended
1982	<i>United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)</i> of 10 December 1982 These maritime laws and conventions (1974, 1979 and 1982) apply to those travelling by sea to seek asylum around the world. That is, the Captain of a vessel that is asked to provide assistance to another vessel in distress must do so (UNHCR 2003)
1984	<i>Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment</i> 10 December 1984
1989	<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i> 20 November 1989 (AHRC 2008; UNHCR 2011b)
2000	<i>Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime</i> of 15 November 2000 (Palermo Protocol on Trafficking)
2000	<i>Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime</i> of 15 November 2000 (Palermo Protocol on Smuggling)

Source: UNHCR 2007

One of the factors that may affect the travel pathways of refugees from conflict zones may be countries' participation in the *Refugee Convention* and the *1967 Protocol*. Forty-five UN member states have declined to enter into one or the other of these two instruments. Of significance to this study is the notable absence of participating states in the paths of refugees travelling generally southwards (towards Australia) from Afghanistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka, sites of conflict and sources of asylum seeker arrivals to Australia in 2009–2011. In this general direction, the following countries were non-signatories of either agreement at the time of the incidents examined in this thesis: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia (see Map 4.1) (UNHCR n.d.c). It is in this space that asylum seekers' travel to Australia takes place.

As Dr Evan Arthur, director of the Determination and Refugee Status Policy Division of the then-Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, explained to the Australian Parliament, only a tiny percentage of arrivals to Australia have transited countries that have signed the *Refugee Convention*: ‘it is a reflection of our part of the world: the nature of the region in which we live. There are very few signatories to the Convention within the Asian region generally and even fewer in the South-East Asian region’ (1992, cited in Brennan 2003, p. 55). In the South-East Asia region, only China, Cambodia, Timor l’Este,<sup>40</sup> Japan and Papua New Guinea were signatories and of these, only Japan is both a democracy and an industrialised or developed nation, both circumstances that may attract asylum seekers in their quest for support from a haven that values freedom and can provide economic security. At the time of the incidents in this study, Australia’s negotiations for ‘upstream disruption’ (Brennan 2003, p. 59) of asylum seekers heading for its shores was mostly with Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, three non-signatory nations.

**Map 4.1: Signatory nations in the general travel paths towards Australia**



<sup>40</sup> Timor l’Este is the name adopted in this thesis, in accordance with the preferences of that country, except where East Timor is used in direct quotes from the RAC or in newspapers.

Non-signatory states have not made a commitment to protect asylum seekers. As so few states in South-East Asia are parties to the *Refugee Convention* (UNHCR 2015c, para. 2), the absence of national legal frameworks and the increase in policies that detain, expel and *refoule* these asylum seekers mean that protection for refugees in this region is 'fragile and unpredictable'. While waiting many years for resettlement in a signatory country, asylum seekers in transit countries such as Indonesia do not have access to employment and access to healthcare and education for themselves and their families is severely restricted (APRRN 2015; UNHCR 2015b). For those living outside of Indonesia's detention centres, the precariousness of their position is amplified by routine imprisonment. Such practices in non-signatory countries help explain why asylum seekers continue their journeys towards a country like Australia that has committed to protecting them (by signing the Convention).

### 1.7 Where are they coming from and where do they apply for asylum?

The UN reports biannually on applications for asylum lodged to the 44 industrialised countries that record these statistics. Table 4.2 below shows the key countries of origin of those seeking asylum in Australia in the period 2009–2011, coinciding with the time periods covered in this thesis.

**Table 4.2: Top 10 populations of origin of asylum applicants to Australia by country 2009–2011**

Origin	2009	Rank	2010	Rank	2011	Rank	Total	Rank
China	1 197	1	1 191	3	1 188	3	<b>3 576</b>	<b>3</b>
Afghanistan	936	2	3 129	1	1 721	2	<b>5 786</b>	<b>1</b>
Sri Lanka	554	3	796	6	370	9	<b>1 720</b>	<b>4</b>
Zimbabwe	351	4	—	0	—	0	<b>351</b>	<b>11</b>
Islamic Rep. of Iran	311	5	1 354	2	2 156	1	<b>3 821</b>	<b>2</b>
Iraq	303	6	856	5	491	7	<b>1 650</b>	<b>5</b>
Fiji	262	7	547	7	276	10	<b>1 085</b>	<b>9</b>
Pakistan	261	8	470	8	817	4	<b>1 548</b>	<b>7</b>
Malaysia	231	9	—	0	—	0	<b>231</b>	<b>12</b>
India	213	10	412	9	765	5	<b>1 390</b>	<b>8</b>
Stateless	—	—	1 035	4	530	6	<b>1 565</b>	<b>6</b>
Egypt	—	—	328	10	417	8	<b>745</b>	<b>10</b>

Sources: UNHCR (2011a); UNHCR (2012a).

### **Why do they flee?**

Global movements of people are indicative of situations of social, cultural, economic, and political upheaval in nation states across the world over time. Conflict is the key motivator for asylum seekers to flee their countries of origin, with civil conflict the prime precipitator (Hatton 2009). Persecution in these contexts can take many forms: for example, massacres and threats of massacres, detention, beatings, torture, or rape and sexual assault; it may also have meant forced evictions, disappearances of family members or associates, enforced conscription into the army or sexual slavery; in addition, long-term persecution may include harassment, political repression and denial of human rights (Burnett & Peel 2001, p. 486). Persecution can be directed at individuals because of their beliefs or actions, or at a group of people, such as the Hazaras in Afghanistan or the Kurds in Iraq. It can be perpetrated by governments, militias, or other groups with the power to effect torture and punishment with relative impunity.

Timothy Hatton (2009) investigated the reasons for variations in asylum seeker flights and applications over time. He found that poorer countries generate more asylum applications, that political rights captures an important motivation for flight and that war was a major precipitator. A very significant indicator was the terror measure which captures threats to individuals and, in particular, civilians.

The role of war as a prime instigator of people movements is significant for Australia. Australia and its allies have participated in either ground or air forces, or both (Australian War Memorial n.d.), in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and now Syria (to name a few) – all source countries for most asylum seekers who travel by boat to Australia. Commentators such as Mike Steketee (2010a) and Matt Khoury (2015) argue that this participation places a moral obligation on these Western nations to provide safe havens for asylum seekers fleeing the scenes of these conflicts. This is especially the case for those asylum seekers whose lives may be in greater danger because of assistance they have given to Western forces in their countries (Khoury 2015).

### **Where do they want to go?**

Asylum seekers from particular arenas of conflict have tended to apply to resettle in a small number of shared 'safe haven' destinations. For example, more than half of all claims by Iraqi asylum seekers in the 2009 UN report were lodged to just four countries: Germany, Turkey, Sweden and the Netherlands. Similarly, while Afghani asylum seekers applied to 35 different countries (out of the 44 industrialised countries in the survey), one third applied to either the United Kingdom or Norway (UNHCR 2009b, p. 6).

The question of the motivation to seek particular destinations was investigated in a UK report (Robinson & Segrott 2002). Vaughan Robinson and Jeremy Segrott found that factors that influence asylum seeker choices for 'safe havens' are 'extremely limited' (2002, pp. 4–5). There are four reasons given: firstly, many asylum seekers are 'acute refugees' who leave at very short notice and without plans; secondly, access to travel documents and money affects where they can travel, how far and what means they can use to get there; thirdly, some countries are less accessible than others because of transport links or visa and other immigration controls; and, fourthly, asylum seekers enlist the help of 'agents (or facilitators)' to travel from their home country to a safe destination and these agents are often the decision makers, based on their knowledge of destination countries and travel arrangements. Thus, temporal, spatial and organising factors may contribute to these differing patterns of global people movements and applications for resettlement along with the status of the transit and destination countries' agreement with the UN *Refugee Convention*.

### **1.8 Australia's contribution to the international effort to assist asylum seekers and refugees**

Australia's comparative contribution to helping those seeking asylum throughout the world can be gauged against the UNHCR's three criteria (2005, p. 51): Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita; national population; and land area. On these criteria, Australia's contribution is small, as demonstrated by the comparisons below.



- i. Australia ranked 77th in the world when number of refugees resettled was compared to Australia's GDP per capita (UNHCR 2008, p. 1).
- ii. At the time of the first period examined in this case study (2009), Australia was host to 1.1 refugees per thousand inhabitants compared to the United States's 6.2, Germany's 7, the United Kingdom's 8.4, Canada's 17.9, Syria's 75.5 and Jordan's 84.4. Another way of looking at this is that Australia was 69th in the world if countries are ranked on the number of refugees they settle on a purely per capita basis (AJA 2009, p. 1).
- iii. Australia has the sixth-largest land mass of any country in the world at 7,692,024 sq. kilometres. However, it may be argued that a large proportion of this land mass is not suitable for settlement, if that is the basis on which this criterion is included.

In a background note for the Department of Parliamentary Services, Janet Phillips maintains that 'In fact, the burden of assisting the world's asylum seekers mostly fell, and still falls, to some of the world's poorest countries' (2011, p. 12). In 2009, the then-Immigration Minister, Chris Evans, acknowledged the small scale of the issue of asylum seeker arrivals in Australia compared to other parts of the world (cited in Phillips 2011, p. 4).

### **1.9 People smuggling**

As is evident in Map 4.1, the last leg of an asylum seeker's journey towards the island continent of Australia involves a significant boat journey. It is the asylum seekers who travel on these boats who are the subject of the stories and storytelling examined in this thesis. These journeys are effected by what are known as 'people smugglers', who arrange transport from Indonesia to Australia at a price. They buy Indonesian fishing boats and recruit local fishers, often with little experience in boat handling – or knowledge of what they are being asked to do – to captain the vessels that make their way towards Australia. Australia's federal Attorney-General's Department defines people smugglers as 'individuals or groups who assist others to

enter a country through irregular methods. In the case of Australia, people smugglers provide air or sea access' (n.d.a).<sup>41</sup>

The UN adopted two protocols addressing people smuggling in 2000, both supplementing the UN *Convention against Transnational Organised Crime* (adopted 15 November 2000). They are the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*<sup>42</sup> and the *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air*<sup>43</sup> (UNHCR 2007). The second is pertinent to this thesis.

Under this convention and its protocols, and in enabling national laws in many signatory states, people smuggling is a criminal offence. Australia has legislated to penalise people smugglers who bring asylum seekers in boats to Australia, through the *Anti-People Smuggling and Other Measures Act 2010* (Australian Government 2010). However, in the report of the 2001 Expert Roundtable referred to earlier (see Section 1.5), 10 (i) it says that: 'In principle, a carrier which brings in an "undocumented" passenger who is subsequently determined to be in need of international protection should not be subject to penalties' (Feller et al. 2003, p. 256).

The connotations of people smuggling in the context of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia differ. While the UN refers to those who smuggle migrants as 'profit-seeking criminals' (UN *Office on Drugs and Crime* n.d., para. 4), many refugee advocacy groups contend that those who smuggle asylum seekers in this situation are providing an important service, helping those in dire circumstances to escape to what they anticipate is a 'safe haven'. Some point to the situation during World War II where people smugglers arranged for Jews and other persecuted peoples to escape to safety, actions later lauded by the world community. Indeed, Robyn de

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<sup>41</sup> This term is distinguished from 'human trafficking' which is the transportation or use of persons for exploitation, such as sex slaves, denying them freedom and choice when they arrive at their destination (Attorney-General's Department n.d.b).

<sup>42</sup> This Protocol entered into force on 25 December 2003.

<sup>43</sup> This Protocol entered into force on 28 January 2004 (UN Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.)

Crespigny's book about one such people smuggler in Australia, Ali Al Jenabi, promotes him as 'the "Oskar Schindler of Asia"' (2012, cover).<sup>44</sup>

## **1.10 Australia's role in the region**

### **The Bali Process**

As a postcolonial, developed, Western nation situated in South-East Asia, Australia represents itself as a leader in the region (Burke 2008). One of the range of international and regional bodies that influences and reflects its interests in the treatment of asylum seekers and related issues is known as the 'Bali Process'. Australia is one of its 45 member nations<sup>45</sup> and Indonesia and Australia are co-chairs, taking turns to host annual meetings that focus on the Asia-Pacific region. This organisation was initiated after a 2002 meeting of government ministers in the region to discuss people smuggling, human trafficking and 'related transnational crime'. The Bali Process and its Regional Support Office were established to 'strengthen practical cooperation on refugee protection and international migration' (The Bali Process n.d., para. 3). Specifically, it addresses 'irregular migration' in the Asia Pacific, focussing on people smuggling. Within the Bali Process is the Ad Hoc Group and its members, those countries deemed most affected by the issues. These include Australia but do not include Iraq or Iran, prime source countries for Australia's asylum seeker boat arrivals. Participants discuss and cooperate on border security, identity verification/information and technologies to combat people smuggling and human trafficking (Bali Process Ad Hoc Group 2014). Australia's participation in the Bali Process represents and reinforces the Australian government's national story about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia from the region.

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<sup>44</sup> Schindler protected over a thousand of his Jewish factory workers from deportation to camps during World War II and used his fortune to pay bribes to SS officials and to buy black market goods to keep his workers alive. He was lauded for his actions despite profiting from them.

<sup>45</sup> In addition, the International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and UN Office on Drugs and Crime are listed as members. A further 18 countries are listed as 'participating' in the Bali Process (The Bali Process n.d.).

## **Foreign relations practices with Indonesia and Sri Lanka**

Key countries in the region with which Australia has negotiated on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals are Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In terms of foreign relations practices, both countries are treated similarly, in that both attract Australia's aid,<sup>46</sup> as well as funds and equipment to assist them to deter asylum seekers from leaving their shores to journey to Australia. In its negotiations with Indonesia and Sri Lanka, Australia is pursuing its self-interest to garner their assistance to 'stop the boats', a cry issuing from Australia's domestic political discourse. The weight given to this self-interest is apparent in a comparison of the markedly different circumstances of the two countries in relation to asylum seekers. Neither country is a signatory to the *Refugee Convention* (UNHCR n.d.c). However, where Indonesia – a near neighbour and significant trading partner to Australia – is a well-established transit country for asylum seekers (UNHCR 2015b), Sri Lanka is a source country for Tamils fleeing persecution from the civil war and its aftermath. The victors in the civil war, and their leader, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, have been the subject of international condemnation for alleged human rights abuses and related crimes which have been investigated by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR 2015).<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, Australia also pays these alleged perpetrators of the persecution of Tamils in Sri Lanka to prosecute its 'stop the boats' policy.

## **SECTION 2: NATIONAL — AUSTRALIA**

### **2.1 Immigration**

Australia's history of immigration is relevant to understanding the context for this study of storytelling about asylum seeker boat arrivals. Australia is a country built on migration – it has been a 'classic immigrant-settler nation' (Soutphommasane 2012, p. 65). Western archaeologists propose that the land now known as Australia has been occupied by its Indigenous peoples since before 120,000 years BP (Sherwood

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<sup>46</sup> Australia provides substantial aid to Indonesia, more than ten times the amount it provides to the much smaller Sri Lankan nation (DFAT n.d; DFAT 2016).

<sup>47</sup> The OHCHR investigation also examined claims against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the paramilitary group in conflict with the Rajapaksa forces (OHCHR 2015).

2010, p. 58). This occupation, it is suggested, is the result of migration on boats from the north.<sup>48</sup> Since the British invasion of 1788, subsequent waves of immigrants have largely been at the invitation of Australian governments, most commonly in efforts to build the nation, such as after World War II. That is, since British colonisation, Australia has mostly invited or accepted immigrants and refugees in its own interests (Brennan 2003; Soutphommasane 2012). These interests were early expressed in terms of racial 'purity' (Deakin, cited in Jordan 2005).

The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* was designed to 'preserve pure for all time the British element with which we started' (McMillan, cited in Cooper 2012, p. 4). It epitomised the new federation's approach to immigration and 'symbolised the birth of what came to be known as the White Australia policy' (Cooper 2012, p. 2), a policy that has come 'to haunt the Australian political landscape' (Jayasuriya, Walker & Gothard 2003, p. i). Indeed, a reported motivation for the federation of the states of Australia in 1901 was the determination to present a united front to the world, a front that would repel unwanted arrivals (Jayasuriya, Walker & Gothard 2003). Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, spoke in Parliament in support of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* and declared that democratic principles did not apply to race. The exclusion from Australia of people of non-white races was reputedly due to a fear of 'invasion' and loss of jobs (Deakin, cited in Cooper 2012, p. 6) and was based on the premise that whites were in every way superior to non-white people.

### **Immigration and multiculturalism**

The story of Australia's immigration ideal has shifted from exclusion to assimilation to integration and then to multiculturalism over the decades since the introduction of large-scale assisted immigration after World War II. As well as providing a further social and political context for this thesis, multiculturalism is a concept that is raised and challenged in the rhetorical visions found in the media articles analysed in this study (see Chapter 9). The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) sets out

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<sup>48</sup> However, Indigenous Australians maintain that 'our ancestors have been here since the beginning of time' (Yunupingu, cited in Sherwood 2010, p. 59), known as the Dreaming, the time of creation.

three ‘meanings’ for the term ‘multiculturalism’: first, it describes the ‘diverse cultural makeup of a society’; second, it refers to a set of norms ‘that uphold the right of the individual to retain and enjoy their culture’; and third, it is the name given to the government policy ‘which seeks to recognise, manage and maximise the benefits of diversity’ (2008, p. 36). Australia’s first official identification as a multicultural nation came in 1973 in a speech delivered by Al Grassby, Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Labor government.

The Whitlam government framed the adoption of multiculturalism as a question of social justice, equity and full citizen participation, rather than cultural pluralism (Soutphommasane 2012, p. 11). Legal frameworks were instituted to reject discrimination – such as the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* – and support immigrants in the community, and this established the foundations for an official Australian multiculturalism (Soutphommasane 2012, pp. 13–14). With this, the White Australia Policy was finally jettisoned: ‘It is dead’, said Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1974 (cited in Soutphommasane 2012, p. 12). Immigrants were to maintain their identities alongside an overriding commitment to the Australian nation and its laws and principles (Department of Social Services 2014).

However, the persistence of the White Australia Policy until the 1970s was ‘a testament to the country’s deep anxiety regarding immigration, as well as the depth of its racist foundations’ (Taylor 2015, p. 343). The path to Australia’s multiculturalism of today has not been without diversions and challenges. Stories in this thesis attest to the continuation of this anxiety about immigration and to the preservation of sentiments captured in the White Australia Policy, even if the policy itself has been cast aside.

### **Boats to Australia**

The diversity referred to in the story of a multicultural Australia has been effected by the arrival of migrants and, to a small extent, refugees. These refugees may resettle in Australia by onshore methods or offshore programs (see Section 2.3.1 in this chapter for explanation). It was only in relatively recent times that those fleeing

persecution sought sanctuary by arriving uninvited to Australia on boats from the north. In the 1970s, Australia experienced a substantial increase in Asian immigration; much of this consisted of asylum seekers from the conflict in Vietnam – the original ‘boat people’ referred to in the media (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p. 34; York 2003, p. 17).

There have been four waves of boat arrivals in the past 40 years (Brennan 2003; Soutphommasane 2012):

- i. Indochinese refugees, mostly from Vietnam, began arriving in Darwin in July 1976, prompting one Melbourne newspaper, the *Herald Sun*, to proclaim ‘the coming invasion... of Asian refugees’ (cited in Brennan 2003, p. 30).
- ii. Refugees from Cambodia marked the beginning of the second wave of refugees when they landed in Broome in the Northern Territory in November 1989.
- iii. Vietnamese and Chinese refugees arrived between 1994 and 1998 in response to the closure of camps around Asia, undertaken to effect a compulsory return of refugees to Vietnam.
- iv. Since late 1999, refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran have been travelling to Australia via Indonesia – the ‘biggest wave of boat people in modern Australian history’ (Brennan 2003, p. 40). Refugees from Sri Lanka have also made the trek to Australia, particularly Tamils escaping the civil war (1983–2009) and its aftermath.

After a brief hiatus, boats again began to arrive to Australia in 2009 – this can be seen as a continuation of the fourth wave in that the asylum seekers are largely from the same arenas of conflict. However, taken in conjunction with the legislative and other measures that altered with the outgoing Howard Coalition government and the incoming Rudd Labor government in 2007, it may also be claimed as a fifth wave (McKay, Thomas & Kneebone 2011).

## 2.2 Refugees and the media in Australia

As mentioned, 'boat people' is a term originally coined to describe Vietnamese boat arrivals to Australia in the late 1970s. Despite the official multiculturalism policy, or perhaps because of it, public disquiet about immigration, and refugees in particular, became a part of the media landscape in Australia. After an initial fairly sympathetic public response, public and media discussion shifted to ideas of jumping immigration queues and the term 'queue jumper' became common in media depictions of the issue, even though these queues did not exist in the source countries for those seeking asylum. As Phillips (2011, p. 4) points out, 'The concept of an orderly queue does not accord with the reality of the asylum process'.

During the 1977 Federal election, there were widespread claims reported in the media that Australia was losing control of migrant selection (Betts 2001, p. 34). Sociologist Katherine Betts analysed opinion poll data on the issue of boat arrivals for the 25 years to 2001; she found that negative sentiment 'has been a slow and growing trend over the last quarter of a century' (2001, p. 45).

In the recent history of this issue, the period of the Howard government (1996–2007) saw three developments that warrant further description for their impact on public perception of the issue and the government of the time, and for their role in helping to create the conditions that ensued: the *Tampa* and Children Overboard incidents in 2001, and the Pacific Solution. These are described below in the order in which they occurred: *Tampa*, Pacific Solution, and Children Overboard.

### **The *Tampa* incident**

The incident in August 2001 that became known as *Tampa* was 'a turning point in Australian state responses to unauthorised refugees' (Grewcock 2009, p. 152). It began when a Norwegian container vessel, the *MV Tampa*, was contacted by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to alert the captain to a ship in distress. The captain, Arne Rinnan, rescued 433 asylum seekers from the *Palapa 1* in the Indonesian maritime rescue zone. As the asylum seekers on board wanted to go to



Christmas Island (Brennan 2003, p. 41), Rinnan headed to this nearby Australian territory off the north-west coast of the mainland. However, the Howard government refused the *Tampa* permission to land. Prime Minister John Howard announced that this was a decision about Australian sovereignty, of border protection, a claim that echoes to today and resonates with past practices.<sup>49</sup> In parliament, and in his speech for the upcoming federal election, Howard (2001) uttered his now infamous call – that Australia had the right ‘to decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come’.

The conditions on the ship prompted Rinnan to issue a distress call that required a response from Australia. The Special Air Service (SAS) of the Australian Army was eventually dispatched to the ship and the asylum seekers were later transferred to an Australian Navy vessel – the HMAS *Manoora* – for removal to Nauru and New Zealand (Brennan 2003). A number of scholars have identified this incident as the beginning of the militarisation of Australia’s response to asylum seekers: ‘the extra-judicial action had the hallmarks of a military action against potential invaders: the use of special forces, heavily armed, boarding a ship in distress at sea’ (Kampmark 2006, p. 7). Howard declared Australians to be a humane people and that ‘[o]thers know that and they sometimes try and intimidate us with our own decency’ (cited in Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p. 63). International condemnation of Australia’s actions in the impasse over the *Tampa* asylum seekers was universal (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p. 141). The captain’s principled stand to protect those he rescued was recognised with numerous awards around the world, (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p. 292) endorsing his adherence to humane principles and the laws of the sea.

### **The Pacific Solution**

The events surrounding the *Tampa* heralded what became known as the Pacific Solution, a strategy involving the co-option of other countries in the region to take asylum seekers heading for Australia (Brennan 2003; Marr & Wilkinson 2003). The Pacific Solution also had ramifications for the engagement of the military in

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<sup>49</sup> Prior to the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s.

migration matters and for the operation of the courts in relation to asylum seekers. Firstly, coinciding with the departure of the *Tampa*, the government introduced a military response to boat-borne asylum seekers. It directed ships and aircraft to effectively 'blockade' the Indian Ocean (Brennan 2003; Marr & Wilkinson 2003; Metcalfe 2010), warning and boarding vessels that entered Australia's contiguous zone. Decisions about what was to happen with each boat approached for this purpose were to be made by the government in Canberra, rather than the Navy personnel on site (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, pp. 131–32). This operation sought to communicate the appearance of force to deter those contemplating such journeys (Marr & Wilkinson 2003).

Secondly, Howard's government was unhappy with the role of Australia's courts in 'interfering' with its treatment of asylum seeker boat arrivals. With the legal standing of the government's deterrence strategy doubtful, he announced that external territories such as Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef – key targets for the boat arrivals – would be excised from Australia's migration zone. For the purposes of the *Migration Act 1958*, if asylum seekers did arrive at these distant parts of Australia, they would not be treated as having arrived in Australia (see *Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Act 2001*).

### **Children Overboard**

The *Tampa* incident was followed in October the same year (2001) by another infamous event, one that prompted inquiries to ascertain the truth of the claims and counter-claims that ensued – the Children Overboard incident. Again, an asylum seeker vessel, the *Olong (SIEV 4)*, was in distress on the high seas. An Australian Navy vessel shadowed the boat and eventually took the asylum seekers on board after the boat began to take on water (Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p. 184). Some male adult asylum seekers (who later reboarded the *Olong*) were in the water at this time and photographs taken by Navy personnel were sent back to Canberra (Parliament of Australia 2002). Prime Minister Howard and the then-Minister for Immigration claimed these photos showed asylum seekers throwing their children overboard – a claim later proved incorrect. However, at the time, Howard went on Sydney radio to

declare that these people were not the sort of people we would want in our country (on Alan Jones, cited in Marr & Wilkinson 2003, p. 190). The incident was used repeatedly to characterise asylum seekers as alien, inhumane and manipulative. Months later, when the truth was revealed, media and commentators criticised the Howard government for misrepresenting the photos for political ends.

These three incidents came to characterise the Howard government's approach to asylum seekers. In reference to the *Tampa* and Children Overboard, asylum seekers were demonised and made to appear unreasonable, as if they were taking advantage of Australia's kind heart – not the sort of people we want in Australia, as Howard proclaimed (Marr & Wilkinson 2003). Their 'othering' was accomplished through this 'us and them' rhetoric linking their reputed behaviours with deviance, taking an 'unfair' advantage of Australia (and 'good' refugees who wait in queues), and with criminality implied by their association with 'vile' people smugglers (AAP 2009). The Howard government portrayed the people involved, and the issue, in terms of border protection and 'fairness' and insisted on its right to enforce its position, in spite of Australia's obligations as a signatory to the *Refugee Convention*. This position was developed with the introduction of the Howard government's militarised Pacific Solution – Australia's responsibilities towards asylum seekers were to be severely curtailed and small, impoverished neighbour nations were to be inveigled into accepting refugees from Australia. Binoy Kampmark asserts that the Howard government's discourse on refugees bears a 'striking' resemblance to themes common in the resistance to Jewish refugees seeking asylum in Australia in the 1930s (2006, p. 3). He cites other scholars who remark that, despite global trends that have criminalised refugees, 'the Australian reaction has been extreme'.

However, in the later years of the Howard government (1996–2007) there was some shift in sentiment towards asylum seekers who arrived by boat (Phillips & Spinks 2011, p. 7). Mandatory detention and stories about its effects on children, in particular, and the wrongful detention or deportation of Australian citizens (Cornelia Rau and Vivian Alvarez Soron) appeared to shift public opinion (Phillips & Spinks 2011) so that the Howard government moved to ensure children were removed

from the detention centres. Notably, these changes occurred after the release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's 2004 report *A Last Resort? National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention Report* (The Hon Amanda Vanstone, media release, cited in Phillips & Spinks 2011, p. 12) and a change in the Minister for the immigration portfolio. This more moderate attitude coincided with a dramatic decrease in boat arrivals so that tension and coverage dropped in concert.

### **2.3 Australian laws and processes for asylum seekers (at the time of the two incidents in this study)**

Alongside, and in tension with, the international laws that govern treatment of asylum seekers are national laws and regulations that express Australia's national story about asylum seekers. The fact analytic category appears in this context: Australia's laws and regulations are designed and implemented according to national values, and these values are then translated into 'facts' when laws are enacted. In the course of 2001, and the three incidents just described, Australia again<sup>50</sup> came to more strongly imagine refugees as belonging outside the continent, beyond its borders. This inside/outside tension is a critical element in framing Australia's national stories. It is reflected in the three principal distinctions that describe Australia's regulated treatment of asylum seekers at the time of the standoff and the boat tragedy. These distinctions are between offshore resettlement and onshore protection, between authorised and unauthorised arrivals, and between arrival at a prescribed point of entry and at an excised territory of Australia under the *Migration Act 1958*. Other factors that arise will be mentioned in the explanation of these distinctions.

#### **2.3.1 Offshore versus onshore (2009–2011)**

One national categorisation of asylum seekers involves their location either inside or outside of Australia's borders when they apply for resettlement.

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<sup>50</sup> Since the second wave of asylum seekers – see Section 2.1 for details.

- **Offshore resettlement:**

Refugees and other ‘humanitarian entrants’ were able to apply for a visa from outside Australia. These visas could be awarded to asylum seekers who had already been assessed as refugees according to the UNHCR criteria, or via special humanitarian programs<sup>51</sup> (AHRC 2008). Those refugees who waited in ‘queues’ in refugee camps – the ‘good’ refugees (Warne-Smith 2010) – fell into this category. Although the special humanitarian program mostly operated under the offshore resettlement category, people who were already in Australia could also apply.

- **Onshore protection:**

Asylum seekers already in Australia who were found to be refugees were eligible to apply for a Permanent Protection Visa, the first step towards permanent residency and Australian citizenship (AHRC 2008, p. 5). Refugees may have needed bridging visas while waiting for their applications for the Permanent Protection Visa to be determined. The prerequisite of already being in Australia, and the different entitlements this activated, led to the change in what it meant to be ‘in Australia’ embedded in the Howard government’s Pacific Solution – see Section 2.3.3 in this chapter.

### ***2.3.2 Authorised versus unauthorised***

A second binary that frames Australia’s national story about asylum seekers is associated with the documentation that authorises entry into Australia: those who have valid visas to enter Australia stand in contrast to boat arrivals of asylum seekers who are without this documentation.

- **Authorised arrivals:**

Those who arrived in Australia with a valid visa such as a tourist or student visa could apply for a Permanent Protection Visa; because they arrived in Australia with the authorisation of a valid visa they are described as authorised arrivals. The distinction

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<sup>51</sup> This refers to when Australian citizens or permanent residents or an organisation based in Australia, for example, can act as ‘proposers’ to people who are experiencing discrimination in their home countries and may not come under the refugee criteria; this criterion of discrimination would amount to ‘a gross violation of human rights in their home country’ (AHRC 2008, p. 5).

based on this attribution provides visa overstayers and air arrivals (whose carriers must ensure they carry valid entry visas) with greater opportunities to stay in Australia than asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

- **Unauthorised arrivals:**

Those who arrived to Australia without a valid visa were described as unauthorised arrivals. In addition, approximately 98 per cent of those in this category had arrived in Australia by air and were people, such as backpackers and tourists, who had overstayed their visas, making their continued presence in the country unauthorised. A point made by refugee advocates (Phillips 2011) is that many of the visa overstayers were (and are) from wealthy countries, unlike the boat arrivals.

**Table 4.3: Statistics of Visa Overstayers and Unauthorised Arrivals – 1991 to 2011**

Year	No. of overstayers	Origin	2009
91–92	81 164	78	—
92–93	—	194	—
93–94	—	194	—
94–95	—	1 071	485
95–96	—	589	663
96–97	45 100	365	1 350
97–98	50 950	157	1 558
98–99	53 150	921	2 106
99–00	58 748	4 175	1 695
00–01	60 000	4 137	1 512
01–02	60 400	3 649	1 193
02–03	59 800	0	987
03–04	50 900	82	1 241
04–05	47 800	0	1 632
05–06	46 400	56	1 598
06–07	46 500	135	1 388
07–08	48 500	25	1 451
08–09	**<50 000	678	5 072
09–10	*53 900	4 597	5 981
10–11	*58 400	5 166	6 335

Sources: Department of Immigration & Citizenship \*\*(2009), \*(2012); Horwood (2009); Phillips (2015b).

Unauthorised arrivals were detained by Australian government authorities to check their identity, health and security status. They could then be given a bridging visa so that they could live in the community while they waited for their refugee application to be decided (AHRC 2008, p. 8). However, Australia is one of the few countries in the world to insist on mandatory detention of asylum seekers who are unauthorised arrivals, specifically those who arrive to Australia by boat.

### **2.3.3 Prescribed versus excised territories under the Migration Act 1958**

Like the first categorisation, a third binary in Australia's national story is also about those who are inside versus those who are outside Australian territory, although in this case the territory is circumscribed by the *Migration Act 1958*. Australia's migration zone is the area it recognises for the activation of its responsibilities under the *UN Refugee Convention* to asylum seekers arriving in its territory. This zone is specified in the *Migration Act 1958*. As mentioned in the context of the Pacific Solution, in July 2005 the Howard government changed the migration zone for Australia, excising a number of places to alter the meaning of 'entering Australia' under this legislation, and thus limiting the options for asylum seeker boat arrivals. Excised offshore places included Christmas, Ashmore, Cartier, and Cocos Islands<sup>52</sup>. These islands are located north-west of Australia's mainland, close to Indonesia, the launching point for most boat journeys to Australia. Consequently, asylum seekers would have to reach the Australian mainland<sup>53</sup> to trigger the 'onshore' protection provisions. Arrivals at excised places would be deemed unauthorised and 'offshore entry person[s]' and not able to apply for visas to Australia<sup>54</sup>, unless they went to another country and applied from there (under offshore resettlement). Most of these changes were retrospective to September 2001, before the *Tampa* incident (Australian Government 2001). This was the circumstance at the time of the incidents examined in this thesis. Kampmark comments that 'The severity of the

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<sup>52</sup> The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2008) states that excised offshore places are part of Australia in every sense except for this right of unauthorised arrivals to apply for visas to Australia when they arrive or while they are in Australia.

<sup>53</sup> However, in 2012, in the term of the Gillard Labor government, the excision was extended to include the mainland of Australia.

<sup>54</sup> The Minister can lift the bar on making a valid visa application but there is some restriction on this because he or she must table to Parliament the reasons for a particular lifting.

excision laws reminded one Australian academic of the “Chinese exclusion acts” of the 1880s that “established a racialized border” (2006, p. 8).

#### **2.4 Detention of asylum seekers and refugees**

Not surprisingly, Australia’s national story draws powerfully on the prerogative of a sovereign nation to make and administer laws and regulations in relation to its jurisdictions. This is despite Australia’s policies and practices running counter to its commitments to international instruments that govern the treatment of asylum seekers. Australia’s mandatory detention policies – and the rhetoric that supports them – clearly demonstrate the clash between the national and the international on this issue. Alone of all countries in the world, Australia mandatorily detains all asylum seeker boat arrivals<sup>55</sup> and has done since the introduction of mandatory detention in 1992 during the second wave of boat arrivals to Australia. Mandatory detention is strongly discouraged in the *Refugee Convention* and, if it does occur, it is to be restricted to very limited time frames and is not permitted at all for unaccompanied children. Australia’s practices, in spite of these international strictures, therefore identifies mandatory detention as a significant aspect of Australia’s national story about asylum seekers. Along with sovereignty, it brings into play notions of national security, ‘border protection’ and terrorism – all also stressing the outsider status of asylum seekers, and their ‘threat’ to the nation (cf. Gale 2004; Grewcock 2009; Klocker & Dunn 2003; Rowe & O’Brien 2014).

Once asylum seekers cross into Australia’s territory, they are subjected to internal borders in the form of these boundaries of the Australian detention regime, which controls not only their movements but also their access to services, courts and external scrutiny. The length of time and the conditions under which these asylum seekers are held are both documented as harmful to their well-being (AHRC 2004; HREOC 1998, p. 229). The legislation under which they are held – the *Migration Act 1958* – prescribes no time limit on this detention and allows very limited review by the courts in Australia.

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<sup>55</sup> In addition, those authorised arrivals who have become unlawful because their visas have expired are required to be detained (AHRC 2004).



Immigration detention is mostly effected in detention ‘camps’. When Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd took office in 2007, he announced the dismantling of the Howard government’s Pacific Solution and the associated opening of detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island (PNG), funded by the Australian government.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, in 2009–2011 most mandatory detention of unauthorised arrivals in Australia took place on Christmas Island.<sup>57</sup> In its 2009 report after a visit to Christmas Island, the Australian Human Rights Commission asserts that the *Migration Act 1958* does not require mandatory detention on Christmas Island and makes a number of recommendations for changes to government policy, including abandoning this practice (AHRC 2009, p. 3). Refugee advocates have petitioned successive governments to change the policy of mandatory detention (RCOA 2011), with their demands ranging from abolition of the practice altogether (e.g., the RAC) to the use of mandatory detention only for short periods to ascertain identity and determine any health or security risks (e.g., AHRC 2004). In May 2011, at the end of the second incident captured in this thesis, 6520 asylum seekers were in detention, with only 564 of those in community detention<sup>58</sup> (RCOA 2011, p. 1).

## **2.5 Australia’s resettlement program**

Australia is one of only 20 nations worldwide that participates in the UNHCR resettlement program. Australia’s annual quota includes offshore and onshore applicants and was increased to 13,500 in 2008–2009 under the Rudd Labor government, 500 more than in the previous year. Although Australia was third behind the USA and Canada in accepting refugees from the UNHCR program in 2008 (USCRI World Refugee Survey 2009, cited in Phillips & Spinks 2011, p. 4), only a small percentage of refugees are actually resettled through this scheme globally and, of

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<sup>56</sup> However these offshore detention arrangements were reinstated by the Gillard Labor government in September 2012, after the period of this study (Karlson 2016).

<sup>57</sup> Onshore remote facilities have been used, opened, closed and reopened at different times over the past ten years.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Community detention’ was instituted in 2010 for unaccompanied minors, vulnerable asylum seekers and families to live in houses run by community and church based organisations instead of immigration detention centres (Marshall, Pillai & Stack 2013).

this small percentage, Australia took 12.4 per cent that year (UNHCR 2012c).<sup>59</sup> Most refugees remain in their region of origin, placing the burden for their care on neighbouring countries that are often very poor (Phillips & Spinks 2011). For example, as at 31 December 2010, Pakistan hosted over 1.9 million refugees compared to Australia's 21,805 (RCOA 2011, p. 11).

### **SECTION 3: LOCAL**

The third frame for understanding the shaping of stories about asylum seekers in this study is the local. Localness suggests community, attachments, civil society and, in this case, activism. It is typically not associated with the legal, unlike the international and the national, but is similar to the other frames in its resort to history and the political. This section describes the development of the RAC, the subject of the study of storytelling in an activist public (Chapter 5) and by an activist public (Chapter 6) in this thesis on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. I provide a brief survey of some of the local groups advocating for change to asylum seeker policies in Australia, the purpose, history and functioning of the RAC, and its relationships to other groups involved in the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals and related concerns. This information is gleaned from interviews with RAC members, my own observant participation, and media and web information on the activities on this issue.

#### **3.1 Local groups advocating for change on this issue**

Organisations and groups advocating for asylum seekers in Australia range from international organisations in Australia, such as the UNHCR, Amnesty International and the Red Cross, to church affiliated groups such as Anglican Aid and Australian Catholic Social Justice, to centres such as the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the Edmund Rice Centre, to locale-focussed groupings such as Rural Australians for Refugees and Balmain for Refugees, to particular campaign groupings such as 'Love

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<sup>59</sup> Total resettlement places offered by those countries participating in the program were 80,000 in 2009 (UNHCR 2012c).

Makes A Way'.<sup>60</sup> The roles they play can differ too – from providing specific services such as legal or health services for asylum seekers, to spaces for food and social support, to advocacy in the public sphere for more humane policies. Some organisations focus on particular groups, such as the Hazara People International Network, or the Australian Tamil Congress. A number of groups advocate for asylum seeker children, such as ChilOut and Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children. Most bodies rely on volunteers and donations, with only a few, such as the Refugee Council of Australia and the Australian Human Rights Commission, attracting any government funding. The RAC is part of a network of similarly named and oriented organisations in other states of Australia, including the Refugee Action Collective, Refugee Action Network, and Refugee Action Committee.

There are also a number of anti-refugee groups operating in Australia, such as the Australia First Party, the Australian Protectionist Party and the Rise Up Australia Party. These are small networks of people advocating against immigration and refugees. The Australia First Party (2016) website exemplifies their stance when it declares that '[t]he subversive extremist Left's agenda is to make Australia the global dumping ground for millions of breeding Third Worlders seeking welfare'. More recently, the re-emergence of the Pauline Hanson One Nation Party has garnered support for its anti-Muslim, anti-immigration and anti-refugee sentiments. It has on its platform that Australia should no longer be a signatory to the *1951 Refugee Convention* (Pauline Hanson's One Nation, n.d.).

### **3.2 RAC's relationship to other groups**

Members of the RAC coordinating group participating in this study are commonly also members of other groups, in particular two, sometimes competitive, socialist groups in Sydney. In addition to these socialist groups, RAC members also participate in groups advocating for marriage equality, Indigenous issues, and against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in their relevant unions. Therefore, most of the

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<sup>60</sup> Love Makes A Way (LMAW 2015) describes itself as a movement of Christians (of any denomination) 'seeking an end to Australia's inhumane asylum seeker policies through prayer and nonviolent love in action'.

members of the RAC's organising cadre interviewed for this study can be categorised as 'all issue publics' (Grunig & Childers 1988) in that they are knowledgeable, aroused and active on a range of social justice issues.

In addition to the network of refugee advocacy groups, others outside of this movement assist by providing information to the RAC. For example, in relation to information about forced deportations, Chris says that:

We could follow those planes [that were being used to deport the asylum seekers] because there was just a whole network of people who weren't immediately associated with refugee action type groups around the place but who just fed that information in (2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

The RAC has cooperated with groups such as the Refugee Action Collective and Refugee Action Network on 'convergence' actions, such as demonstrations at remote detention centres to protest treatment of detainees. Friendships and political alliances bridge geographic and ideological differences. Together, these and the other groups working to change policies towards asylum seekers form a social movement in Australia.

### **3.3 RAC Purpose and history**

The RAC is a collection of activists advocating for what they see as humane treatment for those who seek asylum in Australia. The RAC has had two sustained periods of activity to date. The first began in 1999, as the Refugee Action Collective, created in response to a number of protests about hunger strikes at Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney's west. One of the founding members says that they recognised that 'we had to create a movement, we had to get this issue off the margins and that was going to mean some organisation' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October). He describes it as a 'grassroots movement' where 'there was a social imperative that came from us, by and large, initially', encouraging other groups and collaborations to 'wage the struggle'.

The second sustained period of activity began in late 2009 and continues. Refugee Action Coalition NSW, as it had become known, had been in hiatus for about 12–18 months (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October). The meeting to reignite the RAC in October 2009 coincided with the first incident captured in this study: the standoff involving asylum seekers on the *Oceanic Viking* and the *Jaya Lestari 5* stranded at Merak. Four people – including the researcher – attended this meeting. The meetings work to coordinate ‘mass actions’ that advocate for changes to policies and practices towards asylum seekers and refugees. As Anna says in her interview, the core purpose of the RAC ‘is the public mobilisation of support for refugees... That’s the unique thing that RAC does... the organising of demonstrations and public opposition’ (2012, pers. comm., 6 September). Chris concurs with Anna and adds that the demonstrations provide a social manifestation of support for those who are working to help asylum seekers. He also stresses that he hopes there is a reminder that ‘it’s systemic, that unless you get... fundamental policy change the mistreatment and so on [is]... going to continue’.

Although the RAC is local to NSW, Australia, its members think about themselves, asylum seekers and Australia from an international perspective. This is an orientation that is both political and historical: members’ political beliefs spurn borders and foreground humanitarianism; their knowledge of the asylum seeker issue spans decades and the globe. Like author (about the *Tampa*) Father Frank Brennan (2003, p. 216), RAC’s desire is for Australia to behave towards asylum seekers as ‘a warm-hearted, decent international citizen’. To this end, RAC members view media as ‘valuable weapons in their struggle’: as author (about detention centres) Heather Tyler (2003, p. 234) explains, ‘No other vehicle generates compassion the way the mass media can’.

### **3.4 How the RAC operates**

The RAC activist public has a core organising cadre with a network of interested individuals and activist groups who are informed about positions and upcoming actions and invited to participate. The organising group meets weekly, is open to all who wish to attend and communicates on issues via email and Facebook between

meetings. The group operates as a democratic collective without office bearers and each meeting agrees to a chair on the night. Meetings are conducted with formal speaking orders and attendees vote where necessary on issues in dispute. It may be that the strict adherence to speaking orders at meetings, votes, and rotation of chair and secretary tasks, reflect a genuine desire to set aside (and manage) any histories of differences among members (for example between members of the two socialist groups) to ensure they work together for the joint cause of assisting asylum seekers. If not the intent, this is certainly the outcome.

One member of the group has a key role in information provision to and on behalf of the group – Ian Rintoul. Ian's pivotal role in the RAC may be attributed to several factors. Firstly, he devotes himself to this issue and has developed contacts in the media and in refugee communities here and internationally. Rintoul is the person asylum seekers will be put in contact with, whether they are in Indonesia, on boats in transit to Australia or in detention. He is thus a source of information for the RAC and for journalists and is an accomplished media performer. Secondly, he has a lead role in one of the two socialist groups mentioned earlier to which a number of the current members of the RAC's coordinating cadre belong. Thirdly, his own persistence with this issue has spanned a lull in meetings of the RAC so that, when the RAC was not meeting and organising, Rintoul was still active on the issue and speaking about it when opportunities arose in the media.

Having set out the interpretive contexts in which the stories about the incidents in this study are told, the next chapter begins the analysis of these stories with an examination of the stories and storytelling in interviews with members of the RAC, the activist public.

## CHAPTER 5: AN ACTIVIST PUBLIC FORMS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on members of the Refugee Action Coalition NSW (RAC). It explores the stories and storytelling that contribute to the formation of an activist public on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. It focusses on two important factors that influence this formation: the production of group consciousness and the issue of member motivation. These two factors are related in that understanding the motivations for member involvement provides insight into the nature or character of group consciousness. In undertaking this analysis, the chapter draws on a set of in-depth interviews with key members of the RAC organising cadre.

The first section of the chapter explores the expression of an RAC group consciousness about asylum seeker boat arrivals. Scholars such as Ernest Bormann (1983), John Cragan and Donald Shields (1992) have argued that the development of group consciousness is a key element in the formation of a cohesive and active public on an issue. They postulate that group consciousness is evident in a shared orientation to an issue (Ball 2001; Bormann 1983; Cragan & Shields 1992). Addressing group consciousness in relation to Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), Bormann contends that it can be discerned in the stories and storytelling of group members. In this chapter, SCT is deployed to understand and explore the creating, raising and sustaining of a group consciousness in the stories told by the RAC members. This group consciousness helps define the RAC's identity. Bormann (1983) argues that it is by telling, retelling and embellishing stories that the group forms (and exhibits) a similar view on an issue and, with that, an orientation towards collective action to effect change (Ball 2001, p. 219).

Section 2 of this chapter examines the factors that motivate RAC members to be involved in the issue and the organisation. It builds on the findings of the first section. However, what is novel in this section is that it uses a framework devised

from two theories about public formation from the public relations literature as well as concepts from three classifications of motivations from the social movement literature. Together these theories provide an exploration of communication and motivational factors that influence the formation of the RAC activist public.

The researcher's observant participation (Bray 2008) in the group facilitated open communication with interviewees and an understanding of the rhetorical visions as they emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts. These two methods provide a rich, thick description (Creswell & Miller 2000) of those factors contributing to the formation of this activist public. The interviewees are all tertiary educated; two have PhDs, three have Masters degrees, and five are graduates of bachelor degrees in a variety of disciplines. Genders are equally represented and the age spectrum is 25–65.

## **SECTION 1: GROUP CONSCIOUSNESS**

In analysing the production of RAC group consciousness, I explore the rhetorical visions, sanctioning agents and master analogues present in the interviews. The rhetorical visions reveal 'a specific social reality in which are embedded attitudes, values and beliefs that become an impetus for action' (Ball 2001, p. 219). I identify sanctioning agents as those legitimising concepts that appear in the stories expressed by the interviewees. These provide authority for the activists' fantasy themes and rhetorical visions. In addition, I analyse the master analogues that underpin the fantasy themes and rhetorical visions. These master analogues are the underlying structures that drive the logic of the visions and provide insight into the nature of RAC's group consciousness on the issue.

### **1.1 Rhetorical visions**

The RAC members tell a variety of stories about the issue of asylum seeker arrivals to Australia and about their own motivations for joining RAC and participating in actions. These stories about their own motivations are woven into the stories about what is wrong with the government's position, its effects, and how to achieve



change. In total, 24 fantasy themes (FTs) are identified. These FTs are grouped together into three rhetorical visions (RVs) that tell a more complete, composite story about this issue as it is understood by this activist public. The first RV forms from stories that relate facts of asylum seeker arrival numbers, as well as legal and UN Convention aspects relevant to the case. The second RV gathers together FTs that express the activists' position on the issue and its representation in Australia. The third RV integrates stories that focus on the Australian government's position and the motivations the activists attribute to the government for particular communication and policies about asylum seekers.

#### **Rhetorical vision 1:**

**As a wealthy signatory nation (to the *Refugee Convention*), Australia is obliged to act on its responsibilities and accommodate the small number of asylum seekers who arrive by boat.**

The first of the RVs is created from five FTs that converge on what are understood by the interviewees to be the facts of the issue (see Table 5.1 in Appendix B). These facts provide content, perspective and the foundation from which many of the activist stories, arguments and positions are formed and promoted. The facts they call on tend to focus on the laws, information and positions of international bodies. With these facts, the interviewees address, and challenge, the actions of the national – Australia. Therefore, it is not surprising that four of the five fact-based FTs in this RV draw on the UN as an internationally based source of credible or factual information. One fact that is central to this RV, and underpins many of the stories, is that Australia is a signatory to the *Refugee Convention* (UNHCR n.d.c, p. 1) and that, as a consequence, asylum seekers should expect its protection. This first FT is exemplified by Germaine when she says 'look at the *Refugee Convention* which has been adopted by the *Migration Act*. So it is law, made law. The *Refugee Convention* is law within Australia' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September).

In the second FT in this RV, activists assert that Australia has the wealth and capacity to provide a safe haven for those fleeing persecution. As with the first FT, this FT is supported by reference to the UN – the international – this time by its criteria for

assessing capacity on the basis of comparative wealth (assessed as GDP per capita), land mass and population (UNHCR 2005, p. 51). David provides an example of this FT when he says '[Australia is a] nation that can actually afford to have a humanitarian program and accept asylum seekers' (2012, pers. comm., 14 September). In the third FT that draws on the UN, the activists counter claims that asylum seekers who arrive by boat are illegal. They refer to the *1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights*<sup>61</sup> and to the provision in the *Refugee Convention (Article 31)* that requires that asylum seekers not be penalised because of 'unlawful entry' (Feller et al. 2003, Section 10(a)). They therefore contend that the manner in which asylum seekers arrive to a country is irrelevant. As Anna says, 'You can seek asylum by any means, basically. If you have a legitimate claim to asylum it doesn't matter really what you did' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

In the fourth FT in this RV, the facts all interviewees refer to are the UN statistics that demonstrate that the numbers of refugees arriving to Australia are very small when compared with global people movements (UNHCR 2012b). Interviewees assert that it is important to ensure the facts of actual arrival numbers are known by the Australian people. As Fiona says:

I think trying to chip away at the false notions that people have about refugees [is important], like that we're being flooded by some huge number of people that are a drain on society or something like that, and going through the actual numbers and the facts and so forth (2012, pers. comm., 26 October).

Interviewees use the fact of small arrival numbers to argue that these 'most vulnerable and dispossessed people in the world' (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September) do not warrant the attention, the anxiety, or the responses they have evoked to date from the government and the media. As Isla says, '[It] is a trickle – an absolute drop in the ocean... We utterly exaggerate how big this is as an issue' (2012, pers. comm., 1 November). Ben concurs: 'When you look at it in the media you'd

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<sup>61</sup> This Declaration states that 'everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution' (Article 14.1) (UNHCR n.d.b).

think it was some sort of terrible, terrible problem, the sky's about to fall in' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October).

In addition to those facts that can be confirmed by international institutions, activists' stories also often express a fifth FT that draws on the national in relation to history and racism. In particular, in this fifth FT, RAC members draw on Australia's colonial history as a nation with racist policies designed to exclude immigration of non-white people (the external other) – the White Australia Policy (Cooper 2012) – drawing a parallel with the current treatment of asylum seeker boat arrivals. For example, Chris says that 'the White Australia Policy is the thing which underpinned the whole way in which refugees were portrayed or seen... so there's that kind of continuity that you see' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). Fiona makes a similar point when she says of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers today that 'I don't think it is an anomaly' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October). Unlike the other FTs in this RV, this FT references facts that are historical.

#### **Rhetorical vision 2:**

**Australia should welcome refugees – they are just like us. The RAC needs to publicly demonstrate about the issue to inform and mobilise Australians about the damage the detention regime causes refugees.**

RV2 emerges from the FTs about the activists' position on the asylum seeker issue. It comprises themes about the activists' belief that asylum seekers must be treated humanely, that they should be welcomed and that Australia should abide by the spirit of the *Refugee Convention* which it has signed and ostensibly espouses. As with the factual orientation in RV1, this RV tells the story of a wealthy nation with international and humanitarian obligations the activists believe should be met. Like RV1, this RV draws on the international as a means of framing the national actions/inaction. In RV2 the activists add the notion of humanitarianism, a concept that also transcends the notion of the national. RV2 differs from RV1 in that it captures the activists' position on asylum seeker arrivals, their beliefs, interpretations and ethical judgments, rather than focusing on objective measures – that is, facts. The activists portray their role as not only advocating for asylum

seekers, but also countering government and media stories that are misleading the populace to support the government's inhumane and damaging (to asylum seekers and to Australia's reputation) policies. In this sense both RV2 and RV3 (see below) are sometimes about a refusal on the part of governments to honour facts. It is the role of the activists to ensure the Australian people are alert to the truth which, for the RAC, emerges from the power of international humanitarian conventions. RAC members have faith that the Australian people have the capacity to act humanely towards asylum seekers if they have the information and understand the asylum seekers' plight.

Six shared FTs (FT) in this RV (see Table 5.2 in Appendix B) present the activists' perspectives on the issue. With the first FT, the interviewees assert that asylum seekers should be welcomed to Australia. Ben, Hugh and Chris all use the word 'welcome' in their stories. Chris articulates this theme: 'I'm a welcome boat person ... people who come to the Australian border, in whatever way they come, should be welcomed at that border and should be processed' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). The second FT in this RV relies on references to Australia's colonial history. Interviewees assert that all Australians arrived here by boat, referring to the arrival by boat of the British invaders to Australia. For example, Isla says that 'We're all boat people here' (2012, pers. comm., 1 November), a direct challenge to the 'otherness' ascribed to asylum seeker boat arrivals because of their mode of arrival. The third FT in RV2 claims that refugees are just like us [Australians]. Like the previous FT, it suggests a shared identity between Australians and asylum seekers and, with this, repudiates racism. It differs from the previous FT in its focus on the present rather than the past. Anna says that, like other Australians, asylum seekers 'want to have lives, they want to be part of society, they want to bring their kids up, they want to go to work' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

The fourth FT in this RV holds that if Australians knew the facts of the issue they would be more likely to feel compassion for asylum seekers. This theme brings together fact and emotion. It is exemplified in Chris's point that support for asylum seekers in opinion polls 'appeals to people's better instincts, so they're certainly

there to be appealed to' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). In this FT, the influence of the media is seen as part of the reason for the paucity of facts presented on the issue. To illustrate with another comment by Chris, the same polls indicate 'an aversion to boat people', explained as 'bringing out all the prejudices in the prevailing news that have all been socially created'. In the fifth FT, the activists' stories relate the importance of making opposition to the government's position on asylum seekers visible to Australians in order to mobilise them on the issue. For example, Germaine explains it as saying to those who oppose the government's position, 'you're not alone and that's where very public appearances of what you [the RAC] stand for are very important' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). This FT reveals the RAC motivations for public demonstrations on the issue. The final, sixth, FT in this RV draws on the notion of history. Here, though, it is not about the history of the Australian nation but the long history of activism for social change. With this, calls to action now resonate with mobilisation on past issues. Therefore, as Anna expresses it, 'we're not starting from no-one' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

### **Rhetorical vision 3:**

**The government deliberately communicates in an untruthful and misleading manner to divide the community and distract it from other issues. Its communication is consistent with Australia's racist past. Government policies of isolation foster a calculated dehumanisation of asylum seekers.**

RV3 unites activists' FTs that describe and ascribe motivations to the government's actions and communication on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. This RV understandably dominates in the analysis of the interviews, as it is the government's actions and ascribed motivations that have mobilised the activists on the issue of asylum seekers. RV3 converges on the story that the government has purposely isolated asylum seekers – in terms of space and communication – so that most Australians now fail to recognise their plight or identify with them. In her interview, Anna articulates this FT as the expression of a strategy to dehumanise the asylum seekers, both to themselves – they are referred to by numbers within the detention centres – and to the Australian community. As Anna says, 'out of sight, out of mind' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September). Interviewees enunciate this FT when they note

that Australians see asylum seekers as alien, different from themselves, and are thus led to view the issue in a racist framework consistent with Australia's heritage:

That terrible, terrible racist over-engorged self-entitlement to sort of say we will decide who comes to this country<sup>62</sup> that we stole from somebody else [Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders], and we are [all] boat people and it was just unbelievable and it was just like taking Australia back to the White Australia Policy and swallowing all of Pauline Hanson's... bullshit (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).

Jenna's passionate account of the situation – her moral outrage – links asylum seekers, racism and Australia's history of violence against Aboriginal Australians, the internal other in Australia's national story. Also making these links is another FT that captures the activists' belief that the government could choose to tell a different story about asylum seeker arrivals. They believe that it tells this story in order to distract attention from other issues facing the Australian people, and from issues where government (in)action may warrant more scrutiny.

In RV3, the activists identify two key entities – the government and the media – that collude in miscommunication about asylum seekers. This RV is comprised of thirteen FTs (see Table 5.3 in Appendix B). With the first of these, the activists assert that the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia is not a problem in itself. As David says, 'it's been politicised to make out that it's a problem' (2012, pers. comm., 14 September). The logic of this FT is that the government has represented these arrivals as a problem and the media have been complicit in the creation of this story. The second FT builds on the first. In it, the activists blame the government and the media for what is described as 'this inhumanity' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September) – that is, the 'problem' engineered by the government has led to the actual poor treatment of asylum seekers, and to the nurturing of community attitudes that support this treatment. The activists make the point that it is not the Australian people leading this charge to demonise and reject asylum seeker arrivals; instead, Australians are being led by the Australian government and a compliant media. Germaine expresses

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<sup>62</sup> This phrasing alludes to former Prime Minister Howard's statement in 2001, noted in Chapter 4.

this FT when she says of the government that 'It is a political body that has poisoned people's minds and has created, in fact, a right wing element that they now have to pander to in their elections' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). Anna's story adds to this: 'They have to tell lies in order for us [Australians] to accept this vile policy' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

The third FT involves the activists' charge that the government is committing human rights abuses. For example, Jenna uses the term 'bullying' to describe the government's behaviour, contending that the government is 'victimising – demonising – the victims of war' (2012, pers. comm., 27 November). A fourth FT is that of punishment. This is similar to the charge of abuse in FT3 but suggests the government has a more organised, systematic approach. For example, Fiona refers to government policy as a 'punishment regime' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October). Other RAC interviewees drawing on this FT enunciate the long-term consequences of this regime: Jenna describes what she sees as a 'lifelong stamp' of detention on a former detainee (2012, pers. comm., 27 November).

The fifth FT in this RV accuses the government of hypocrisy and state violence. In this FT, the hypocrisy refers to the Australian government's professed national values and compassion in the face of its treatment of asylum seekers. Hugh's comment exemplifies this FT: [The way the government treats refugees is] 'an example of state violence<sup>63</sup> and it's just entirely hypocritical in light of the propaganda you get from both major parties about the values that they claim' (2012, pers. comm., 28 September). In reference to professed national values, Eli articulates this discrepancy when he says that

they [the government] want to portray a national identity of Australia and to try to, I suppose, weld people onto that identity, an identity which does try to pretend, as I said, we are a really generous people, Australia is a warm-hearted nation, that Australia isn't just a cruel, vicious, unequal place, or whatever. They have to project that idea of Australia to get anyone to support that (2012, pers. comm., 27 September).

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<sup>63</sup> Grewcock also makes this argument when he says that 'Australia's border protection practices often constitute state crime' (2009, p. 12).

The sixth FT refers to both government policies and communication about asylum seeker boat arrivals. This FT draws together the factors that contribute to a policy that prevents the humanising of asylum seekers. These include their isolation in remote and offshore detention centres, the use of case numbers, and the failure to allow access to asylum seekers by journalists and other investigators. Anna demonstrates the presence of this FT when she says, 'it's part of keeping them inhuman, keeping them faceless... They're all presented as faceless and nameless' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

The seventh FT refers to a pattern of racist policies and practices in Australia's colonial history. As with FTs in other RVs, this FT asserts that the treatment of asylum seekers is consistent with Australia's past. It differs from the FT in RV1 in that it centres on the activists' interpretation:

It's going back to what we've had since Federation – the White Australia Policy – we've had the yellow peril, the red devils, reds under the bed and then the towel heads and the asylum seekers. It is just part of this whole historical racist rhetoric (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).

In the eighth FT, the activists contend that the government wants to encourage Australians to feel threatened by boat arrivals, creating distrust and division. The activists say that, with 'brown scapegoats arriving in boats' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September) the government communication 'demonise[s]' (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September) asylum seekers and creates 'hostility' towards them (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October). The ninth FT elaborates on government motives for engendering racism and hostility. Anna says that racism is used as a 'diversion from the real problems ... so it's always "look over there, there're scary refugees arriving"' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September). Part of this FT is based on the notion that this is a deliberate distraction from what Eli calls 'our real enemies' (2012, pers. comm., 27 September).



In the tenth FT, the activists point to the deliberateness of the government's choice to tell the asylum seeker story to engender distrust and isolation. Instead, the RAC offers an alternative imaginary. As Anna says, the government could tell a story of triumph over adversity:

[I]magine if the government and the media, using the same facts, change the way they present them. So, instead of saying, 'Oh my god, four and a half thousand people arrived by boat in Australia in 2011' they said 'How wonderful, four and a half thousand people have managed to escape from persecution and find their way to Australia' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

The eleventh FT in this RV signals the use of another binary, in this case the government's characterisation of good versus bad refugees:

[A] good refugee is someone who's done what they're told, gone through the right channels, fitted in with the criteria established by the government. Bad refugees are people who've arrived unannounced or who challenge in some way (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

As Chris's quote illustrates, this FT makes visible the government's logic in categorising refugees as acceptable and unacceptable. He makes clear that, for the government, good refugees are those who join the 'mythical queue' for entry into Australia, not those who arrive on boats unannounced.

The twelfth FT points to the destructive power of the words used in the stories told about the issue. Ben conveys this FT when he explains the motivations behind the use of particular 'demonising' metaphors: 'I think government, opposition, shock jocks, tabloid writers, whatever, are attempting to sow seeds of distrust and hostility [by using these terms]' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October). Germaine describes this language as 'evil' and says that 'if only people could realise their words have terrible consequences' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). The thirteenth FT is closely allied to the twelfth. In this FT, the interviewees assert that the government communicates

lies and misrepresentations about asylum seekers, including its use of the terms/ metaphors referred to in the twelfth FT. Interviewees refer to the deliberate use of incorrect terms such as ‘illegals’ for boat arrivals when the *Refugee Convention* ‘clearly says that... coming by any means is not illegal, coming without documents is not illegal... those that say it is [illegal] know that they are wrong’ (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September). Reference to the international trope for asylum seekers, the *Refugee Convention*, underpins and strengthens the thrust of this final FT. The FT cites the UN as an international institution that legitimises the activists’ position; this echoes the use of this international source of facts in the first RV.

### **Sanctioning agents/dimensions**

A key structural concept within SCT is the sanctioning agent, used here to enable further insight into the stories and storytelling of the RAC interviewees. Cragan and Shields suggest that a sanctioning agent ‘legitimizes the rhetorical vision’ (1992, p. 202). These agents are ‘sanctioning’ in the sense that they provide support and authority for the FTs – they act as agents to give legitimacy and validation to the thrust of the FTs. The nature of the sanctioning agent is not a given – each text is analysed for agents that appear in the storytelling. For example, studies have found sanctioning agents of truth and decency, reason and common sense, and the defence of life versus death (Moore 2007, pp. 145–47). In SCT, sanctioning agents are proposed as self-evidently irreproachable. In this study, I identify three elements in the activists’ storytelling that perform as sanctioning agents, animating and legitimising the visions of the activists: connectedness, credibility, and resonance.

- **Connectedness**

The first of the sanctioning agents that account for the animation of the RVs is connectedness. Connectedness emphasises bonds in human relations, interactions and stories. This is evident in all three RVs. Of note is that the activists use connectedness both positively and negatively to provide support to their FTs. The *positive* use appears when they describe how they understand the issue, forge links and create feelings of empathy in their own storytelling about asylum seekers. In this

positive application, the activists (RV2) attempt to counter the isolation or facelessness of asylum seekers by providing human interest stories to the media to help Australians connect to and identify with these asylum seekers. The connectedness sanctioning agent works to legitimise the RAC's calls to recognise a common humanity and solidarity with asylum seekers. For example, one activist recounts that, in an early campaign, the RAC adopted the phrase, 'I once was a worker, I once was a unionist, now I'm a refugee' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October). Underpinning this strategy was the belief that 'ordinary Australians' would respond positively to the plight of refugees if they could see them as ordinary people like themselves. That is, Australians would offer compassion and welcome if they knew the facts, the stories, and could make the connections with their own hopes and aspirations. Chris sums this up: 'there are refugees and refugee supporters here [at demonstrations] because what happens to you [asylum seekers] matters to what happens to us' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). The sanctioning agent of connectedness is evident in Chris's inference that humans share a bond that transcends differences.

The use of the connectedness sanctioning agent is also evident in Anna's assessment of the response of local Christmas Islanders to the destruction close to their coast of a boat (*SIEV 221*) carrying over 50 asylum seekers. Most of these asylum seekers died in spite of efforts by the locals to save them. Anna alludes to this sanctioning agent in her story about the distress of the locals. She asserts that this

indicated that there is this massive loss of human life that isn't even deemed newsworthy most of the time but also that, confronted with this reality, that ordinary people responded with real compassion and humanity and were really, really upset (2012, pers comm., 6 September).

I argue that the RAC's storytelling is more effective because of its use of the connectedness sanctioning agent to focus on what Chris describes as 'looking for any common ground. And knowing the stories' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

As noted, the RAC interviewees also use the connectedness sanctioning agent *negatively* when they refer to the techniques the Australian government uses to isolate asylum seekers. In reference to the negative, disconnection, Anna makes the point that, as a result of the government's isolation of asylum seekers – physically and psychologically – Australians see neither their faces nor know their names and, she says, 'I think it's deliberate' (2012, pers. comm., 6 September). Located in remote and offshore detention centres, asylum seekers are disconnected from the Australian population, the media, the legal system and other advocates (RV3).

In addition, the connectedness sanctioning agent sometimes operates in relation to the tripartite framing device of the international/national/local. For example, this is apparent when the activists' stories connect Australia's asylum seeker arrival numbers to the patterns of global movements of refugees around the world (RV1). By drawing on the connectedness sanctioning agent, these local activists attempt to challenge the ways in which the number of boat arrivals is discussed in Australia's national story. RAC interviewees utilise what are normatively understood as credible international institutions such as the UN to make these connections. This RAC storytelling provides the global context for the Australian experience and this information creates connectedness, perspective and balance in the debate.

- **Credibility**

The second sanctioning agent identified is credibility. Credibility is understood here as the perception of plausibility or trustworthiness, accorded either because of the authority of facts, as in the case of many stories related by the interviewees, or because of the status/power of the 'speaker'. These two aspects capture the credibility of the content and the source respectively.<sup>64</sup>

This sanctioning agent is most often employed in the first RV, which refers to the 'facts' of the case, such as Australia's position as a signatory to UN Conventions.

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<sup>64</sup> Credibility has been the subject of considerable empirical research, particularly for its relationship to persuasion (Metzger, Fanagin, Eyal, Lemus & McCann 2003).

However, it is also evident in the second and third RVs as the interviewees often refer to international and national institutional power as a way of establishing the credibility of their stories. Examples of the use of the credibility sanctioning agent through the invoking of institutional power include references to the *Refugee Convention* and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the UN statistics on global people movements, and Australian laws regarding anti-discrimination, racial vilification and immigration. By using this credibility sanctioning agent, the activists deepen the legitimacy of the FTs they relate. It is animated when activists refer to this institutional power either as they make their own case or when they challenge the institutional power of the Australian parliamentary representatives in government and opposition, using an international institution to suggest it ‘trumps’ the less honourable national institution. With this, the RAC exploits the tension between the national and the international. For example, in reference to Australia’s mandatory detention and offshore processing practices, Chris points to the UN monitoring and criticism of these policies and practices: ‘now you’ve got Australia, previously an exemplary signatory to this at an international level, now undermining it at an international level and UNHCR do not like that at all’ (2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

Credibility is also evident as a sanctioning agent when the activists refer to Australia’s espoused national cultural values of fairness, equity and multiculturalism (Soutphommasane 2012). Interviewees challenge the government on the apparent contradiction between these values and Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers. This comparison is utilised to diminish the credibility of the government on the issue of asylum seekers.

- **Resonance**

The third sanctioning agent that animates and legitimates the RVs is resonance. This sanctioning agent is a significant element in all three sites in this case study: the interviews, the media releases and the media articles. Focusing here on the stories related by the RAC members, resonance refers to the ways in which the activists’ stories highlight the reverberations and repetitions throughout history of particular

themes. Resonance appears in temporal, spatial and ideological dimensions in the activists' storytelling. Firstly, the temporal dimension of resonance is evident in RV1 in references to historical facts about Australia's migration policies since white settlement. This also appears repeatedly in RV3, with interviewees referring to earlier incidences of racial exclusion and violence in Australia. All interviewees use the temporal resonance sanctioning agent to claim that the government story about asylum seeker arrivals (RV3) is consistent with 'the long history of racism in Australia' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).<sup>65</sup> The use of this sanctioning agent links the activists' stories about the current Australian government's position (RV3) on asylum seekers with Australia's racist history.

This sanctioning agent works so effectively because interviewees know the history of the issue. They are knowledgeable and informative about Australia's treatment of refugees over the country's period of white settlement. For example, returning to the FT (in RV3) of good versus bad refugees, it is apparent in the interviews that this story is reinforced by the resonance sanctioning agent. Chris provides a number of examples from the history of this issue in his interview. He describes Australia's ready acceptance of Timor l'Este refugees at the end of Suharto's reign and its treatment of Bosnian refugees who he characterises as 'by and large, good refugees [because they were part of the NATO operations in Yugoslavia] with a little question mark at the end' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). Chris also describes Australia's reluctance to accept South African refugees and its rejection of Jewish refugees before World War II. In addition he asserts that 'there was no way in the world they [the Australian government] were going to recognise the West Papuan refugee'. Thus, Chris's recounting exemplifies the interviewees' use of the resonance sanctioning agent to suggest that Australia's current asylum seeker policies are a continuation of Australia's pursuit of its self-interest over social justice – as Fiona says, 'in that sense you're [the Australian government's] tapping into something that's already there' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October). This deep knowledge of the

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<sup>65</sup> Racism has been a hallmark of Australia since the British invasion, with legislative, regulatory and rhetorical examples of anti-Aboriginal, anti-Asian, and anti-nonwhite people sentiments, policies and practices (Cooper 2012).

history of the issue enables RAC members to see the ways in which the Australian government reproduces earlier strategies of exclusion.

Resonance is again evident as a temporal dimension in RV2. RV2 captures the themes in the activists' stories about their own position on the asylum seeker issue and their own communication efforts to advocate for the humane treatment of asylum seekers. Using the resonance sanctioning agent enables them to reflect on earlier social justice campaigns on other issues. For example, when Anna tells the story of her involvement in the issue of asylum seeker arrivals she says that

I suppose you really have to go back to the late 70s... because it became an issue for the first time really when Vietnamese people fleeing from the regime there started to arrive in Australia, or attempt to arrive in Australia via boat... So that was the first thing [when I was] actually taking a stand in support of the rights of Vietnamese boat arrivals (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

Many interviewees also refer to a long history of grassroots battles about a number of issues such as the Iraq war, Aboriginal reconciliation and same-sex marriage (marriage equality). This sense of a long history of activism buoys them – they have seen victories with anti-apartheid measures, stopping Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War and acceptance of Vietnamese refugees. They suggest that their struggles today resonate with these earlier 'battles' and that they take heart from past 'victories' (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October); thus, temporal resonance – history – is also present in their stories about their own actions and communication.

Secondly, as a spatial dimension, resonance refers to the geo-politics of the region that locates Australia as a white supremacist nation amongst non-white states. As Fiona describes it, '[With Australia] you had these white settlers in the middle of Asia that were tied with Britain and so forth' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October). The use of the temporal dimension of the resonance sanctioning agent in references to Australia's colonial history and Western identification enables several interviewees to express a further spatial dimension of this sanctioning agent. They characterise

Australia's behaviour in the region as bullying – Australia is seen as 'an arrogant contemptible bully' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October). Here Chris refers not only to the government's behaviour towards asylum seekers but also towards its near neighbours, such as Indonesia and Timor l'Este. Using the resonance sanctioning agent, interviewee stories about Australia represent it as a country that will bully less wealthy nations in the region to garner support for its policies to prevent asylum seekers from arriving to Australia. For example, Ben comments on the influence money, foreign affairs and trade considerations have had on the relationship between Australia and Indonesia: 'they really don't want to be dictated to by Australia and at the same time they have been prepared to ... absolutely collaborate and try and meet the demands of Australia' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October). Here Ben situates action and inaction on asylum seeker arrivals in the geo-politics of the region. Isla also makes this point: 'It's about aid. It's about the aid dollars' (2012, pers. comm., 1 November).

Thirdly, resonance appears with an ideological dimension. Many interviewees are members of socialist groups in Australia; consequently, they interpret Australian government and opposition actions and rhetoric on asylum seekers in relation to this fundamental philosophical and political orientation. Inhumane treatment of asylum seekers by a wealthy Western country therefore resonates for them with larger stories of political oppression and struggle. For example, one interviewee refers to the differences in the ways in which those with money wanting to come to Australia are treated compared to asylum seekers. With this, Anna builds the story of Australia, a capitalist country, treating asylum seekers poorly.

if you are a desperate person without funds... you will be brutalised, demonised...  
On the other hand, if you can prove you've got \$5 million that you want to invest in Australia, red carpet, walk in the front door, feted as a great entrepreneur (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

Another member of the RAC, not a member of a socialist group, points to this ideological dimension of the resonance sanctioning agent when she says of the RAC



that its socialist members 'have their political consciousness that I don't have, to explain what they're doing and how they do it, why they do it' (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November). Nonetheless, socialist member Ben says that this ideological dimension should not dominate RAC's work for asylum seekers: 'I think it's very, very important to the health of the refugee movement to not try and impose your organisation on what is meant to be a broad collective' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October). Here Ben asserts the need to separate individual members' socialist sensibilities from the collective work the RAC undertakes for asylum seekers – he contends that their ideological orientations (the ideological dimension of the resonance sanctioning agent) may enable members to make sense of the issues and their involvement but these sensibilities should not govern the work of the RAC organisation.

### **Master analogues**

The master analogue is another key structural component of SCT (Cragan & Shields 1992, 1995). Master analogues are deep structures underpinning shared dramatic metaphors and these structures reflect 'the predominant power of a vision' (Endres, 1994, p. 295). Master analogues exhibit the templates for thinking that express the worldviews of the storytellers. Worldviews are selecting mechanisms for what is observed as well as organising frameworks for interpreting, understanding and communicating about the world (Mintzberg 1987; Grunig & White 1992). Like worldviews, master analogues are 'systems of thinking' (Smudde 2007, p. 207).

Unlike sanctioning agents, in this analysis I draw on pre-existing types of master analogues proposed by Thomas Endres (1994) and Cragan and Shields (1995). These three master analogues explain different emphases individuals and groups exhibit in their perceptions of reality. They are the righteous, social and pragmatic master analogues. As noted in Chapter 3, the righteous master analogue refers to FTs (and RVs) that are based on the notion of what is right or wrong – this master analogue underpins those FTs that take a moral stand. A social master analogue refers to FTs that emphasise human relationships or laud a connectedness or social orientation. A

pragmatic master analogue refers to FTs that canvass practical considerations or arguments, emphasising what is useful and efficient.

- **Righteous master analogue**

Underpinning the activist stories is the premise that there is a right way to do things, a moral or ethical position to be promoted or pursued – that is, the righteous master analogue. In her interview, Isla demonstrates this righteousness: ‘So it's all on the wrong principles. It's all... built with the wrong modus operandi. Motivation – wrong motivation’ (2012, pers. comm., 1 November). The righteous master analogue underpins all the RVs in the stories of this activist public. RV1 refers to the ‘facts’ of the case and the interviewees suggest that these facts present an accurate picture of the context for the treatment of asylum seekers arriving by boat to Australia. The implication is that Australia has a moral and legal obligation to ‘do the right thing’ according to UN guidelines and in light of its own prosperity. Hugh points to this obligation and to the effect on Australia’s identity of failing to help those in need:

[It has] this poisonous corrosive influence... on the way that Australian society talks about its relation to the world and how it manages its privilege. I mean it’s [Australia’s] clearly affluent, clearly secure, the least we can do... etc., etc. (2012, pers. comm., 28 September).

The moral dimension of the stories told by the activists also appears in RV2 when they discuss the right way to treat asylum seekers and argue that the government’s current policies are the wrong way. Eli sums up the activists’ view of what is the right way: ‘I think we should accept everyone who comes by boat and plenty more. Australia could easily afford that *if we had our priorities right*’ (2012, pers. comm., 27 September; emphasis added). Jenna says the government is in the wrong because its practices abuse the victims of war, which she says is ‘a sickening form of public [bullying], a nation bullying people’ (2012, pers. comm., 27 November). Interviewees claim that it is morally wrong to knowingly harm people who are in your care and seeking a safe haven from persecution. David castigates the government for its position: ‘it’s wrong what we’re doing to these people, this isn’t the way to treat

people' (2012, pers. comm., 14 September). The RAC group consciousness on the issue is driven by both the righteous master analogue and the ideological dimension of the resonance sanctioning agent. Hugh says that '[f]or me the most important thing isn't that we've signed the Convention... To me it's not a legalistic question, it's an ethical question' (2012, pers. comm., 28 September). For Hugh, and for all the interviewees, it is not just what Australia has signed up to do, it is what is right and good for the well-being of asylum seekers.

Lastly, righteousness is central to RV3. In it the activists critique the government's motivations for its asylum seeker policies, declaring that they are unethical and morally repugnant. For example, Ben says of those in government and their supporters that

some of these people who peddle these lies are actually intelligent and educated enough themselves to know but are consciously sowing the seeds in the wider public to set up barriers between us and them, to create suspicion (2012, pers. comm., 11 October).

The interviewees characterise the government regime as inhumane and its communication about asylum seekers as self-serving. This, Ben implies, is reprehensible behaviour.

- **Social master analogue**

Although the RVs in the activists' storytelling are underpinned by the righteous master analogue, the social master analogue is also clearly present in RV2 and RV3 and bears a close relationship to the righteous orientation in this study. The social master analogue foregrounds human relationships and communication that promote connections and social cohesion. It is closely allied to the connectedness sanctioning agent. For example, in RV2 the activists relate stories that promote connections between Australians and the asylum seekers arriving to their shores. Eli illustrates this when he says that we have 'a common interest in wanting to just lead our lives, have decent lives, be able to afford to feed ourselves and our families'

(2012, pers. comm., 27 September). Here he makes connections with common human desires, demonstrating the operation of the social master analogue.

This master analogue is also at work in these RVs when interviewees criticise government policies and stories for failing to make or enable these connections. The interviewees condemn the government for promoting alienation and a sense of the 'otherness' of asylum seekers. For example, Ben voices this cohesion-driven master analogue in RV3 when he asserts that the government's process of disconnecting Australians from the asylum seeker experience creates a 'poisonous sense of hostility towards outsiders' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October), clearly intimating that this disconnection is undesirable. At the heart of the activists' criticisms is a worldview that values connections and a common humanity – the social master analogue. They condemn the government for 'the lack of humanity at that very basic level' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October). In RAC members' stories, humanity is proffered at the national level as an antidote to Australia's history of racism and, at the international level, when aligned with principles captured in UN Conventions.

The notion of a global community, and the responsibility Australians have to fellow human beings in peril, fits with this social master analogue, as well as with the righteous master analogue. It is consistent with the social master analogue in its emphasis on human relationships; and it is consistent with the righteous master analogue in its orientation towards what is right and what is ethical in emphasising human relationships, rather than nationalistic isolationism and racist agendas.

- **The pragmatic master analogue**

The pragmatic master analogue is the driver for FTs that are founded on the idea that it is desirable to be efficient, effective and practical. Very few FTs in the activists' stories align with the notion of the pragmatic master analogue (Cragan & Shields 1995; Endres 1994). It is only in RV2 that this master analogue appears in the interviewees' references to RAC campaign strategy decisions and the motivations that propel them. For example, Germaine displays a form of pragmatism when she stresses the importance of RAC demonstrations. Without them, she says, 'people

won't know there is an opposition and that there is a different standpoint' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September).

The relative absence of the pragmatic master analogue fits with the logic of the RAC activists' approach. It is explained by Anna, an influential member of the cadre with a long history as an activist. She makes the point that she does not want to use pragmatic approaches to the issue in the RAC's public storytelling:

Australia's this backwater of a country, it's got very low population and density so that lots more people could play a role in developing the country. But I always dislike those arguments about developing the country because it sort of says we only want people if we can make money out of them and that's not my approach to it. But even if they just made those pretty conservative arguments about 'well, people could come here and, guess what, they'll do things, they'll live, they'll create demand, they'll produce wealth, they'll do all of this.' Even that kind of conservative argument, which is not one that I subscribe to, even in those terms they [the government and opposition] could easily put a very different approach to things (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

Anna makes it clear that her approach, and that of the RAC, is to stress what is right, what is humane and what is responsible behaviour – that is, to stress the righteous position on the issue.<sup>66</sup> To adopt a pragmatic approach, such as arguing for on-shore processing of asylum seekers because of its relative cost effectiveness, would be seen to undermine the importance of the moral question. Consequently, the interviewees' stories do not generally reflect this master analogue. Nonetheless, I argue that references to the facts of the matter (RV1) may also reveal a pragmatic worldview. For example, as a signatory to the *Refugee Convention*, Australia has international obligations to which it says it will adhere and, pragmatically, it can be expected to act in accordance with these obligations.

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<sup>66</sup> This excerpt from her interview also illustrates the ideological dimension of the resonance sanctioning agent in RAC storytelling.

The RAC members' local stories are framed in terms of the national/international and, consequently, link Australia to the world. They do this in relation to asylum seeker movements, to international institutions and their instruments, to Australia's international reputation and to the 'bullying' of its neighbours in the region in order to get their cooperation in thwarting asylum seeker journeys to Australia.

Contemporary Australia is also linked in the RAC member stories to the racist policies of its past and the continuation of the alienation and abuse of vulnerable 'others'.

The deliberateness of the government's communication and actions about asylum seekers is a further point of emphasis in the churning out of FTs across the interviews with the activists. They see it as designed for domestic consumption, particularly in its evocation of racist tendencies that are not far below the surface in Australian rhetoric about 'others'. It is these stories in the individual interviews that demonstrate a group consciousness on the issue amongst these RAC members.

## **SECTION 2: FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE FORMATION OF A PUBLIC ON THE ISSUE**

There is a range of motivating factors for involvement in this activist public and in the process of group consciousness raising and sustaining (Bormann 1983).

Motivation is a key factor leading to involvement of members in the formation of RAC as an activist public. As Theodore Zorn, a prominent scholar in organisational communication, writes about the place of motivation in communication,

[m]otivation is what lifts us from a state of inertia to action, directs that action, and impels us to persist in the action. Applied to communication, motivation is what sets in motion our communicative efforts, directs us towards specific strategies, and impels us to continue (2012, p. 517).

Zorn argues that, although need is an important ingredient in communicative behaviour, values are closer to action than need (2012, p. 519), a point returned to later in this section. As a precipitator for participation in the RAC activist public, motivation appears as a salient reference in the interviews. Of note is that the activists not only articulate and attribute motivations to themselves but they also

attribute motivations to the government and opposition figures implicated in the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. This section applies a number of relevant concepts from the public relations and social movement literatures (see detail in Chapter 2).

### **2.1 Motivation 1: Problem recognition**

A motivation for participating in the RAC is shared problem recognition, one of three concepts from James Grunig's Situational Theory of Publics (STP) (Grunig 1978, 1997; Grunig & Hunt 1984). With this factor, Grunig's contention is that people will only stop to consider and act on an issue if they perceive that something needs to be done to improve the situation – that is, if they recognise that there is a problem to be addressed. The interviewees recognise the problem in two ways: firstly, the problem of what the government is doing and saying on this issue (the 'cause'); and secondly, the problem of what the RAC needs to do to change this (the 'remedy'). These two dimensions of shared problem recognition emerge in the RAC FTs.

For the RAC interviewees, the problem is not the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia – this is the government's 'manufactured problem' (David, 2012, pers. comm., 14 September). Instead the 'causal' problem is the government's communication about these arrivals and its behaviour towards them. The interviewees believe that the government has victimised these asylum seeker arrivals, bullied and punished them in a systematic, deliberate strategy to create a diversion that distracts the Australian community from the government's deficiencies on policy and in/action in other areas. This problem recognition motivation is captured in RV3. The interviewees' stories unite on the government's role in creating asylum seeker 'scapegoat[s]' (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October) in their storytelling and their actions to distract from something else that is to do with 'the broader health or ill-health of the capitalist economy' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

The second dimension of the interviewees' shared problem recognition is illustrated in their stories about the remedies for the current situation and thus about the

problem they face in mobilising for change. They see one remedy as getting the truth out to the Australian population and – with information and human interest stories – appealing to Australians’ capacity for compassion. RAC members contend that if the RAC is able to summon a compassionate response from the Australian people, then the government would be pressured to change its story and its policies. A key RAC mobilisation strategy is to hold public demonstrations on the issue. Germaine says that these demonstrations illustrate to those who may not share the government’s vision on the issue that they are ‘not alone’ (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). Other interviewees (Anna, Ben, Chris, David, Hugh) share similar views.

## **2.2 Motivation 2: Constraint recognition**

A second motivation to act on this issue is constraint recognition. Grunig explains this as a limiting variable because those who recognise constraints to the change they seek are less likely to communicate on the issue (1978, 1997; Grunig & Hunt 1984). In relation to constraint recognition the interviewees’ responses are organised into two categories: constraints they see as being within the refugee activist movement and constraints they deduce are imposed by external characters, systems, norms and ideologies.

There are two key points repeated in the interviews that demonstrate the internal constraints the RAC members relate. The first is that the RAC has only a small core local group that regularly participates in meetings, communication and organising for action, and that this limits the scope of what can be done and the maintenance of action over time. Thus, constraints or obstacles for this activist public within the broader movement focus on the problem of size: ‘there aren’t enough of us, that’s the key problem’ (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September). The second point relates to the coordination of action/s across the variety of groups agitating for change on this issue. This coordination is seen by some (e.g., Ben) as a key to effective communicative action now and into the future, with the RAC well-placed to lead this coordination. However, some other interviewees contend that, as different activist publics have different orientations and priorities, these can become obstacles for



coordinated actions to benefit asylum seeker arrivals. Past efforts at coordination have not always been successful. Hugh's perspective on these constraints is that

there's jealousy on the part of larger groups towards their membership and their own brand and they don't want to collaborate particularly with us... we're at the far Left edge of the refugee advocacy spectrum obviously so that carries risks (2012, pers. comm., 28 September).

The RAC members also speak about external constraints imposed by characters, systems, norms and ideologies. These draw the group together in a shared disdain for those mechanisms and policies that produce the current situation for asylum seekers. Jenna sums this up: 'The system creates a lot of obstacles. There is an enormous apparatus which creates the social view and the big picture is... bipartisanship (2012, pers. comm., 27 November)'. Fiona says that it is the RAC's goal 'to break the bipartisan consensus between the two political parties that they can trash refugee rights' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October). This bipartisanship is a reference to the pursuit by both major parties of deterrence policies to exclude asylum seekers from Australia (Phillips & Spinks 2013); the contention here is that without the representation of a diversity of opinion on the issue in the parliamentary arena, the Australian people will fail to think of alternative ways of dealing with asylum seeker arrivals.<sup>67</sup>

The media system – which Fiona refers to as 'the servile media' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October) – is also identified as a key external constraint, serving a hegemonic function in representing the issue to the Australian people. Ben states that '[a] large section of the mainstream media is an obstacle and I think many of the myths that have been propagated by all of these institutions are obviously huge obstacles as well' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October). The interviewees see media as culpable participants that create a barrier to the dissemination of accurate information and a compassionate perspective; media are seen to actively create and propagate the

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<sup>67</sup> This perspective from the activist interviewees is consistent with Elisabeth Noelle-Newman's (1984) Spiral of Silence theory.

myths about asylum seekers Ben refers to in his interview. The media's role as a constraint for the activists is also demonstrated in an example from Jenna. Referring to journalists she has encountered who have indicated that a story Jenna is promoting is interesting, she says she has been told 'but my [the journalist's] boss just doesn't want to hear it' (2012, pers. comm., 27 November). Jenna refers to the media coverage as 'a very narrow frame of reference... they don't want to hear another perspective'.

### **2.3 Motivation 3: Involvement**

A third factor from STP that helps explain the motivations of the RAC members to act and communicate about asylum seekers is involvement. Involvement can be understood in relation to personal relevance (Hallahan 2001), motifs for engagement in Social Movement Organisations (as identified by Klandermans and his co-authors in a number of articles, cited in Stockemer 2012, p. 269), metaphors of protest (van Zomeren & Spears 2009) and the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) (van Zomeren 2013).

- **Personal relevance**

In his explanation of the Issues Processes Model (IPM), Kirk Hallahan (2001, p. 40) suggests that involvement in an activist public may be understood in terms of personal relevance and personal consequence for participants, a proposition I addressed in the interviews with the activists. Interviewees were asked to reflect on their own life stories and how they came to be involved in the RAC, and whether and how this issue may have personal relevance or consequence for them. Personal consequence is not relevant to understand the involvement of these activists in this issue: none are refugees and none would suffer personal consequences (dis/advantage) if the government were to continue with its current policies and practices.

The question of personal relevance provokes a range of responses in the interviews. For example, for Jenna personal relevance occurs when you have personal

experience with asylum seekers: it's 'the glue that fixes you ... it's the thing that makes you really care, because these are real people' (2012, pers. comm., 27 November). Four of the 10 interviewees begin by saying that the issue has no personal relevance for them but, even so, two of these go on to relate stories that capture pivotal moments or concerns that they say are very important to them personally and that they feel propelled their interest in the issue. Their own perceptions of personal relevance evolve as they reflect on their involvement and its genesis. For example, Hugh says that his father had come to Australia as a refugee after World War II but 'I've never consciously drawn the link... Who knows how subconsciously that might have played a role? (2012, pers. comm., 28 September)'. In fact he says that he did not make this connection until the interview.

Two themes that arise in relation to personal relevance warrant discussion here – the family history theme and the teacher/advocate theme. In relation to the family history theme, one interviewee refers to the history of his family's involvement in helping asylum seekers and refugees in Europe during World War II: Ben says, 'the whole question [of involvement in helping asylum seekers] is part of the family history... and I knew [my grandmother]... was proud of it and that also provided me with an extra bit of inner strength in terms of commitment to the whole issue' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October). Another refers to family history in a different way. Eli's family circumstances were impoverished and this gave him a keen desire for social justice in all its forms. 'The key thing for me was about seeing the inequalities, mostly the economic inequalities, I suppose, as a starting point. And that would have been from my upbringing... So, we were poor' (2012, pers. comm., 27 September).

The second theme of note, the teacher/advocate theme, is apparent when several interviewees say the personal relevance of the issue arose when students they were teaching either demonstrated the effects of prolonged detention or sought their assistance when attempting to navigate the immigration system. Half of the interviewees are or were teachers, in secondary and tertiary institutions. This is interesting in that so many of these activists work as experts in their educational institutions, reflecting, learning and teaching on diverse topics, including

nationhood, history and international relations – and yet, as activists on this issue, this expertise is largely unrecognised in the public sphere. Some of the interviewees had become their students' advocates and this translated into a recognition that the system itself needed to change. Jenna tried to help her asylum seeker students and their parents:

they've brought all their paperwork in a plastic Woolworths [supermarket] bag that you'd pick up your shopping in and it was just a nightmare trying to work out... so in that way, through those students, I became a sort of accidental activist (2012, pers. comm., 27 November).

- **Motifs, metaphors and SIMCA**

Three typologies of motivations from the social movement literature are applied to deepen my understanding of the RAC members' motivation to become involved in this issue and this organisation. First is Bert Klanderman and his co-authors' notion of the motif (as outlined in Stockemer 2012). These motifs explain the underlying motivations for people to engage with organisations pursuing social change agendas. Of the three motifs in Klanderman and his co-authors' typology, it is the ideology motif that best captures the motivations of the interviewees to participate in RAC action for asylum seekers. This motif is characteristic of activists who 'have entrenched values and beliefs' and 'look for a venue where they can live according to their convictions' (Stockemer 2012, p. 269). Stockemer further asserts that Social Movement Organisations 'aim to shape group ideologies' (2012, p. 270) and that these group ideologies are derived from mutual solidarity, shared beliefs and values and common ideological orientations. A dominant FT in the interviews with the RAC activists is the belief that the current system of treatment of asylum seekers is morally wrong, breaches human rights and international conventions, and is at odds with a sense of fair play and social inclusiveness. These values are all espoused in interviewees' stories, as noted in the earlier discussion about righteous and social master analogues. An example of the ideology motif is when Isla says 'I really care about justice, and I think it's the public duty of government to deliver justice' (2012, pers. comm., 1 November). Ideology is also evident in the commitment, mentioned

earlier, many of the interviewees have to socialist groups advocating for wholesale social change. As is demonstrated in Eli's quote below, these entrenched values inform their position on this asylum seeker issue:

I'm a member of [a socialist group] and that's kind of my belief system and I think the whole – why do we have refugees in the first place? – it's because of the whole world that's just based around the interests of the rich and powerful. Profits come first, people come last; wars, racism, all these things are, I think, a product of that – I think that all fits together (2012, pers. comm., 27 September).

Second are the metaphors of protest proposed by Martijn van Zomeren and Russell Spears (2009). These metaphorical types provide a classification of individual and group-based motivations for collective action that go beyond the traditional focus on self-interest (Stockemer 2012). Two of the three metaphors of protest apply to the RAC members – the intuitive theologian and the intuitive politician. The most significant here is the intuitive theologian. Van Zomeren and Spears describe intuitive theologians as being motivated to communicate and act 'when sacred values are transgressed, individuals [then] experience motivated arousal that transforms into moral outrage responses (i.e., a desire to vilify the transgressors) and moral cleansing responses (i.e., a desire to reaffirm the transgressed value)' (2009, p. 671). For example, in response to a question about what formed his views on the issue, Hugh says

what Australia was doing to asylum seekers was wrong and reprehensible. It was moral. I know for a lot of people it's originally political but, even though it's become that for me, I think originally it was moral outrage (2012, pers. comm., 28 September).

The RAC activists are seeking to protect their values of inclusiveness, human rights and social responsibility (their ideology). In particular, Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary's (1995, cited in van Zomeren & Spears 2009, p. 674) proposition that 'denying belongingness to those who deserve it would enrage intuitive theologians' is apt in

the case of the activists and their efforts to secure human rights and access to settlement in Australia for these asylum seekers.

The other metaphor of protest that is useful is that of the intuitive politician. Van Zomeren and Spears describe the intuitive politician metaphor as specifying both a self-conscious struggle against the powerful in society and a belief that collective action is necessary to mobilise others to support the activist cause. They argue that '[p]oliticised identity develops when people perceive shared grievances, make adversarial attributions, and realise the involvement of society at large' (2009, p. 670). I would further suggest that the intuitive politician is allied to the ideology motif (Stockemer 2012). For example, one interviewee says that the RAC's role is to 'engage closely with – I don't know – some kind of socialist sense of political engagement with political authority' (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November). The activists' understanding of the effect on society of complacency about treatment of refugees was clear:

the consequences of not fighting what was happening over refugees was going to be a very, very divided society – the racism, the xenophobia, the anti-Islamic stuff... There was a wider social agenda associated with it that was compelling (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

The intuitive politician metaphor, exemplified by Chris's perspective here, expresses the activists' motivation for collective action about asylum seeker arrivals. It links ideology and identity – these activists see collective action as their *raison d'être* as well as the key to mobilising the community to effect change.

The third useful typology of motivations from the social movement literature is the SIMCA. With this model, van Zomeren (2013) proposes four core social-psychological motivations for undertaking collective action: efficacy, identity, emotion and morality. Of these, the morality and emotion motivations are demonstrated in the moral outrage, anger and action the RAC interviewees relate in their stories about the issue and their involvement. This is closely allied to the intuitive theologian

metaphor of protest (van Zomeren & Spears 2009). As is evident in most interviews, and illustrated in Hugh's earlier example, the activists report that they are largely motivated by moral outrage.

Ben captures the integration of these three typologies from the social movement literature, expressing the ideology motif, the intuitive politician metaphor and the emotion and morality motivations in the SIMCA when he says that, for him, 'it's got the mixture of being a moral question about the effects of racism on people, an emotional question in terms of the people it affects, but also a sort of political and intellectual question' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October).

## **CONCLUSION**

It is apparent from the interviews with the RAC activists that they are not motivated to advocate for asylum seekers because of any consequence for themselves, nor for instrumental or pragmatic reasons. Individuals are not motivated by a desire for identity with the RAC for their own ends. Instead they are motivated by ideology, and by their moral and emotional outrage at transgressions to their values.<sup>68</sup> Rather than expressing stories of cohesion and social bonds with the other members of the RAC, their group 'identity' is discerned in their attachment to similar entrenched values and beliefs, as are referenced in the ideology and intuitive theologian classifications, and in their patterns of storytelling that reveal a symbolic convergence on the RVs about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. In their storytelling about the issue of asylum seeker arrivals, the group ideology is founded on a 'welcome boat' philosophy – they profess unequivocal acceptance of refugees. Their group consciousness (Bormann 1983; Cragan & Shields 1992) is propelled by a sense of what is the right – or righteous – course of action for Australia to take when asylum seekers make their way to its territories. It is fuelled by the activists' knowledge of the history of the issue in Australia, their beliefs in the value of human connectedness and in Australia's obligation to honour the spirit of the *Refugee*

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<sup>68</sup> Moral motivation has been associated with social identity and, coupled with group based anger, has forecast collective action (van Zomeren et al. 2008).

*Convention.* A crucial element in their storytelling is to work against the ‘despicable’ government and opposition rhetoric and policies about asylum seekers. They pair the institutions of government and media in their condemnation and seek to hold out a beacon of hope and resolve for those Australians who support asylum seekers, in addition to the asylum seekers themselves.

In the next chapter I explore how the rhetorical visions, master analogues and sanctioning agents appear in the media releases produced and distributed in the public realm on behalf of this activist public.



## CHAPTER 6: RAC STORIES IN THE PUBLIC REALM

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins my exploration of who gets to be heard on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia and extends the exploration of what stories are told about these arrivals by the RAC in the public realm. It analyses the RAC's public storytelling in its media releases about the issue. With this public storytelling, this local organisation seeks to participate in the local/national/international debate about asylum seekers in the public sphere. In this chapter, I focus on three aspects of the process of production of the RAC's public communication: the function of the media releases in RAC public relations work; the stories related in the media releases; and the roles the RAC adopts as it provides a platform for the voices of the storytellers in this process. In the course of this chapter, I note the links between the stories related by RAC members in the interviews (Chapter 5) and this public storytelling in its media releases.

The first section of this chapter describes the RAC public relations work and the process for producing media releases for distribution to Australian media. These media releases perform a storytelling function. Indeed, Paul Elmer (2011, p. 47) argues that 'public relations is storytelling'. Media releases are 'short, official statements released publicly by organisations and office-bearers of organisations, which can be quoted or reproduced in full by media' (Macnamara 2012b, p. 356). This section explains the function of media releases and sets out the addressees for the 22 RAC media releases in this study. Section 2 examines the media releases for the stories the RAC presents on the issue of asylum seekers. In this section I again employ Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA) from Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), this time to identify the storylines in the media releases in the forms of rhetorical visions, sanctioning agents and master analogues. Writing on Ernest Bormann's contribution to communication scholarship with SCT, Moya Ball asserts that, in SCT, the texts of communities are understood as 'the fossilised remains of shared group fantasies' (2001, p. 221). The analysis in Section 2 of this chapter includes an assessment of

these media releases as the manifestation – the ‘fossilised remains’ – of the RAC symbolic convergence on shared group fantasies related in the interviews with the activists (Chapter 5).

The third section of this chapter explores the roles the RAC adopts in these media releases and the voices of the storytellers it includes. Here voice is understood as ‘the expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that needs to be acknowledged’ (Couldry 2010, p. 1). This section reveals the importance of the watchdog role that drives the communication and actions of the RAC on the issue of asylum seekers.

### **SECTION 1: MEDIA RELEASES AND THEIR ROLE IN RAC COMMUNICATION ON THE ISSUE**

The RAC’s storytelling on the issue of asylum seekers in the public sphere is expressed in a number of forms traditionally associated with public relations (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber 2015). Sectional interests in society use public relations to facilitate and exert their ‘influence and control through media and culture’ (Demetrious 2013, p. 3). RAC storytelling occurs in activities and publications familiar to activist publics, such as fact sheets distributed at rallies and in interviews recorded on television, radio and online, predominantly with Ian Rintoul as the RAC spokesperson. The RAC has a Facebook page members use to communicate with those who have proffered their details, often at earlier public rallies on the issue. This Facebook page also attracts people to the RAC and to action on the issue. However, media releases are ‘the most well-known and ubiquitous outputs’ (Macnamara 2014, p. 75) in public relations practice and, despite recent changes in the media landscape, Richard Waters, Natalie Tindall and Timothy Morton maintain that ‘publicity and media relations components of public relations campaigns continue to thrive’ (2010, pp. 243–4).

## 1.1 Media Releases

The media release form adheres to what Peter Smudde and Jeffrey Courtright propose as a genre in public relations writing. They contend that such discourse genres exist because of recurring situations that 'suggest appropriate symbolic responses to them' (2012, p. 21). Media releases are developed to communicate through media outlets to a broader public. An integral part of the RAC mobilisation strategy is its engagement with the traditional media to examine, reveal and publicise the actions related to asylum seeker issues of the day. The media are believed to be the key to reaching and mobilising the Australian people (Anna, Ben, Chris, David, Hugh) so that political players who make and shape policy in this area are influenced to respond to mass support for change that effects a more humane policy. Traditionally the media or news release has two potential addressees or publics: the journalist/editor at the media outlet to which it has been distributed and the reader of such a publication.

The first task of the media release is to gain the interest of the journalist recipient. RAC activists perceive the journalist as the key 'gatekeeper' (Smith 2012, p. 81) in the RAC's efforts to alert Australians to the plight of asylum seekers (e.g., Anna, Ben, Chris, Germaine). The style and structure of a media release is designed to facilitate publication by mimicking the style of the journalist's publication; that is, as an example from a public relations textbook instructs, 'a good release will sound as if it's been lifted from the newspaper' (Yale 1991, p. 109). This strategy is said to make it easier for the journalist to recognise the news value of the story and to adopt and adapt the material for inclusion in her media outlet (Smith 2012; Yale 1991).

By adhering to these style and structure conventions, the media release also caters to its second addressees: the readers of the publications it has 'targeted'. These readers are the ultimate addressees, in that the communication to the journalist is not an end in itself but an intermediate step in the goal of reaching the readers of journalists' publications. As gatekeepers, journalists give or deny access to communication with their readers. Many research studies attest to both the

influence of public relations ‘information subsidies’ (Zoch & Moleda 2006, p. 284) on journalism output (e.g., Kinnick 2005; Louw 2005; Macnamara 2014), and the hostility journalists direct at these missives (e.g., Davies 2009; White & Hobsbawm 2007). As part of a ‘push’ communication strategy (Hallahan 2010), media releases are designed to raise awareness of particular issues in the public’s consciousness, alerting them to the position or stance on the issue promoted by the authoring organisation. This strategy fails to take effect if the journalist ignores or rejects the media release and thus the second, key addressee is not reached with the author’s story. As Chris said in his interview, for RAC the media present ‘serious institutional blockages’ to communication of its message to the Australian people (2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

However, in the contemporary media environment, the scope of potential readers is considerably broader than just the readers of the journalists’ publications. Media releases are now available directly from their authors’ websites, via blogs and tweets, and on Facebook (Breakenridge 2008, 2012; Kent 2010). Thus, distribution strategies for media releases, including those of the RAC, now include the posting of media releases online. This incorporates a ‘pull’ strategy (Hallahan 2010) that relies on interested people to seek out this information from these posting locations.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to journalists and their readers, the RAC is interested in garnering the attention of, and influencing, Australian politicians. In this context, and in their engagement with the Australian media, the RAC media releases mark a subtle shift to the national away from the pronounced international emphasis evident in the interviews with RAC members (Chapter 5). The national, in this instance, is embodied in the Australian politicians who design and administer the systems that govern Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers. The government addressee is evident in media releases that directly urge it to act in ways the RAC promotes. This is a form of petitioning. For example, after the Memorandum of Understanding

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<sup>69</sup> In contrast to a pull strategy, a push strategy sends messages either directly to the intended public or via an intermediary such as the media.

(MOU) reached between the governments of Australia and Afghanistan and the UNHCR, in a media release the RAC asserts that

[r]ather than agreements to push 'involuntary removals', the government *should* legislate to establish complementary protection for asylum seekers. This *could* provide a legislative protection for humanitarian protection that is presently being denied. Minister Chris Bowen promised the legislation before Christmas 2009. We are still waiting (2011m; emphasis added).

This petitioning is a characteristic of most of the RAC media releases. Its purpose is to urge the government and opposition to make the suggested changes, but also to indicate to the Australian people – the second addressees – the demands they should be making of their elected representatives.

## **1.2 RAC Media Release development process**

The RAC produces media releases to express its position, and, implicitly, its group consciousness, in stories that respond to current or future events, such as High Court challenges about to be handed down, government action or communication. These media releases also communicate information gleaned from asylum seekers on the issue and rally Australians to join actions in support of asylum seekers.

The RAC's media releases are initially developed by one or two members of the organising cadre, outside the scope of the regular weekly meetings. Although a shared group consciousness is evident in the interviews (Chapter 5), this is not to suggest that there are no ideological differences within the RAC organising cadre. The key space in which these differences emerge is in discussion of the RAC's communication strategies at weekly meetings. As an observant participant, I believe that an attempt to write media releases at the meetings would be unworkable because of the time it takes to allow all in the two competing groups within the RAC to express their positions on each issue of contention and the unlikelihood of a resolution within a meeting timeframe. Instead, volunteer RAC members produce these releases outside the meetings and drafts are circulated to the full organising

group email list for comment in a short timeframe. Final versions are then emailed to those on the coordinating group email list after distribution to the media.

On occasions (witnessed by the researcher) some discussion about final media releases follows in the next regular meeting of the group. This discussion sometimes reveals differences of opinion about how an issue could have been framed, or a story told. For example, in one meeting several attendees said they felt the media release should have directly accused the government of racist policies towards asylum seekers. However, this approach was not universally supported at the meeting – other attendees said that to say this directly would undermine the chance that the media release would be used by the media. In this example, differences occurred along the party lines mentioned earlier and long-running tensions were manifest in meeting exchanges. Whereas many decisions are reached by a consensus, when tension arises votes are taken to resolve any dispute.

The key messages in the RAC's media releases reflect those in its other public communication on the issue, such as in leaflets, banners and chants at rallies. Examples of key messages in all are 'Close Christmas Island', 'Welcome refugees', and 'End mandatory detention'. Key messages 'are on the surface of the text, readily and easily observable, and signified by the presence of a series of words or phrases' (Carroll, Huang-Horowitz, McKeever & Williams 2014, p. 389). These repeated messages are also cues for fantasy themes on the issue. In this way, the concept of the key message from the public relations literature is related to the fantasy themes of SCT, in that fantasy themes incorporate key messages in a storyline.

As noted, media releases form an integral part of the RAC's campaign. The RAC employs the media release genre in order to contribute to what members see as the RAC's key purpose: to mobilise a national cohort, the Australian people, to support action to change Australia's treatment of asylum seekers. This grassroots mobilisation begins with information provision to the Australian people via the media about the issue and about opportunities for Australians to express support for asylum seekers at rallies, seminars, meetings and in petitions. Fiona says of the RAC

campaign that 'I think [it] can help to bridge the gap [between isolated asylum seekers and the Australian people] and actually bring back a bit of common humanity to the debate' (2012, pers. comm., 26 October). As Ben explains, the role of RAC's communication on the issue is both 'activist and educative [with the purpose of] just trying to engage with the whole idea of shifting public opinion' (2012, pers. comm., 11 October). Anna, Ben, Chris, David and Germaine stress that a key strategy in the RAC's mobilisation efforts is to let people know that there is opposition to the current practices.

I think the thing that RAC does, that no one else does – is therefore our core purpose, if you like – is the public mobilisation of support for refugees, and that means trying to organise demonstrations, trying to again encourage those large numbers of people that already oppose the government's policies to feel that they should come out and make that support public (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

Another member of the organising cadre makes a similar point, adding to the perceived significance of this public communication: Chris says that 'the main thing which I think RAC has done is the public manifestation of opposition to the policy which I think is a crucial but not a singular role... So... people... recognise that they are not alone' (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). This 'not alone' motif recurs throughout the interviews and is a driver for RAC mobilisation in its media releases. The RAC media releases communicate information and the message that alternative views are possible and supported. To effect the RAC's call to action, the releases are directed at traditional or 'mass' communication modes and their online forms. The reach and role of these traditional media are significant because, as Brian Loader and Dan Mercea claim, a community's shared depictions of issues and events are drawn from the media, a key arena in which we see the performance of the public sphere (2011, p. 763). However, getting the media to publish RAC stories is a difficult task.

You have to move against the dominant narrative that has control over most of the media and television, newspapers and everything. You have to find people who will publish what you say. Of course, they fight back. They call you far left-wing bleeding hearts, whatever (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).

Germaine's comments point to the crucial role of the journalist as conduit for reaching the Australian people with RAC stories. In public relations parlance, the RAC's outcome objective is to change public opinion about asylum seekers so that Australians support a 'more humane' approach; its process objective (how to reach the outcome) is to participate in debate in the public sphere by telling RAC stories in the traditional media.

## **SECTION 2: THE STORIES**

The stories in the media releases display the RAC's public face. As in Chapter 5, I apply FTA to discern the rhetorical visions, sanctioning agents and master analogues present in these texts. This analysis provides insights not only into the stories the RAC tells, but also into the storytelling processes that produce them. Locating the sanctioning agents in the media releases pinpoints those legitimising concepts the RAC uses to provide the authority for journalists and their readers to understand and give credence to the RAC's perspective on the issue. Identifying the master analogues establishes the drivers for the RAC's public storytelling about asylum seekers.

### **2.1 Rhetorical visions**

Twenty-three fantasy themes are identified in these media releases, coalescing into five rhetorical visions. In the first RV, the RAC blames the government for what happens to asylum seekers who seek Australia's protection. It incorporates the RAC's assertions about the facts of Australia's international obligations and capacities, as well as the effects of its detention of asylum seekers, and asserts that Australia is responsible for what happens to asylum seekers who seek its protection. This RV mirrors RV1 in the interviews with the activists (see Chapter 5) and is thus a direct representation of the RAC's group consciousness on the issue.



In the second RV, RAC expresses its condemnation of the Australian government's communication about asylum seekers. The RAC claims Australia's communication to and about asylum seeker arrivals is untruthful and untrustworthy. The third RV presents the RAC as the voice of the asylum seekers and the asylum seeker experience, as a conduit for information and truth. In its media releases, the RAC demonstrates that it is in direct contact with the asylum seekers and thus represents its organisation as an inside source for the Australian people about this issue. In the fourth RV, the RAC takes a moral stance and declares that the Australian government's behaviour on the issue is reprehensible and a national disgrace. It makes demands about what Australia should be doing to rectify the situation – that is, it petitions the government and the Australian people. The fifth and final RV in the media releases declares the RAC's own position on the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers: the RAC wants Australia to welcome refugees, to close off-shore detention centres, and to release asylum seekers into the community for re-settlement.

**Rhetorical vision 1: Australia is trying to avoid its responsibilities for the experiences of those seeking Australia's protection as they flee persecution, including for the deleterious effects of detention.**

The first of the RVs in the media releases draws on the facts of Australia's international responsibilities to protect those who seek its protection from persecution. The presentation of these responsibilities has three facets. The first facet relates to the boat journeys. The RAC (2010b) declares that if Australia 'was willing to properly process asylum-seekers in Indonesia' they would not get on boats. In addition, the RAC claims that if Australia did not 'push' Indonesia to harass asylum seekers they would have less motivation to leave Indonesia on these journeys to Australia. The RAC (2010b) also submits that Australia's people smuggling laws deter those on these boats from notifying Australian authorities when in distress. Together these elements place the blame for these journeys, and subsequent deaths at sea, on the government's policies and actions. The second facet is also related to Australia's legal and moral responsibility for asylum seekers undertaking the boat journeys from Indonesia. Here, the RAC blames the Australian government for its

failure to provide sufficient resources to speedily process asylum seeker claims in Indonesia. The third facet of responsibility is associated with the suffering asylum seekers experience in detention centres in Australia and offshore. The RAC asserts that Australia's policy of mandatory detention and the conditions in these centres are the government's responsibility, as are the mental and physical health issues that arise, either as a direct result of the detention or as a result of the inadequacy of the medical services provided to detained asylum seekers.

The first RV arises from four related fantasy themes (see Table 6.1 in Appendix B). The first exhorts Australians to reflect on one boat story as emblematic of Australia's responsibility for and treatment of asylum seekers in the region. An RAC media release refers to the standoff at Merak 12 months earlier. The RAC spokesperson says that 'the fate of the Merak Tamils says everything about Australia's punitive policies that push asylum seekers to risk the boat journey to Australia' (RAC 2010d).<sup>70</sup> The story of the death of one person on this boat is used to personalise the repercussions of the standoff and is told in order to tell the story of the Merak asylum seekers, which in turn represents the asylum seeker story. Providing a human interest angle on an issue is a common public relations and journalistic device for eliciting sympathy or empathy (Newsom & Haynes 2017) from the reader.

The second fantasy theme in RV1 builds on the first in that it accuses Australia of 'avoiding its obligations to asylum seekers under the Refugee Convention' (RAC 2011f). Here, the reference is to Australia's policy of offshore processing. The third fantasy theme addresses Australia's responsibility for conditions asylum seekers endure in detention centres. These centres are seen as inadequately resourced and 'a hothouse of frustration' (RAC 2011k). Asylum seekers are said to suffer further trauma and ill-health as a result of prolonged detention. This is a powerful – and frequent – charge the RAC and others level at the government and associated

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<sup>70</sup> The Merak asylum seekers refused to disembark and maintained a dispute with the Indonesian and Australian authorities about their position. A year later all but nine of these asylum seekers (who were still awaiting decisions) had been assessed as refugees by the UNHCR. At the time of this media release they are still in detention in Indonesia 'in appalling conditions' (RAC 2010d) and have no prospect of being resettled in Australia.

institutions. It evokes increasing concern and debate in Australia about mental health issues as well as the abuse of children by institutions of care.<sup>71</sup> The fourth and final fantasy theme in RV1 declares that 'Australia is by far the best equipped, and the best resourced country in the region to process and resettle refugees' (RAC 2011g), comparing Australia's wealth to poorer countries in the region such as Timor l'Este.

Not surprisingly, the fantasy themes in this RV bear a striking resemblance to those in the first RV found in the interviews with the activists (see Chapter 5). In particular, this RV in the media releases compares Australia's wealth and power to those poorer countries in the region that are being asked to take on Australia's 'burden'. It resonates with what the interviewees say, thus reflecting their group consciousness. For example, Hugh says '[Australia should] assume its fair share of the burden' (2012, pers. comm., 28 September). This then is an example of a clear translation from private to public storytelling.

**Rhetorical vision 2: Australia's communication on the issue is untruthful and untrustworthy; it resorts to subterfuge and misdirection and does not keep its commitments.**

The second RV is a composite of three fantasy themes (see Table 6.2 in Appendix B) about the Australian government's communication about asylum seekers. The RAC characterises this storytelling as 'political posturing' (2010a). With the first fantasy theme, the Australian government is represented as untruthful and untrustworthy because it is not open or honest in its actions and communications. For example, one release states that 'Chris Bowen [Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in the Gillard Labor government] has not even been honest enough to admit they have taken away appeal rights' (2011h). RAC media releases contend that the Australian government constructs boat arrivals of asylum seekers as a crisis, that it tries to discredit the asylum seekers with stories that the RAC comprehensively refutes, and that it makes arrangements and changes without consultation or clear communication. In the second fantasy theme, the RAC asserts that the government

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<sup>71</sup> These concerns have subsequently become the subject of Australian Royal Commissions of Inquiry.

is untrustworthy because it fails to keep promises made about and to asylum seekers. In its watchdog role (see section 3 in this chapter), the RAC (2009b), provides details of examples of broken promises such as when the Labor government promises to use 'detention as a last resort' to 'introduce complementary protection legislation' (2011j) and to 'process the applications more quickly' (2011c).

In the third fantasy theme in this RV, the focus is not explicitly on the government but instead is on its agents. RAC alleges that these agents, Serco<sup>72</sup> and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, have resorted to subterfuge to conceal the scale of hunger strikes, for example, and remain unaccountable for unexplained delays in processing claims for asylum. The RAC accuses these government agents of concealing facts. For example, in a media release on 21 January 2011, the RAC declared: 'We need an end to the culture of lies and cover-up that dominates the Immigration Department. The promise to process claims quickly must be kept'.<sup>73</sup> The alleged subterfuge is again highlighted when the RAC (2011f) refers to information that is gleaned from 'leaked' documents, rather than from open communication. The RAC alleges that these communication behaviours, like the Minister for Immigration's excuses for returning the survivors of the boat tragedy to detention on Christmas Island, 'don't stand up to scrutiny' (2011a). RV2 is consistent with many fantasy themes in RV3 in the interviews with the activists (see Chapter 5), again demonstrating the RAC's translation of its group consciousness to the public realm.

**Rhetorical vision 3: The RAC gives a platform for the voices of asylum seekers so that their stories reach out to the Australian people.**

The third RV establishes the RAC as a conduit for the voices of the asylum seekers. In this RV, the RAC communicates that it represents the interests and the views of asylum seekers on the boats at Merak and in detention centres in Australia and offshore. The RAC's conduit role is achieved in several ways. Firstly, through contact

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<sup>72</sup> Serco is the private operator of immigration detention centres for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

<sup>73</sup> In his interview, Chris identifies the Department as a major obstacle – its culture and processes – to changes to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

with asylum seekers in various locations, the RAC is able to quote them in stories they tell to the Australian people in their media releases. Secondly, the RAC includes as attachments to its media releases several direct communiqués from the asylum seekers themselves. Thirdly, members' knowledge of the history, legislation, and processes relating to asylum seekers allows the RAC to advocate for the interests of asylum seekers – to be their 'voice' in Australia.

RV3 is a composite of three fantasy themes (see Table 6.3 in Appendix B). The first fantasy theme records direct messages from another mode of communication, banners that asylum seekers have created and displayed at detention centres, such as 'protection not detention' (RAC 2011j), and 'where are our human rights?' (RAC 2011d). These are quoted in RAC media releases, thus both aligning the RAC with the asylum seekers' demands and giving those who produced the banners another avenue to reach the Australian media. The second fantasy theme also speaks directly with the voice of the asylum seeker: with this, the RAC and the asylum seekers are effectively saying that 'we can tell you the truth'. For example, the conditions of asylum seekers on the *Jaya Lestari 5* at Merak are related in a statement issued by 16 signatories from the boat and attached to an RAC media release: '27 women hold 31 nutritionally deprived children who are losing weight' (2009a). With this inclusion, these signatories are able to appeal directly to Australians. They are seeking a recognition of their common humanity by making a connection or identification with their own circumstances: 'many people in Australia will recognise our situation because they know other refugees or have faced similar circumstances, having the same fears and fleeing the same dangers'.

The RAC's facilitation role is captured in the third fantasy theme in this RV, which articulates the close alliance it has been able to establish with asylum seekers. RAC members are trusted emissaries with a long track record of helping asylum seekers in their struggles to seek Australia's protection. Consequently, members of the RAC have direct access to asylum seekers, where media and other independent bodies do not. For example, an RAC media release during the standoff refers to the alliance: 'Refugee advocates *in touch with* the asylum seekers on the boat at Merak,

Indonesia, have refuted media claims ...' (2009d; emphasis added). This alliance establishes that the RAC is able to provide 'inside' information in its media releases, reporting otherwise inaccessible information and perspectives to the media and the Australian people.

**Rhetorical vision 4: The RAC condemns the government's behaviour towards asylum seekers, who have already suffered enough. This treatment of asylum seekers brings Australia's international reputation into disrepute.**

RV4 condemns the behaviour of the Australian government towards asylum seekers. This RV draws on a key motif in the RAC stories that exploits the tension between the national and the international. RV4 is strongly associated with the interviewees' use of the power of international institutions and instruments (see Chapter 5) to assess Australia's treatment of asylum seekers. The RAC's media releases claim that Australia's behaviour is shameful and exacerbates the suffering of asylum seekers fleeing persecution for a safe haven in Australia, a signatory to the *Refugee Convention*. Seven fantasy themes contribute to this RV (see Table 6.4 in Appendix B). The first fantasy theme refers to the suffering that the asylum seekers have endured and continue to endure at the hands of the Australian government through its practices of deterrence and delay. One media release declares that 'They have suffered enough' (2010a), referring to the survivors of the boat tragedy subsequently kept in detention on Christmas Island.

The second fantasy theme in RV4 deems Australia's behaviour as shameful and a national disgrace: 'to treat the survivors in this way would be unconscionable' (RAC 2010a). The third fantasy theme cautions the government that the world is judging its behaviour, that 'it is the Sri Lankan government [from which the Tamils are fleeing] and the Australian government that are on trial' (RAC 2009f), not the asylum seekers. The recurring link between the national and the international appears here in relation to Australia's international reputation on this issue. The fourth fantasy theme asserts that 'all asylum seekers should have the same rights' (RAC 2011h), referring to the government's response to a High Court decision about offshore versus onshore detention. The fifth fantasy theme claims that Australia's processes

for assessment of refugee claims are unfair. This unfairness has come about through 'political manipulation' (RAC 2011j) and 'political meddling' (RAC 2011c) that is 'an abuse of the asylum seekers' right for their claims to be judged fairly and independently' (RAC 2011d).

In the sixth fantasy theme in RV4, in another national/international linkage, the RAC points out that by consorting with governments with histories of corruption and abuse of their citizens the Australian government is complicit in this abuse. For example, in reference to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Afghanistan for the return of rejected asylum seekers, the RAC says in its media release that 'it is an agreement with an illegitimate and corrupt government propped up by the Australian and NATO forces' (2011m). In another media release, the RAC makes the same point in reference to Sri Lanka:

Unless the Australian government delegate John McCarthy raises the human rights abuses with the Sri Lankan president, the Australian government will be complicit in the on-going abuse of Tamils in Sri Lanka (2009f).

Also referring to Australia's international relations, the seventh and final fantasy theme in RV4 accuses Australia of acting with arrogance towards Timor l'Este. This is a reference to revelations from an Australian government document proposing a regional assessment centre in Timor l'Este without consultation with that country and in contravention of earlier declarations made by Timor l'Este's parliament. The RAC's media release declares that 'the arrogance of the document is astonishing' (2011g). This position accords with the tenor of RV1 in the interviews, where the activists accuse Australia of being 'an arrogant contemptible bully' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October) to its neighbours, referring to its comparative wealth and power to choose to help asylum seekers, or, alternatively, to pressure countries in the region to do its bidding.

**Rhetorical vision 5: The RAC believes that asylum seekers should be welcomed and that the Australian government should support asylum seekers here and abroad.**

This rhetorical vision creates an integrated view of what the RAC believes should be done in the face of the boat arrivals of asylum seekers. This echoes the second RV in the interviews with the activists, where they also propose their solution to the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. The media releases are not neutral territory: they indicate that the RAC believes asylum seekers should be welcomed, protected, and their applications processed promptly to enable them to settle into the Australian community without further suffering from lengthy periods in detention.

The thrust of this fifth RV is captured in the first of its six fantasy themes (see Table 6.5 in Appendix B): that is, that 'What is needed is a welcome refugee policy' (RAC 2009e). This first fantasy theme has a direct correlation with the first fantasy theme in RV2 in the interviews with the RAC activists (see Chapter 5), where several identify themselves as people who support a welcome boat policy. The second fantasy theme in RV5 of the media releases exhorts the government to challenge those who speak against refugees. The RAC alleges that this sort of 'anti-refugee histrionics' damages not only asylum seekers but also 'the social fabric of Australia' (2009b). This fantasy theme implicitly lauds Australia's current stature as a multicultural nation and the government policies that support multiculturalism. In the third fantasy theme, the RAC warns that for Australia to reject and repel Tamil asylum seekers is to support Sri Lanka's ongoing mistreatment of this minority in its country. Instead of the message communicated by its current practices, the RAC says that 'the Australian government should be sending a strong message to the Sri Lankan government by bringing the Tamil asylum seekers at Merak and those on the Oceanic Viking to Australia' (2009f).

In the fourth fantasy theme in RV5, the RAC asserts that Australia should protect the rights of asylum seekers here and overseas. For example, in a media release on 17 January 2011, the RAC states that '[t]he Australian government should be securing human rights for asylum seekers, not undermining them, in Afghanistan or Australia' (2011m). In another reference to the national/international nexus, the RAC asserts



that Australia should act against those governments that persecute their citizens, rather than support or collude with them. The fifth fantasy theme petitions the government to close Christmas Island (RAC 2009e) and to bring asylum seekers to Australia and process their claims here (RAC 2009a). In sum, the RAC's position in this fantasy theme is that 'offshore processing is discriminatory and unfair. It should be scrapped' (2011c). In addition, the sixth and final fantasy theme entreats the government to process asylum seeker claims promptly: as the RAC expresses it, 'Justice delayed is really justice denied in these cases' (2011k). Together, these fantasy themes communicate a clear message about what can and should be done for asylum seeker boat arrivals. The media releases express a mix of the utopian visions also espoused in the interviews, and more prescriptive elements that call for specific actions to ameliorate the suffering of asylum seekers in detention. Thus, the RAC vision for asylum seekers is sharpened and refined in its public communication on the issue.

## **2.2 Sanctioning agents**

In this section I apply the concept of the sanctioning agent to the stories that appear in the RAC media releases. These media releases use sanctioning agents to ground and bolster the RAC stories about asylum seeker boat arrivals. The three sanctioning agents found in the media releases parallel those found in the interviews: credibility, resonance/history and connectedness.

- **Credibility**

Credibility is the sanctioning agent that provides authority for the claims the RAC makes in its media releases. In these media releases, the RAC challenges the credibility of the government story and actions using institutional bodies to bolster these challenges, as well as facts, historical references, and the voices of the asylum seekers (these overlap). It also questions the credibility of politicians' current claims by holding them to account for their past statements and undertakings on the issue. The RAC also calls into question the processes for assessing asylum seekers – and the statistics about 'failed' claims – because of what it calls 'political manipulation' (2011j).

Firstly, the credibility of the government story is challenged with reference to highly esteemed international and national institutional sources of information such as UN reports and statistics (e.g., RAC 2011f), High Court of Australia decisions (RAC 2010c), the law (e.g., RAC 2011h), the Commonwealth Ombudsman (RAC 2011k) and the government's own statistics (e.g., RAC 2011k). By effectively challenging the government's story, the RAC's own position and information gain authority. This is exemplified in an open letter to the president of Timor l'Este that was initiated by the RAC and attached to its media release. It refers to the UN and its Conventions, the UNHCR, AHRC and Amnesty International. For example, it says that

the policy of imprisoning asylum seekers arriving by boat is a clear breach of the UN Convention on Refugees, which clearly states that a person must not have penalties imposed on them because their arrival is unauthorised. The UN human rights committee has also found that mandatory detention breaches the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2011g).

In addition, this open letter – signed by a range of representatives of the Australian community such as academics, journalists and activist organisations – includes footnotes that refer to media reports quoting government sources. These footnotes also act as a sanctioning agent for the claims made in the letter, even though referring to reports by the media institution is somewhat self-referential (as these media releases are directed to journalists). In another example, the RAC uses the UN to trump the national institution when denouncing and undermining Prime Minister Gillard's proposal to establish a Regional Assessment Centre in Timor l'Este: RAC says, 'It is also obvious that there is no commitment from the UNHCR to support or run the centre' (2011f).

Secondly, the RAC uses institutions to provide facts that support the credibility of its story. Facts are also furnished directly from the asylum seeker experience, although it may be that the status of these stories as facts is disputed. Thirdly, credibility is established by using the voices of the asylum seekers. They speak through the RAC and the RAC speaks for them, as evidenced in RV3 in this chapter. The RAC's ready

access to asylum seekers is testament to its credibility with them and its value as a source for the media and the Australian people.

Fourthly, comments by opposition politicians are challenged with reference to past claims or promises (e.g., RAC 2011h, 2011j, 2011c). For example, '[former Coalition government Immigration Minister Phillip] "Ruddock's comments about 'a pipeline of 10,000 asylum-seekers' are on a par with his claim in 1999 that 'whole villages were packing up to come to Australia'. He had no evidence then, he has none now" said Ian Rintoul' (RAC 2009e). Ruddock's own words when he was Immigration Minister undermine his current claims and his credibility in the debate about asylum seekers. This challenge to Ruddock's credibility overlaps with the resonance/history sanctioning agent (see the next section), in that it uses the former Minister's hyperbolic statements to undermine the credibility of his contemporary claims about asylum seekers. Fifthly, the RAC also declares that, with 'political interference' (2010c) in the asylum seeker assessment process, there can be 'no confidence' (2011m) in the government or the process and therefore neither has any credibility.

- **Resonance/history**

A key sanctioning agent in these RAC media releases is history. (Unlike in the interviews, the resonance sanctioning agent in the media releases is confined to the temporal dimension – history). History as a sanctioning agent takes four distinct forms in its media releases, as the RAC compares current practices and statements with past practices, with the history of detention and deterrence in Australia, with past incidents, and with references to politicians' earlier statements and promises about the issue.

Firstly, history provides the authority for broad comparisons with past policies and practices. In particular, the RAC uses Prime Minister Howard's era as a measure of poor practice in the treatment of asylum seekers. For example, in its media release about the hunger strike in the Curtin detention centre, the RAC says that 'the lack of transparency is reminiscent of the worst of the Howard era' (2011b). The RAC also refers to Howard when calling on the Gillard government to abandon its proposal for

a Regional Processing Centre in Timor l'Este: 'It is time for the Gillard government to stop running its Howard-lite anti-refugee agenda' (2011f). In this use of near history as a sanctioning agent, the RAC's assumption is that the then-current Labor government would find any resemblance to Howard unwelcome and that the Australian people would agree with the RAC's assessment. Similarly, and in the same media release, the RAC goes on to say that 'her [Prime Minister Julia Gillard's] plan for a new offshore detention centre in Timor-l'Este is nothing more than a new version of the former Howard government's discredited Pacific Solution' (2011f).

Another example of the history of past practices used as a sanctioning agent arises when Australians are called on to remember the deadly consequences of sending asylum seekers back to the countries they are fleeing. For example, in reference to the MOU about Australia returning rejected asylum seekers to Afghanistan, the RAC states that 'Too many mistakes have been made in the past with the Australian government returning asylum seekers to danger and death' (2011m). This is a reference to the Howard era record of sending rejected asylum seekers back to their deaths, but also alludes to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers prior to and during World War II.

Secondly, history is used as a sanctioning agent when the RAC focuses its critique on current detention and deterrence practices. This is accomplished in a manner that is often metaphorical rather than specific, with allusions to sinister past practices of detention. For example, in one media release the RAC asserts that 'if [then-Prime Minister] Kevin Rudd really wants to put an end to the dark days of children behind razor wire, it's time to end the Indonesian solution' (2009a); in another, it says 'it is well-established that deterrence doesn't work' (2009e). The uses of the phrases 'dark days' and 'well-established' in these examples suggest a 'dark past' on the issue of treatment of asylum seekers and imply that evidence and public opinion supported a change in these historical policies and practices.

Thirdly, the RAC makes parallels with a series of historical incidents that resonate with the Australian psyche (see detail in Chapter 4). For example, in reference to the

*Tampa* incident in the Howard era, an RAC media release soon after the *Oceanic Viking* took on board the 78 Tamil asylum seekers states that '[Prime Minister] Julia Gillard's claim that the Sri Lankan Tamils taken to Indonesia are Indonesia's responsibility is a shameful reprise of the Tampa incident in 2001' (2009b). In the same media release, the RAC invokes the memory of another notorious incident in Australia's history of this issue when it points to the loss of life at sea in 2001 when the *SIEV X* sank on the way to Australia, drowning 353 people (Kevin 2004, p. 24): the RAC's media release declares that 'We don't want any more SIEV X's' (2009e). These are deliberate efforts by the RAC to reawaken the outrage and shame that Australians felt and attracted on these occasions.

Fourthly, history is a sanctioning agent when politicians are held to account for promises they made about planned changes to asylum seeker policies, as well as for claims they made that were not vindicated. For example, in RV2 one fantasy theme refers to promises made and not kept when the RAC says that the current situation 'does no credit to a [Labor] government that promised to establish a humane refugee policy in place of the divisive policies of the Howard era' (2009b).

- **Connectedness**

The connectedness sanctioning agent appears when the RAC emphasises the bonds between people, particularly the sense that humans share basic values and needs and belong to a common human family. The RAC uses this sanctioning agent not only to express its values (as part of its group consciousness) but, more specifically, to elicit sympathy for or empathy with the asylum seekers in its stories. Connectedness appears in four ways in the RAC media releases: in direct quotes from the asylum seekers; in communication from the asylum seekers in attachments to the media releases; as asylum seeker stories that provide emotional human interest and consonance with other stories of institutional responsibility for childhood trauma; and in references to relationships with other refugee groups and individual advocates.

Firstly, the inclusion of direct quotes in RAC media releases provides a platform for the asylum seekers' voices. Several individuals are identified and quoted in the releases, as well as unnamed asylum seeker sources. For example, an Iranian detainee, Majid Rabet, is quoted after the devastating floods in Queensland in 2011. His plea is a clear attempt to reach out to the Australian people, and to draw parallels between the asylum seekers' and the Queenslanders' experiences of the destruction and dislocation of the floods:

Many of us come from countries that regularly experience terrible natural disasters and, from the bottom of our hearts, we would like the Australian public to know that we are genuinely willing to participate in the clean-up and re-building (cited in RAC 2011m).

With this offer, Australians also have the opportunity to reciprocate and imagine themselves in the shoes of the asylum seekers.

Secondly, the RAC includes attachments to its media releases that are statements from asylum seekers. For example, in their letter to the International and Indonesian Red Cross, the Tamils on the *Jaya Lestari 5* plead for urgent medical assistance: 'We are refugees. All we are asking is that we are treated as human beings' (cited in RAC 2009c). Their appeal is a call to solidarity with other humans in strife, a clear example of the use of the connectedness sanctioning agent.

Thirdly, the RAC media releases tell individual stories, again using the connectedness sanctioning agent to help identify and make connections with the asylum seekers and their circumstances. These connections tend to transcend the local/national/international frames, instead drawing on the call to a common humanity. For example, an RAC media release tells the tragic story of the death of Jacob who was one of the 250 Tamils on the *Jaya Lestari 5* in Merak 12 months earlier (2010d). In another example, after the boat tragedy the RAC asks for survivors to be allowed to leave Christmas Island. In its media release, the RAC tells the story of nine-year old Seena who lost his family in the sinking. He 'has taken to meeting

and watching newly arrived asylum boats in the hope that his parents will be on the “next boat”.’ RAC asks, ‘Can anything justify such suffering for another day?’ (2011e). Other survivor children are ‘so traumatised that they become terrified when it rains and believe that the island will sink. During the night they suffer from terrible nightmares from the fear of remaining on the island’ (2011a). This story personalises the asylum seeker experience. Stories about children are particularly powerful, as they elicit strong protective responses from affected adults. The pairing of the care of children with institutional responsibility again evokes Australia’s colonial history of violence, as told in stories reported in the *Bringing them home* report<sup>74</sup>, a national inquiry into successive Australian governments’ forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their parents. In addition, successive national enquiries into children held in immigration detention centres have provided expert evidence on ‘the negative impact that prolonged immigration detention is having on their mental and physical health’ (AHRC 2014, p. 10).<sup>75</sup> These negative impacts arise in the first RV in the media releases and suggest further connections between the contemporary treatment of asylum seeker children and the abuse suffered by other children at the hands of government authorities.<sup>76</sup> As with Australia’s racist past, the RAC alludes to the consonance between this current behaviour towards asylum seekers and past practices of abuse of children.

Fourthly, the RAC promotes a connection with other refugee advocacy groups. Most media releases begin with the claim that ‘Refugee *groups* have called on’ (emphasis

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<sup>74</sup> This 1997 National Inquiry was conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) (later the Australian Human Rights Commission). It investigated the removal of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their families and communities to then suffer abuse ‘at the hands of the authorities or their delegates’ (HREOC 1997, p. 4). The ‘stolen’ children were exploited for their labour, to ‘inculcate [them] with European values and work habits’ (HREOC 1997, p. 22), and to ‘dilute’ their Aboriginal heritage.

<sup>75</sup> These reports by the HREOC and then the Australia’s Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in 2004 and 2014 have found that this practice of mandatory detention runs counter to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and have recommended Australia changes its practices to accord with international law.

<sup>76</sup> At the time of writing this thesis there is an Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (n.d.) underway, with institutions such as the Catholic and Anglican churches scrutinised for their involvement, collusion and cover-up of these widespread practices. Concern for institutional/governmental practices of child abuse are the zeitgeist of the 21st Century in Australia.

added), even though only the RAC is quoted and has the sole attribution at the end of the release. Another example occurs in a letter initiated by RAC and attached to its media release (2011f) on 2 February 2011. This letter is signed by 25 individuals and organisations concerned about the proposal for a Regional Processing Centre on Timor l'Este. In the preamble, the RAC says 'The Refugee Action Coalition has been working with East Timorese NGOs to build opposition to the regional processing centre in both East Timor and Australia' (2011g). Here, the RAC characterises itself as a key player in the coordination of efforts to mobilise on this issue. The connectedness sanctioning agent is evident as the RAC builds a picture of momentum in the movement for change. Its success is demonstrated by the number of 'initial signatures' of prominent advocates on the letter, and, perhaps, by the eventual failure of this proposal to be embraced by Timor l'Este.

### **2.3 Master analogues**

In this section I consider the master analogues that underpin the RAC's organisational biographies – the media releases – to understand the worldviews the RAC exhibits in its storytelling in the public sphere (Habermas 1989, 2006). The righteous master analogue provides the power that drives the rhetorical visions in the media releases. However, the social master analogue is also evident in this body of work. The pragmatic master analogue is barely evident. This pattern is consistent with the master analogues discerned in the interviews with the RAC activists (see Chapter 5).

- **Righteous master analogue**

In its media releases, the RAC communicates the moral and right way for Australia to approach the treatment of asylum seekers – that is, a righteous worldview. The righteous master analogue is at the heart of four of the five rhetorical visions discerned in the RAC media releases (RV1, 2, 4, 5). In RV1, the government is called on to act responsibly, with compassion (e.g., 2011i), and in accordance with its legal and moral obligations (e.g., 2011g). Consistent with the righteous master analogue, the RAC holds Australia responsible for the dire circumstances in which asylum



seekers find themselves after attempting boat journeys to Australia. The media releases firstly claim that Australia is to blame for asylum seekers attempting the perilous boat journeys (RV1) because it has failed to provide adequate assistance to Indonesia for the speedy assessment of arrivals there. Secondly, they proclaim that Australia has then failed to offer to resettle a substantial number of these asylum seekers. Thus, the RAC argues that it is Australia's moral and legal failings that leave asylum seekers (such as those involved in the standoff) trapped in Indonesia, a nation that is neither wealthy nor a signatory to the *Refugee Convention*.

In RV2, the concepts of truth and trust that appear in the media releases illustrate the operation of the righteous master analogue. Thus, the government fails on both these counts when the RAC declares that the Australian government's communication is both untruthful and untrustworthy on this issue. In RV4, the RAC expresses its righteous wrath about the government's 'despicable' (2011h) action and communication on the issue. RAC employs emotive, judgmental and scathing terms – such as 'shameful' (2010d) and 'a complete disgrace' (2010c) – as epithets for the government's treatment of asylum seekers. Finally, in RV5, the RAC declares its own position that offshore detention centres should be closed and asylum seekers made welcome in Australia. To do this would be to take the moral path. This is congruous with the first RV in the interviews (see Chapter 5), which includes a parallel fantasy theme exemplified in David's interview: '[Australia is therefore a] nation that can actually afford to have a humanitarian program and accept asylum seekers' (2012, pers. comm., 14 September).

- **Social master analogue**

The social master analogue foregrounds human relationships, connections and compassion. It is allied to the connectedness sanctioning agent. This master analogue is evident in two ways in these media releases: firstly, in the stories about individual suffering and loss, such as when Seena attends the Sydney funeral for his father; and secondly, with repeated use of the voices of the asylum seekers in direct quotes and in the attachments to media releases. These elements set out to remind Australians of the human stories behind the statistics and, with that, the essential

connectedness of the human story of suffering. For example, asylum seekers on the *Jaya Lestari 5* in Merak plead with the Australian government to help them in a statement attached to a RAC media release. They say that '[t]he asylum seekers at Merak need urgent humanitarian assistance... It is hard for us to keep our hopes alive, but we still hold on to the belief that there will be justice for us' (RAC 2009a). Underpinning the inclusion of this statement, and its sentiment, is the social master analogue that values compassion, connection and community.

- **Pragmatic master analogue**

Only brief mention is made in the media releases of anything that could be attributed to a pragmatic master analogue — in this case, cost. In an RAC media release on 15 October 2009, spokesperson Ian Rintoul says that

[i]nstead of spending millions of dollars on 'border protection' to use Indonesia as a warehouse for asylum seekers, that money could be spent processing refugees in Indonesia and bringing them to Australia (2009e).

This is a reference to cost-effectiveness, a characteristic of the pragmatic master analogue. Other media releases mention Australia's position as a wealthy nation with the resources to be more generous to asylum seekers, referred to in an earlier example for the righteous master analogue. However, these references are underpinned by the righteous master analogue (rather than the pragmatic) as their focus is on what is the right thing for a wealthy nation to do in these circumstances; that is, for Australia to resettle its 'fair share' of asylum seekers (RAC 2011g).

### **SECTION 3: THE VOICES OF THE STORYTELLERS**

In this section, I examine two interconnecting understandings of the storytellers of and in these media releases. In the course of examining the media releases to understand the roles the RAC performs in their production and distribution, I also explore whose voices are heard within the releases – who speaks. The RAC media releases suggest the RAC perceives itself as playing three roles on the issue of asylum

seeker boat arrivals: watchdog, advocate and mobiliser. In addition, the media releases adopt four voices in the performance of these roles: RAC as auditor and witness, RAC as activist, RAC on behalf of asylum seekers, and on behalf of the Australian people.

### **3.1 Watchdog role and voice of witness/auditor**

The first and most significant of these roles is as watchdog, with the RAC keeping account of the trajectory of the issue over time and in the course of decades of different governments, Coalition and Labor. One interviewee, Germaine, sums up this role: 'It's fighting with information' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). This watchdog role is evident when the RAC speaks in the media releases as the auditor of government communication and action/inaction and witness to the plight of asylum seekers. Germaine says 'I believe that if you counter it [government and media misinformation] you have to unpick it as you go. Why do they use these words? How can you use it against them? Because you always have to think strategically'. For example, in the first media release on 15 October 2009, RAC spokesperson Ian Rintoul demonstrates the RAC's long history of keeping watch on governments on asylum seeker policy:

the Liberal party would like to start a political arms race about which party is tougher on refugees. What irks the Liberals is that any refugees are gaining protection in Australia at all. Ruddock spent his whole political life as Immigration Minister trying to make sure Australia took no responsibility for asylum seekers. It is well established that deterrence doesn't work. Asylum seeker numbers rose after Ruddock introduced temporary protection visas. Worse, the deaths of 353 asylum seekers on the SIEV X in 2001 were directly attributable to the Liberal's policies (2009b).

The history sanctioning agent is a key to understanding the RAC's role here. As watchdog, the RAC is forensic in its attention to the detail of current and former practices – the facts. It acts as the custodian of the history of this issue in Australia. For example, in one media release it provides the details of the changes to reviews

of offshore processing decisions: 'the Merits Review process has been an important check to the flaws in offshore processing. Merits Review was overturning over 50% of rejection decisions... Now that is gone' (RAC 7 2011h). The RAC's media releases meticulously 'correct' errors perceived in other media reports as they challenge 'the false stories' (2009d) that they claim are devised to 'discredit the asylum seekers'. The watchdog/custodian role is made possible by the long history of involvement in the issue of several of the members of the organising cadre. At least two of the interviewees were founding members of the RAC in 1999. Most of the interviewees have lived experience of the history of this issue because of their own close involvement with asylum seekers and/or visits to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor l'Este and Sri Lanka. Prior to the RAC's genesis (and currently), the founders were active members of political organisations aware of this issue and its development in Australia.

Although the government and opposition representatives are its key targets, the RAC also keeps watch on other institutions and their representatives in Australia. For example, one media release (2010c) is devoted to the dissection of public statements by UNHCR regional representative Richard Towle. Towle reportedly blames overcrowding in detention centres on asylum seekers whose claims had been rejected and who refuse to be repatriated. In this media release, the RAC's counter-argument details the UN's own reports on the countries of origin of these refugees and the government's responsibility for the dramatic expansion of the detention regime, the long delays and political interference in processing claims. The RAC uses UN reports to dispute the position of the UN's own representative in Australia, normally an ally in the RAC's quest to improve policies and conditions for asylum seeker arrivals to Australia. No one is above the RAC's notice.

The RAC also keeps watch on international matters. Media releases remind Australians of the history of particular governments with which Australia is negotiating in relation to asylum seekers. For example, on 7 November 2009, when the Australian government is negotiating with the Sri Lankan government for the return of Tamil asylum seekers, the RAC reminds Australians of the Sri Lankan

government's record of human rights abuses and the continuing discrimination against Tamils in that country – it says, 'There are over 250,000 Tamils in internment camps in Sri Lanka' (2009f).

Again, the resonance/history sanctioning agent works to inform and bolster the RAC's role as watchdog on this issue.

### **3.2 Advocate and voice of the activist who also speaks for asylum seekers**

In its media releases, the RAC advocates for changes to policies and rhetoric on the issue of asylum seekers, promoting more humane treatment of individuals and groups. The voice of the activist public appears within the media releases when the RAC expresses its own judgements of the governments' – and others' – performance on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. It attributes responsibility and blame and berates the government for policies that the RAC describes as a 'national disgrace' (2010a). This blaming often includes expressive phrases, words and images that are passionate and powerful. Actions are described as 'unconscionable' (2010a), 'unseemly' (15 October 2009b), reactions as 'astonished' (2010c) and the effect on asylum seekers as 'a complete disgrace' (2010c). In this voice, the RAC takes a stand. The term 'advocate' is used often in the media releases and by some of the interviewees from the RAC organising cadre (e.g., Ben, Hugh) in reference to what the RAC and other supporters of asylum seekers do for them. This RAC advocacy role is evident in its critique of government policies (RV1, RV2 and RV4), the demands it makes for change to government policies (RV5), and the access it provides to the voices of the asylum seekers (RV3). This role is motivated by both the righteous and social master analogues.

In its advocacy role, the RAC has access to asylum seekers that would be prized by journalists, most of whom have neither the networks nor the trust to bypass the obstacles created by remoteness and government obstruction. This role as a conduit for the asylum seekers and key information source for the Australian media and Australian people characterises the RAC as advocate and facilitator for asylum seekers.

### 3.3 Mobiliser role and voice of the activists and the Australian people

The RAC's third role as discerned from its media releases is to mobilise the Australian people to act for social change on this issue. This is confirmed in the interviews with Anna, Chris, Eli, Germaine and Ben, who maintain that grassroots action to mobilise the Australian people will put pressure on the government to make changes to asylum seeker policies and practices. As Germaine explains it, 'the main thing is to change public opinion' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). She goes on to say that this is achieved by, firstly, countering misinformation and, secondly, reaching out to members of the public who 'haven't got this vengeful hatred yet'. The RAC does this through the information and perspectives provided in the media releases and in its efforts to collaborate with other refugee advocates and experts in the field referred to in these media releases. For example, in the media release on 2 February 2011 mentioned earlier, the RAC promotes its collaboration with local NGOs on Timor l'Este about the proposed processing centre (2011f). In the attached open letter, the RAC includes a preamble which says that

We have initiated an 'Open letter to President Ramos Horta and the people of Timor l'Este' to encourage the opposition in East Timor and demonstrate the widespread opposition that exists in Australia to this proposal (2011g).

In addition, the mobiliser role is evident in the call to attend rallies embedded in many media releases. In her interview, Germaine says that 'mass actions [are] ... how you make opposition visible' (2012, pers. comm., 13 September). Eli agrees:

I think RAC needs to be the activist wing of the campaign. There's all these other groups obviously who do advocacy, lobbying and a lot of good things in terms of visiting refugees, doing a lot of that support work and everything which needs to happen. It's good that the people do that but I really think we need a political campaign if we're going to change anything and I think that's what RAC needs to be, a group that tries to mobilise people on the streets and get the word out that way. Ultimately build a campaign that forces the government to change its policies (2012, pers. comm., 27 September).

However, within the RAC organising cadre there is disagreement about the specifics of who they hope to ‘target’ with their media messages. Anna comments on this:

One of the things that's come up is something of an argument at times, is who we are targeting, because we do up all of these fact sheets but I'm not that interested in – I'm happy to give it to any racist who happens to come by who wants a fact sheet – but really the audience for RAC I think is that big minority of the population that already supports refugees but don't feel motivated to, or able to, or confident to feel that they can do something themselves (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

The mobiliser role is sometimes evident as the voice of the Australian people. Many references to history in these media releases imply the voice of the Australian people, as when previous actions and policies are characterised as ‘unpopular’ and ‘discredited’. This is particularly the case in relation to other incidents in Australia’s near history, such as in references to *Tampa*, children in detention and the ‘Pacific Solution’ under the Howard government (see Chapter 4 for details).

## **CONCLUSION**

There are strong links between the rhetorical visions found in the interviews with the RAC’s organising cadre (Chapter 5) and the rhetorical visions in the RAC’s media releases. Sanctioning agents translate from one storytelling site to the other, more public, site. The drivers for the stories – the master analogues – are the same in both, with the RAC consistently pursuing the ‘right’ actions for asylum seekers and seeking to undermine the notion of the asylum seeker as the ‘racialised other’. This correspondence is predictable and persuasive: the media releases reflect the group consciousness on the issue displayed in the interviews with the activists. However, the storytelling in the two sites also differs in a number of ways. Firstly, the tone of the media releases is much less personal and caustic than the tone of the interviews. With this change, the RAC adapts to meet the expectations of the media, a form of self-censorship. As organisational stories, rather than individual activist stories, the tone also shifts to accommodate the group and its purpose in this public realm. Secondly, there is a change in the way the RAC voices its righteousness in its media

releases. Whereas the activists speak in broad principles in the interviews, in its media releases, and as watchdog, the RAC augments these principles with a raft of facts,<sup>77</sup> informing the Australian people and media and countering the ‘misinformation’ from the government and opposition. Righteousness is thus paired with facts to present an authoritative accounting. Thirdly, unlike the interviews, the voices of the asylum seekers, in stories and quotes, are a significant presence in the media releases. These voices counter the ‘nameless’ and ‘faceless’ rhetoric about asylum seekers proffered by those in government. Thus, connectedness expressed in global and moral terms in the interviews translates into concrete examples of individual stories in the media releases. Together these changes refine the RAC’s key messages so that they cater to the proclivities of the media – such as for information (that is verifiable) and human interest angles – and present a powerful instrument of surveillance, critique and alternative imaginaries to those they contest in the public realm.

In the next chapter, I report on the quantitative analysis of the 743 media articles in this study to understand the contexts for the appearance of the stories analysed in Chapter 9.

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<sup>77</sup> It is possible that, in my role as observant participant, the activists believed that they did not need to relate the facts of the issue to me in the interviews.



## CHAPTER 7: SETTING OUT JOURNALISM PRACTICES, CONTEXTS AND PATTERNS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the question of who gets to be heard on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia by locating practices of power in the newsmaking work of journalists. Employing Steven Lukes's (1974) three-dimensional model of power (detailed in Chapter 2), I explore practices in journalism and media institutions that contribute to the construction of news about asylum seekers. These practices enable or obstruct the stories that are told on this issue in the media. They activate a bias in both the actions and inactions of journalists and in the media system (Lukes 1974) and thus demonstrate what Antonio Gramsci calls hegemony (Gramsci 1971, p. 12). Lukes's general theory of power refers to the power to affect agendas in its second dimension. To illustrate the application of this aspect of the model, I deploy the more detailed theories of agenda setting/building and framing. These provide more interpretive power to the analysis of these cultural patterns in the media system.

This chapter is organised in three sections. The first section explains the relevance of Lukes's (1974) model of power and Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony to the analyses of the media articles on asylum seeker boat arrivals. It provides the framework – and rationale – for the quantitative content analysis reported in this chapter. The second section uses agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw 1972) to set out the cultural practices of journalism that locate the issue of asylum seekers on the media agenda. In the third section, I employ framing theory (Entman 2007) to further assess the journalism and media practices used to construct these media articles. These analyses provide the context for public and political interpretation of the issue as it is represented in the media storytelling.

## **SECTION 1: POWER AND THE MEDIA**

### **1.1 Lukes's theory of power**

This chapter traces journalism practices that are implicated in the construction of news on this issue using Lukes's (1974) model of power. Lukes's model introduces power in three dimensions that encompass individual decisions, culturally patterned journalism practices and media systems. Since Lukes's work in the 1970s, extensions and developments have occurred in this field. In particular, Simon Cottle (2000, p. 433) identifies three key strands of studies in the sociology of news production that I use here to enrich an understanding of Lukes's model. The detail of these strands enables the pinpointing of practices of power in journalism to which Lukes alludes in his more conceptual work. Specifically, Cottle's survey identifies studies of news access that explore who gets to have their stories told, a key concern in the representation of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia and this thesis.

Cottle describes these three strands as, firstly, the bureaucratic routine and division of labour; secondly, professional ideology and conflict management; and thirdly, news organisation culture (2000, pp. 433–35). The bureaucratic routine of news production (Tuchman, cited in Jontes & Luthar 2015, p. 22) has close ties to Lukes's second and third dimensions of power in that it illuminates journalistic conventions that ritualise and routinise news 'discovery' (Rothenbuhler, cited in Jontes & Luthar 2015, p. 23). This entails a division of labour in the newsroom so that journalists are routinely allocated to 'news beats' and 'news bureaus' that privilege institutional sources like parliament and the courts (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989, p. 6). Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan, in their study of news and deviance, include here the development of what they describe as a 'vocabulary of precedents' that set journalists up to 'recognise', 'produce', 'source' and 'justify' their news stories (1987, p. 348). These processes and practices are equivalent to the cultural patterns described by Lukes and are referenced to add explanatory potential to this analysis.

The second strand is found in ethnographic studies of news production that identify the influence of the 'ideology of objectivity as contributing to the profession's subservience to elite views' (Cottle 2000, p. 434). This professional norm also adheres to Lukes's model that sees individual actions and inactions governed by professional norms and values that produce the cultural patterns to which he refers. The objectivity value (Kaplan 2010; Maras 2013) tends to be realised with a pragmatic effort at 'balance, fairness and impartiality' (Cottle 2000, p. 434) which, in the articles examined in this thesis, may lead to the 'balancing' of opposition with government positions on asylum seeker boat arrivals, even when these are largely equivalent. In addition, the effort to seek out authoritative voices on an issue leads journalists to routinely source stories from institutions with established profiles and privilege. The third strand from Cottle's review is that of news organisation culture. This approach proposes that it is often the ideology or ethos of the news organisation that influences what is covered and how (Cottle 2000), a point also made by Lukes in his third dimension of power.<sup>78</sup>

## **1.2 Gramsci's hegemony**

The second theory that provides the framework of power used in this thesis is that of hegemony from Gramsci. Hegemony is Gramsci's 'signature concept' (Morton 2013, p. 134), articulated in his *Prison Notebooks* of 1971, 1996 and 2007. Hegemony is a 'special form of control, one based not upon coercion or force, but resulting from successful persuasion or enculturation' (Watson 2016, p. 28). This control naturalises the power of those already in privileged positions so that their influence, such as in the representation of events and issues in the media, becomes invisible.

The significance of the notion of hegemony to this study lies in the relationships between the media, political and public agendas (McCombs & Shaw 1972). Agenda setting research confirms a relationship between the media agenda and the public

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<sup>78</sup> Two of the newspapers in this study are owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. The role of media ownership in the conduct of the media has driven considerable scholarship but is not the focus of this thesis.

agenda (Kiouisis, McDevitt & Wu 2005; McCombs & Shaw 1972; Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007; Zhang, Shao & Bowman 2012). Gramsci says of this relationship that:

Public opinion is the political content of the public's political will that can be dissentient; therefore, there is a struggle for the monopoly of the organs of public opinion – newspapers, political parties, parliament – so that only one force will mould public opinion and hence the political will of the nation, while reducing the dissenters to individual and disconnected specks of dust (2007, p. 213).

Here, Gramsci points to the struggle to be the 'one force' to monopolise newspapers, as the 'organs of public opinion', and thus to influence public opinion and 'political will', closing the circle between political, media, public and again to political agendas. Those who manage to monopolise will therefore look to 'mould public opinion' to achieve the acquiescence that comes with hegemony. In addition, by exclusion or marginalisation, dissenters are relegated to comparatively inconsequential mentions in news stories.

Hagai Katz (2006) presents two models of neo-Gramscian thought in his paper on hegemony and global civil society networks. These are relevant to this thesis in that they canvass alternative views on the role of civil society – such as groups like the Refugee Action Coalition NSW (RAC) – in hegemonic practices. The first model posits that hegemonic capitalist and political elites co-opt global civil society, as depicted in the quote from Gramsci (2007 above); the second sees global civil society as the space from which counter-hegemonic resistance can evolve to challenge the hegemony of the first (Katz 2006, p. 333). The co-option referred to in the first model would be anathema to the RAC activist public (see Chapter 5). Consequently, it is the second model that is relevant to the research question, 'Who gets to be heard?'. This model presents the question of whether or not the stories from civil society about asylum seeker boat arrivals (chapters 5 and 6) have the opportunity to challenge those of the political elites that appear in the corpus of media articles (see

Chapter 9), or whether, as Gramsci puts it, they are reduced to ‘individual and disconnected specks of dust’ (2007, p. 213).

## **SECTION 2: THE MEDIA AGENDA**

Researchers in the field of agenda setting assess the salience of issues on the media agenda (Dearing & Rogers 1996) to determine what the media are telling their readers to think about. That is, agenda setting research has found that salience on the public agenda is achieved via the repeated and prominent mention of the issue in the media (Bryant & Miron 2004; Dearing & Rogers 1996; McCombs & Shaw 1972), as well as with the style and form of the stories that are told and their resonance with public ‘consciousness’ on the issue.<sup>79</sup> The journalists’ power to include or exclude issues relates to Lukes’s second dimension of power. Without an appearance on the media agenda, an issue is unlikely to garner public attention; with prominence on the public agenda, the political agenda may also be influenced (Dahlgren 1995). This influence may include changes to policies and practices, such as those advocated by activists, which may effect real change to the lives of asylum seekers. Examining those institutional and occupational practices that influence media agendas – to include or exclude issues and perspectives – therefore exposes the mechanisms that accomplish hegemony (Gramsci 1971, 2006) in this realm.

The importance of an issue for the media agenda (of these newspapers) can be assessed with reference to two key notions gleaned from agenda setting research: space and prominence (McCombs & Shaw 1972).<sup>80</sup>

### **2.1 Space**

I assess space using three aspects of the appearance of the articles: firstly, the number of articles that appear (Funkhouser 1973; McCombs & Shaw 1972) in the

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<sup>79</sup> These latter points relate to news values and newsworthiness principles applied in the construction of news stories (Gillman 2015; Newsom & Haynes 2014) as well as to the nature of transactional communication (Alberts, Nakayama & Martin 2007) and recognising the ‘decoding’ work of the reader (Hall 1980).

<sup>80</sup> McCombs and Shaw (1972, p. 178) refer to ‘space’ and ‘position’ when distinguishing between what they describe as major and minor stories in newspapers.

two periods that capture the standoff at Merak (2009) and the Christmas Island boat tragedy (2010–2011), the traditional method of assessing media agenda inclusions (Dearing & Rogers 1996); secondly, their frequency per day; and thirdly, their length (word count). When media agenda setting research has included length, it has been on the basis of column inches (McCombs & Shaw 1972). However, as I have used online versions of articles for my analyses<sup>81</sup>, I use word counts instead. Length is discussed in Section 3.1 of this chapter.

Firstly, with 743 articles devoted to this issue in these newspapers it is clear that the issue is firmly on the agenda of these publications. Secondly, 411 articles appeared in the 43 days that capture the standoff, an average of 9.5 per day (though articles did not appear every day). Three hundred and thirty-two articles appear over 82 days at the time of the boat tragedy, an average of four per day (again, not on every day). When averaged over a comparable 82 days, the figure per day for the first period is closer to the second; that is, five articles per day. Therefore, regular readers of the papers in these timeframes would have customarily encountered significant numbers of articles on this issue. Significant space was apportioned to this issue on all three criteria (including length, see Section 3.1 of this chapter).

## **2.2 Prominence**

Prominence is the second key factor in understanding agenda setting. I use the concept ‘prominence’ instead of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw’s (1972) ‘position’ because prominence captures the intent of the assessment – that is, what prominence is given to the stories? This criterion is assessed by firstly, recording the page on which the articles appear in the newspapers and secondly, by the space they are accorded, as discussed in the section above. Prominence is conferred on those articles located towards the front of the paper and at the front of specific sections within the newspapers.

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<sup>81</sup> The online versions of the articles in the Factiva search provide information on the location of the articles on pages and within sections within the print newspaper. This information is used in this analysis.

**Table 7.1 Article page location: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Newspaper	Page (all newspapers)				Pages (sections Saturdays) <sup>a</sup>				TOTAL
	1	2-3	Rest	Total	1	2-3	Rest	Total	
SMH	22	27	81	130	2	3	3	8	138
DT	1	7	53	61	0	0	0	0	61
Aust	40	50	118	208	0	0	4	4	212
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>411</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>63</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>58</b>		

Note: Percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number in all tables in this chapter.

a: Saturday editions of the *Australian* begin their Inquirer and Weekend Professional internal sections from page 1. The *Sydney Morning Herald* does the same with its News Review and Business sections inside the main paper on Saturdays.

**Table 7.2 Article page location: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Newspaper	Page (all newspapers)				Pages (sections Saturdays) <sup>a</sup>				TOTAL
	1	2-3	Rest	Total	1	2-3	Rest	Total	
SMH	13	10	44	67	0	0	8	8	75
DT	5	12	49	66	0	0	0	0	66
Aust	27	25	131	183	0	2	6	8	191
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>72</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>88</b>		

a: This figure includes three articles in an edition of the *Australian* produced on 24 December 2010 in the Saturday format.

**Table 7.3 Article length: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Newspaper	Length (all newspapers)				
	<100	100-499	500-999	1000+	TOTAL
SMH	0	54	71	13	138
DT	4	47	7	3	61
Aust	3	74	93	42	212
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>411</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14</b>	

**Table 7.4 Article length: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Newspaper	Length (all newspapers)				
	<100	100-499	500-999	1000+	TOTAL
SMH	1	31	34	9	<b>75</b>
DT	6	45	7	8	<b>66</b>
Aust	2	99	56	34	<b>191</b>
TOTAL	<b>9</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>332</b>
%	<b>3</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>15</b>	

The page location varies in the different papers in the first period but is similar across the papers in the second. In relation to the standoff, 37 per cent of articles in the three newspapers appear on pages 1–3, the key news locations for capturing the attention of both avid and incidental readers (d’Haenen, Jankowski & Heuvelman 2004; Houston 2007, p. 66). However, the *Australian* gives the issue of asylum seeker arrivals more prominence, locating 43 per cent of its articles on pages 1–3, with 19 per cent on page 1. The *Sydney Morning Herald* follows with 37 per cent of articles on pages 1–3 and 18 per cent of these on page 1. In comparison, the tabloid the *Daily Telegraph* has 13 per cent of articles on pages 1–3 and only 2 per cent on page 1. For the second period, the boat tragedy, 29 per cent of asylum seeker articles in all three newspapers appear on pages 1–3: the *Australian* positions 28 per cent of articles on pages 1–3, the *Sydney Morning Herald* 34 per cent and the *Daily Telegraph* 26 per cent.

The differences between the papers in the first period, and between the percentages of prominent articles on this issue between the two periods for the *Daily Telegraph* in particular, may be attributed to the style and scope of the three newspapers. Firstly, the style of the newspaper may influence the prominence afforded an issue. The two styles that predominate in print journalism are broadsheets and tabloids<sup>82</sup> (Connell 1998). In this study, there are two broadsheets – the *Australian* (national) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (metropolitan) – and one

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<sup>82</sup> This distinction is also referred to as between popular and quality papers (Henningham 1996, p. 32). In addition, some studies make a further distinction between ‘red-top’ and ‘middlebrow’ tabloids (Chan & Goldthorpe 2007).



tabloid, the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney metropolitan). At typically six column widths across, broadsheets have traditionally been substantially larger than tabloids, and are associated with a less lurid, more in-depth coverage of the news – as implied by the alternative moniker of ‘quality’ paper (Henningham 1996). This is in keeping with their readership profile, which tends to be more educated and affluent than those of tabloids (Chan & Goldthorpe 2007, pp. 1109, 1116). News production processes of gathering and writing also differ with the broadsheet pursuing a more traditional, sober tone.

The tabloids are smaller and tend to produce shorter stories than broadsheets, with a focus on sport and popular culture (Henningham 1996, p. 32). Tabloids tend to ‘overemphasise’ the personal – as it is understood in terms of the immediate issues of daily life<sup>83</sup> – which Sparks maintains denies readers ‘the means to recognise the structural basis of power relations in society as a totality’ (cited in Allan 2010b, p. 126). Secondly, the scope of the papers in this study covers both national and metropolitan. This difference in scope may also help explain different prominence in the placement of asylum seeker stories. For example, the boat tragedy was followed by funerals for some of the victims in Sydney, making this aspect more relevant to the two Sydney newspapers.

Prominence is greater in the first period than the second for the two broadsheets but much greater in the second period for the tabloid. In reference to the first period, the negotiations with those on the vessels at Merak occur at what is characterised as the start of a new era in boat arrivals of asylum seekers to Australia. In terms of style, the broadsheets may be more likely to give prominence to the first incident because of the type of story it became; that is, the standoff involved negotiations over time (and between governments). This protracted negotiation, and the complexities of the issues canvassed, suited the broadsheets’ style more

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<sup>83</sup> Some tabloids are associated with sensationalist headlines and stories and their news gathering methods and coverage have attracted condemnation in some instances, such as with the phone-hacking scandal in Britain by tabloid *News of the World* employees (Wring 2012, p. 635), also a News Corp publication.

than the tabloid's and this is reflected in the prominence and space each accords the issue in the first period.

The increase in the percentage of articles on pages 1–3 in the *Daily Telegraph* from period one to period two may be due to three factors related to style and scope. Firstly, Sydney becomes the location for an aspect of the boat tragedy when the funerals for some of the victims of the disaster take place there, so proximity is relevant for the metropolitan tabloid. Secondly, these funerals prompt controversial statements by the Coalition opposition about the cost to the Australian taxpayer of the transport of the victims and some of their surviving relatives from Christmas Island for the event. The political backlash against the opposition that ensues adds a party-political dimension to the story that produces fresh and lurid elements to sustain the story on the agenda of all three newspapers. Thirdly, the boat tragedy is a sensational story (characteristic of tabloid stories) of tragedy and loss of life. In this second period, there are first-hand stories of eyewitnesses to the tragedy and these witnesses are Australian – citing Australian eyewitnesses (Mortensen 2015) adds to the newsworthiness (Gillman 2015; Mitchell & West 1996; Yale 1991) of the story (proximity, significance, see Chapter 2, Section 5.2) and, in particular, adds to the likelihood that a tabloid such as the *Daily Telegraph* would cover the story with some prominence. These newsworthiness principles constitute part of the bureaucratic accomplishment of news production (Cottle 2000) in that they provide journalists with the 'vocabulary of precedents' (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989, p. 348) to which they adhere. Visuals captured by these witnesses – in words and images – add to the allure of the story for all three newspapers, but particularly for the tabloid the *Daily Telegraph*.

### **SECTION 3: THE MEDIA FRAMES AND FRAMING**

Framing theory (Entman 2007) refers to the ways in which newspaper articles frame an issue, influencing what readers think about it.<sup>84</sup> As with agenda-setting theory,

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<sup>84</sup> This process of influencing what readers think *about* an issue is also referred to as second-order agenda-setting (Carroll & McCombs 2003; Ghanem 1997).

using framing theory in this analysis helps illustrate the journalism practices that constitute the everyday enactments of Lukes's (1974, 2005) model of power. These enactments create the contexts for the appearance, and interpretation, of stories about asylum seekers. In this thesis, I use Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) rather than framing theory to explore the stories themselves (see Chapter 9). However, in this chapter framing theory provides the framework for understanding how identified elements of news production create contexts for how the story is told by the journalists and the newspapers. The following elements illustrate the framing of the stories on this issue:

- Length of the article
- Location of the article
- Genre of the article – news, opinion, analysis
- Types of writers of the articles
- Sources used in the article
- Order in which the source information/opinion appears in the article.

### **3.1 Length**

Length indicates the space allocated – as with agenda setting – but also can frame reader expectations about the importance of an issue. The articles on asylum seeker boat arrivals are different lengths in these newspapers. Fifty-six per cent of those at the time of the standoff are more than 500 words, with about 14 per cent of 1000 words or more. At the time of the boat tragedy, close to 45 per cent of the articles are 500 words or more, with over 15 per cent of 1000 words or more. Conventionally news articles are shorter than those that express opinion, such as columns and 'features'. The latter usually provide background to a news story with greater depth and breadth of coverage and may include the journalist's own perspective in a variety of forms (Hutchinson 2008; Pape & Featherstone 2006). The inclusion of this proportion of longer-form stories about asylum seekers indicates the intensity of interest in the issue (Adams 2008). In addition, a greater length allows the writer the space to develop an argument bolstered by reference to research studies, statistics or quotes from different parties to a debate and may also express an opinion. These

longer articles would help to foster the development of an opinion in the reader or at least encourage the reader to 'adopt a stance' on the issue, particularly as reading the entire article would itself indicate a reader's interest in the issue (Holsanova, Rahm & Holmqvist 2006; Neijens & Voorveld 2016).

### 3.2 Location

The location of the article indicates not only the prominence of the issue on the media agenda, but also the context for the appearance of the article in the newspaper and thus a larger frame for the issue. As discussed, location is assessed by page number. However, it is also assessed by the section in which the article appears. I suggest that the different sections and their placements in the papers not only create a categorisation of issues and events – which enacts cultural patterns of journalism and newspaper institutions (Lukes 1974) – but also a hierarchy of importance based on their proximity to the front of the physical papers. In addition, reader expectations for the form, style and content of what they will encounter are engendered through placement in these sections and thus location in sections adds to the agenda setting and framing functions of this element of the appearance of the articles.

The three newspapers are each divided into sections that reflect the geographic orientation of the stories included, the length and style of the articles, or the focus of the section, such as 'sport'.<sup>85</sup> For example, on the geographic criterion, the two News Corp papers, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Australian*, both divide news into 'Local' and 'World'. On the length/style criterion, both have a 'Features' section, while the *Australian* adds an 'Inquirer' section, consistent with the broadsheet's more reflective, in-depth coverage on some issues. In the Fairfax-owned the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'The Nation' and 'International News' sections reflect the geographic criterion. In addition, a number of sections are headed 'News and Features', but, within this broad grouping, the *Sydney Morning Herald* adds 'Briefs', 'Leaders', 'Opinion' and 'News Review' that reflect the length/style criterion. Unlike

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<sup>85</sup> These section markers are referred to as 'global paratexts' in semiotics (Holsanova, Holmqvist & Rahm 2006, p. 72).

the News Corp papers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* devotes a specific section of the paper to opinion articles: ‘News and Features: Opinion’. The two News Corp papers have ‘Editorial’ pages but columns appear throughout.

Apart from the framing of news articles by their section location, these sections in the papers have a hierarchy of prominence that also frames the readers’ interpretation of the relevance and importance of the issue to them and to Australia. This aspect of the framing effect contributes to the manipulation of reader interpretation that may result in a hegemonic (Gramsci 1971) influence. For example, all three papers locate ‘Local’/‘The Nation’ news earlier in their publications, which accords with newsworthiness principles of proximity, significance and consonance (Gillman 2015; Mitchell & West 1996). Later sections of the broadsheet newspapers are designed to provide more detailed information and opinion, often providing ‘second-day’ stories (Lamble 2011; Pape & Featherstone 2006) or background on news items usually located nearer the front of the paper. As features and columns are generally longer than straight news articles they are more likely to be found in later sections of the papers (See Tables 7.5 and 7.6).

**TABLE 7.5 Article locations in newspaper sections: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Section	SMH	DT	Aust.	Total per section
Local	—	47	143	<b>190</b>
Features	—	13	62	<b>75</b>
World	—	1	2	<b>3</b>
Inquirer	—	—	5	<b>5</b>
News and Features	68	—	—	<b>68</b>
News and Features – Briefs	2	—	—	<b>2</b>
News and Features – The Nation	22	—	—	<b>22</b>
News and Features – Leaders	7	—	—	<b>7</b>
News and Features – Opinion	19	—	—	<b>19</b>
News and Features – News Review	8	—	—	<b>8</b>
News and Features – International News	7	—	—	<b>7</b>
News and Features – The Diary	2	—	—	<b>2</b>
News and Features – Insight	3	—	—	<b>3</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>411</b>

**TABLE 7.6 Article locations in newspaper sections: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Section	SMH	DT	Aust.	Total per section
Local	—	49	139	<b>188</b>
Features	—	17	42	<b>59</b>
World	—	—	2	<b>2</b>
Inquirer	—	—	8	<b>8</b>
News and Features	43	—	—	<b>43</b>
News and Features – Briefs	3	—	—	<b>3</b>
News and Features – The Nation	5	—	—	<b>5</b>
News and Features – Leaders	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
News and Features – Opinion	11	—	—	<b>11</b>
News and Features – Comment	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
News and Features – Timelines	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
News and Features – Arts	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
News Review	6	—	—	<b>6</b>
News Review – Views Arts	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
Business – Opinion & Analysis	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
The Guide	1	—	—	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>332</b>

The location of the asylum seeker stories in these different sections has agenda setting and framing effects. In the first period, articles on the issue of asylum seekers are largely found in the ‘Local’ sections of the *Daily Telegraph* (77 per cent) and the *Australian* (67 per cent). The issue also appears in ‘Features’ in the *Daily Telegraph* (21 per cent) and the *Australian* (29 per cent) and in ‘World’ only once in the *Daily Telegraph* (2 per cent), and twice in the *Australian* (1 per cent). The *Australian* features five articles in the ‘Inquirer’ section (2 per cent), a section devoted to analysis of news stories. In the second period, the ‘Local’ in the *Daily Telegraph* represents 74 per cent and in the *Australian*, 73 per cent; the ‘Features’ represents 26 per cent in the *Daily Telegraph* and 22 per cent in the *Australian*. The inclusion of these articles in the ‘Inquirer’ and ‘Features’ sections frames the issue as worthy of this attention, space, analysis and reflection.

The different sections in the *Sydney Morning Herald* make a direct comparison with the News Corp papers difficult to draw. However, comparing the locations of the

articles within the *Sydney Morning Herald* over the two periods reveals a greater 'spread' of location in relation to the boat tragedy across sections than with the standoff. Nonetheless, the percentages of articles in the main locations in the *Sydney Morning Herald* – general 'News and Features', 'Opinion', 'The Nation' and 'News Review' – does not reveal a marked difference in this element of framing and agenda setting on the issue between the two periods.<sup>86</sup>

The analysis of sections as framing elements indicates that the newspapers are overwhelmingly interested in presenting stories about asylum seekers who arrive to Australia – the national – rather than stories of those who arrive to other parts of the world – the international. This confirms the operation of the newsworthiness principle of proximity (local relevance) in the hierarchy of article locations within the newspapers. It also highlights the failure of the newspapers to locate the Australian story in the context of world events – and global people movements – that impact on those who may seek asylum by travelling to Australia by boat. Whether and how the Australian government influences this inclusion/exclusion of the international contexts for the Australian experience goes to the heart of concerns about the power of media practices and systems (Lukes 1974, 2005), such as those explored here, to contribute to the hegemonic influence of the government story.

### **3.3 Genre of the articles**

Journalistic writing follows conventions. Genres in journalistic writing are cultural patterns in journalism practice, corresponding to Lukes's (1974) theory of the performance of power in media. They frame both the story, in structure and style, and the reader expectations of the article, and may be another indicator of the importance that the journalist and the newspaper accord the issue. The enshrined typology of journalistic writing distinguishes straight news stories from features and opinion pieces (Wyatt & Badger 1993). This study adapts this customary typology

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<sup>86</sup> The 'News Review' is the only one of these sections in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to have page numbers that are not consecutive within the paper – that is, 'News Review' begins again at page 1. Of the eight articles in 'News Review' in period 1, five appear on pages 1–3. All eight in the second period appear on page 4 and beyond (see tables 7.1 and 7.2).

with amendments from Robert Wyatt and David Badger's proposed five 'modes of composition' (1993, p. 4) that add expository value.

In this thesis, the genre of each article has been classified as news, opinion, analysis or opinion/analysis.<sup>87</sup> Firstly, news stories are generally purported to be a report of an event, announcement or issue, and written in the third person. Like Wyatt and Badger's 'description mode' (1993, p. 6), the news genre's purpose is to 'provide information as effectively as possible'. The news genre follows the third-person style in order to maintain the semblance of 'objectivity' journalism has traditionally lauded (Kaplan 2010; Maras 2013). This ideology of objectivity appears as a professional norm in Cottle's (2000) survey of sociological studies of news production. Wynford Hicks asserts that news style needs 'plainness, decorum, economy, precision – and above all, clarity' (2008, p. 150). The news genre conforms to a structure called the inverted pyramid (Mitchell & West 1996) that places the most important elements of the story first. Writers of news reports are referred to as reporters in this thesis (see Chapter 8 for further explanation).

Secondly, the opinion genre classification is applied to articles that offer overt opinions (Craig 2006). In an opinion piece, 'the emphasis shifts to the peculiar understanding of the columnist or commentator, emphasising the personal and subjective' (Wyatt & Badger 1993, pp. 7–8). Writers of the opinion genre are referred to as columnists in this thesis, except in the case of editorials.

Thirdly, the analysis genre captures those articles that 'interpret(s) without offering overt opinion' (Craig 2006, p. 6). This genre is equivalent to Wyatt and Badger's 'exposition' mode, which uses 'logical and explanatory devices to provide a heightened perspective on or understanding of its subject' (1993, p. 7). It is 'interpretive by nature' (Wyatt & Badger 1993, p. 8) but does not veer into the subjective, which is the province of the opinion piece. The analysis genre is akin to

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<sup>87</sup> Feature articles do not have a separate category but are instead assessed against this typology to account for the orientation within the articles (opinion, analysis or opinion/analysis), rather than the length and style alone.



what Connell refers to as ‘orienting’ journalism whose functions are ‘to provide background, commentary, explanation, aggregation and civic correlation’ (1998, p. 13). Finally, as these genres can be porous, the opinion/analysis type was added to this typology because a number of articles exhibit characteristics of both and the demarcation was difficult to draw.

**TABLE 7.7 Genre of article: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Newspaper	Opinion		News		Analysis		Opinion/Analysis		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<i>SMH</i>	57	41	75	54	2	1	4	3	138
<i>DT</i>	10	16	49	80	1	2	1	2	61
<i>Aust.</i>	74	35	123	58	11	5	4	2	212
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>141</b>		<b>247</b>		<b>14</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>411</b>
% of all articles		34		60		3		2	

**TABLE 7.8 Genre of article: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Newspaper	Opinion		News		Analysis		Opinion/Analysis		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
<i>SMH</i>	21	28	52	69	1	1	1	1	75
<i>DT</i>	18	27	48	73	0	0	0	0	66
<i>Aust.</i>	42	22	142	74	4	2	3	2	191
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>81</b>		<b>242</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>332</b>
% of all articles		24		73		2		1	

The news genre dominates in both periods (See Tables 7.7 and 7.8), as may be expected in newspapers. This genre tends to report on events, announcements, and developments – elements of the story that are new (Patterson 2013) and relate information. Sixty-six per cent of articles in the three newspapers are in this category. In the first period, these articles report the various movements and negotiations among the asylum seekers on board the two vessels involved in the standoff and the Australian and Indonesian authorities. The articles incorporate statements from the government/opposition and some from civil society on the issue – a characteristic of the journalism convention to be seen to provide ‘balance’ in reporting (Cottle 2000, p. 434) – and any known developments in the negotiations. The second period is bookended by two events. The main event is the destruction of the asylum seeker

boat off Christmas Island. The initial reporting gives the facts as they are revealed, and uses witness statements to provide the human interest angle (Gillman 2015). The Sydney funerals of some of the victims create the other 'event'. The reporting includes conflict (between or about political representatives) and human interest (grieving child and other family members) elements.

Despite the preponderance of news articles in this corpus, the percentage of opinion pieces is noteworthy. For example, 41 per cent of the articles appearing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in the first period, and 35 per cent in the *Australian*, are opinion. Referring back to the location of the articles (Section 3.1, above), it is notable that only 14 per cent and 15 per cent of the opinion articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (the only paper to have a dedicated 'Opinion' section) in the two periods appear in the section of the paper identified as 'Opinion' – instead these articles are often found throughout the paper. These are mostly columns written by journalists employed by the publication (see tables 7.9 and 7.10 below for the breakdown of writer types).

In part, this significant contribution of opinion may be explained by the protracted negotiations involved in the standoff. Journalists were not given access to the parties in the negotiations except insofar as the asylum seekers were able to get messages to them – in one case in the form of messages in a bottle that a journalist retrieved from the water near the boats. Consequently, without 'straight' news to report, opinion was a significant part of the coverage of the issue at the time, keeping it on the media agenda.<sup>88</sup> For the tabloid, the *Daily Telegraph*, the proportion of articles that are opinion differs from that in the broadsheets. In the first period, the *Daily Telegraph* publishes over 80 per cent of articles on this issue in the news form. Very little opinion is proffered (just over 10 per cent). The second period demonstrates more closely aligned percentages of news versus opinion in the three newspapers. This may be explained by the sensational nature of the boat crash and loss of lives, the dramatic witness stories, and the heart-wrenching stories of distress from the

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<sup>88</sup> The motivation for the broadsheets to maintain the issue on the media agenda despite little 'news' on the negotiations is an area that may warrant further investigation.

scenes of grief at the Sydney funerals – again, these factors align with the tabloid interest in more sensational stories, including the political dispute that erupted over the payment of travel expenses of the victims flown to Sydney.

### 3.4 Types of writers of articles

Writers of the articles in this study are classified as reporters, columnists, editors or interpretive journalists. This classification, and examples from this study, are examined in Chapter 8. In this section I report the number of writers in each category – identified by the genre of the article (see Section 3.3 above)<sup>89</sup> – and note the contributions to framing that these types of writers may signify.

For the reader, the identification of the writer's name may carry with it the associations of previous columns or articles, and this may predispose her to read the article, to avoid it, or to read the content with her perception of the writer as an influence, particularly with columnists. This corresponds with the process of reader framing, which involves selection and salience (Zoch & Molleda 2006). For example, a well-known conservative columnist like Piers Akerman in the *Daily Telegraph* may have 'followers' who seek out his columns and are predisposed to be influenced by his opinions. This following would endow him with power within this newspaper and within the mediasphere (Scolari 2012). This power would then flow on to his own influence on politicians and their parties – he would be a 'player' in the representation and response to issues such as asylum seeker boat arrivals. This power also extends to other media in the 'net'. That is, his popularity in one publication may see him invited to participate in television and radio panels discussing current issues – for example, he has appeared on the ABC *Insiders*<sup>90</sup> television program. His influence then extends across media platforms and political realms.<sup>91</sup> That is, through this process of amplification (Watson 1998), Akerman, and

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<sup>89</sup> As the genre of the article has been used to classify the writer, one journalist may be identified as a reporter for one story and a columnist for another.

<sup>90</sup> The ABC is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australia's publicly (government) owned and funded broadcaster.

<sup>91</sup> Fray (2016, pers. comm., 4 November), former newspaper editor and currently Professor of Journalism Practice, says that 'a great day for the op-ed editor is to hear their talent they had in the paper that morning also on the morning radio show'.

others like him, have influence on the media, public and then political agendas, not only in the appearance of the issue on agendas, but in the way it is framed by his polemical interpretation.

Similarly, when guest columnists are identified with their professional designations or organisational associations, this informs the ‘reading’ of the article. For example, when the then-opposition spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop (2011), is invited to submit a column, the readers are likely to use their understanding of her political orientation, histories, motivation and policies when reading the column. In a similar process, where a guest columnist is identified as a psychiatrist, that designation may colour the reading of the article, particularly if the article is about the mental health of asylum seekers.

**TABLE 7.9 Types of writers<sup>92</sup> of articles: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Newspaper	Reporter	Interpretive Journalist	Columnist		Editor	No Name <sup>93</sup>	Collection of Quotes <sup>a</sup>	Additional Reporting	AFP	Letters	TOTAL
			Journalist	Guest							
<i>SMH</i>	71	6	42	4	7	5	2	0	0	1	138
<i>DT</i>	25	2	7	0	0	26	1	0	0	0	61
<i>Aust.</i>	118	14	42	11	11	3	10	1	1	1	212
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>411</b>

a: The *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian* have a number of articles that contain a collection of quotes from characters in the week’s news stories, without any additional prose or writer attribution.

<sup>92</sup> The numbers equate to the number of articles and therefore many of the writers appear more than once – so, these numbers indicate not the number of people writing the pieces, but the comparison in the roles the writers adopt for the articles in the collection.

<sup>93</sup> Twenty-six of the 61 articles in the *Daily Telegraph* in the first period were attributed to no writer – neither a name nor a wire service was included. Twelve articles had no attribution in the second period in the *Daily Telegraph*. Therefore, in total (over the two periods) the *Daily Telegraph* had 38 of 127 articles (30 per cent) without any writer or service given credit or responsibility. In comparison, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had seven articles without a name over the two periods (3 per cent), and the *Australian* eight (less than 2 per cent). These articles are all classified as ‘news’ so I would expect that they were sourced from a syndication or wire service. However, the absence of attribution is unconventional and may warrant further investigation. In his content analysis of Australia’s metropolitan newspapers, Henningham (1996) found that the *Daily Telegraph* (like other tabloids in his study) allocated bylines to only 58 per cent, also much less than the broadsheets.

**TABLE 7.10 Types of writers of articles: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Newspaper	Reporter	Interpretive Journalist	Columnist		Editor	No Name	Collection of Quotes	Additional Reporting	AFP	Letters	TOTAL
			Journalist	Guest							
<i>SMH</i>	51	2	10	8	1	2	1	0	0	0	75
<i>DT</i>	36	0	12	0	6	12	0	0	0	0	66
<i>Aust.</i>	135	6	12	17	9	5	6	0	1	0	191
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>332</b>

Two features stand out in the analysis of the numbers of the different types of writers: the proportions of editor contributions and of columnists. Firstly, editorials are included in the opinion genre as they express the ‘position’ of the newspaper on the day (Coward 2013). They are not written with the byline of the editor, but instead stand as the paper’s ostensible ‘opinion’ (see Chapter 8). With this status, they carry the weight of the paper’s credibility, its standing, and the power this can wield. The power of this ‘voice’ of the newspaper is consistent with Lukes’s (1974) third dimension of power that signals the biases in the media system. The number of editorials in the three newspapers differs, particularly in the first period. Editorials on the issue are absent from the *Daily Telegraph* in the first period. It is not until the dramatic events of the second period that the *Daily Telegraph* includes six editorials. By comparison, the *Sydney Morning Herald* includes seven in the first period and only one in the second. The *Australian* coverage in editorials is quite stable over the two periods. As with columns in the opinion genre, it is more likely that editors will write on this issue<sup>94</sup> in the *Daily Telegraph* in the second period because of the sensational nature of the events associated with it. Secondly, the broadsheet papers, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian*, devote much more space to columnists in total over these two periods than the tabloid the *Daily Telegraph*. The two broadsheets are almost equivalent in the number of articles written by columnists. Again, as with editors, the *Daily Telegraph* gives more space to

<sup>94</sup> Editorials are written by either the editor or members of the editorial team (Fray 2016, pers. comm.)

columnists, and thus to opinion, in the second period.<sup>95</sup> In the next section, I address the engagement of guest columnists. Other columnists – journalists employed by these newspapers – are discussed in Chapter 8.

### **Guest columnists**

Newspapers often use guest columnists. In this study, only the two broadsheets include guest columnists. To understand the process of engaging guest columnists – as I could not locate scholarly literature on this point – I interviewed Peter Fray, Professor of Journalism Practice (University of Technology Sydney) and former Editor or Editor-in-Chief of the Australian newspapers the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Sun-Herald*, the *Canberra Times* and the *Sunday Age* and former Deputy Editor of the *Australian*. He therefore has experience in editorial positions for the two broadsheets in this study and for a tabloid. Fray (2016, pers. comm., 4 November) says that guest columnists are engaged for one or more of several reasons: firstly, it ‘goes to the notion of balance’, in that newspapers are a place ‘where debate happens’. The selection of the guest may therefore seem ‘counter-intuitive’, in that the views expressed may seem contrary to the tenor (or editorial) of the newspaper. Secondly, the guest may be someone either known to have something to say on the issue, or a person ‘you want to develop a relationship with’, to pull into the orbit of ‘the family of the newspaper’. Fray gives as an example Arthur Sinodinos, a leading figure in the Liberal Party at the time of his column in this collection, who later went on to become a Senator and then Minister in the current (2016) Turnbull Coalition government. This point is pertinent to the charge of source selection for advantage, exemplifying Lukes’s (1974) contention that the media system develops and expresses biases that privilege elites, and therefore further embeds hegemonic practices. Thirdly, Fray says that the op-ed page editor is ‘deluged’ with people who want to write columns – particularly politicians and academics – and these requests are assessed against the first two criteria, as well as for the requester’s ability to write well and with ‘rhetorical flourishes’.

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<sup>95</sup> Editors and columnists act as ‘opinion leaders’ (Valente & Davis 1999; Weimann 1991) – they are given the advantage and authority to promulgate their views in their newspaper articles.

The types of guest columnists and their affiliations (see tables 7.11 and 7.12) reveal the newspapers' decisions to include and effectively promote particular expertise, information or viewpoints on the issue of asylum seekers. Unlike the columns of regular journalists, most of those written by guests appear in the Opinion pages of the newspapers (op-ed) or in the Comments section, where this exists (the *Sydney Morning Herald*).

**TABLE 7.11 Guest columnists and affiliations: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

News-paper	Writer	Guest writer affiliation	Page	TOTAL
<i>SMH</i>	John Pilger	Edited extract from lecture at Opera House	13	1
<i>SMH</i>	Suvendrini Perera	Professor Cultural Analysis Curtin University	17	1
<i>SMH</i>	Tanveer Ahmed	Psychiatrist	9	1
<i>SMH</i>	Zhi Yan	National coordinator, A Just Australia	17	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Adrienne Millbank	Adjunct Researcher Monash University	11&13	1
<i>Aust.</i>	John Pasquarelli	Pauline Hanson One Nation Party representative	14	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Kevin Andrews	Current Opposition MP, former Howard Govt Minister for Immigration	12	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Martin Ivens	Journalist from <i>The Sunday Times</i>	9	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Michael Roberts	Adjunct Professor, University of Adelaide	16	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Palitha Kohona	UN Diplomat, representing Sri Lanka	12	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Philip Ruddock	Coalition MP, former Howard Govt Minister for Immigration	14	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Sergei DeSilva-Ranasinghe	Writing masters thesis at Curtin Uni on defence policy in Indian Ocean	16	1
<i>Aust.</i>	Tim Soutphommasane	Human Rights Commission	8 Inquirer section 14	2
<i>Aust.</i>	Arthur Sinodinos	Honorary Finance Director, Liberal Party NSW	12	1
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>15</b>

**TABLE 7.12 Guest columnists and affiliations: Period 2 Christmas Island boat tragedy**

News-paper	Writer	Guest writer affiliation	Page	TOTAL
SMH	Chris Berg	Research fellow, Institute of Public Affairs	19	1
SMH	George Brandis	Opposition spokesperson, Attorney-General	17	1
SMH	Hugh Mackay	Psychologist & social researcher	9 News Review	1
SMH	Khalid Koser	Assoc. Dean of Geneva Centre for Security Policy and non-resident fellow at the Lowy Institute	15	1
SMH	Rob Oakeshott	Independent federal MP	17	1
SMH	Steven Glass	Partner of Gilbert + Tobin Lawyers	11	1
SMH	Tanveer Ahmed	Psychiatrist	18 News Review	1
SMH	Waleed Ali	Author/lecturer in politics at Monash University	11	1
Aust.	Andrew Laming	Coalition MP from Qld, former medic in northern Afghanistan	10	1
Aust.	Babette Smith	Author of <i>Australia's Birthstain</i> , and <i>A Cargo of Women</i>	8 Inquirer	1
Aust.	Bernard Salt	Demographer	33&34	1
Aust.	Cameron Milner	Director Milner Strategic Services, former Qld Labor Party Secretary	14	1
Aust.	Derek Woolner, Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin	Researcher ANU, researcher University of Wollongong, academic UNSW	5 Inquirer	1
Aust.	Greg Melleuish	Assoc. Professor University of Wollongong	10	1
Aust.	Joan Grey	Moderator, Presbyterian Church, Murarrie Qld	20	1
Aust.	John Pasquarelli	Adviser to Pauline Hanson, former PNG territorial MP	12	1
Aust.	Julie Bishop	Deputy Opposition Leader, Coalition spokesperson Foreign Affairs	12	1
Aust.	Mirko Bagaric	Co-author of <i>Migration and Refugee Law</i> , former member Refugee Review Tribunal	12	1
Aust.	Philip Ruddock	Opposition Cabinet secretary	12	1
Aust.	Scott Morrison	Opposition spokesperson on immigration	12	1
Aust.	Terry Ryder	Founder of hotspotting.com.au	8	1



News-paper	Writer	Guest writer affiliation	Page	TOTAL
Aust.	Tony Abbott	Opposition Leader - extract from speech to the Young Liberals	14	1
Aust.	Tony Kevin	Former Australian ambassador to Cambodia, author <i>A Certain Maritime Incident - the sinking of SIEV X</i>	12,12	2
Aust.	Troy Bramston	Former speechwriter for Kevin Rudd	6 Inquirer	1 (Analysis)
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>25</b>

**TABLE 7.13 Guest columnists' affiliations in categories**

Source	Period 1	Period 2	Total
Government	(foreign) 1	2	2
Opposition	4	8	12
Expert	7	11	18
NFP	1	1	1
Other	2	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>39</b>

Note: These numbers differ from the number of columns in the above tables as this table counts the writers rather than the columns.

For this study, the guest columnists are further classified as government, opposition, expert, advocate/not-for-profit, and other (see Sources, Section 3.5 in this chapter for explanation of categories). This classification identifies which participants in the debate about asylum seekers are heard in this form, and therefore contribute to framing the issue for the readers. Guest columnists are rarely from government in these articles, with only two columns in the second period and one (foreign government) column in the first. The dominant voice is that of the expert (45 per cent). The experts who contribute columns may offer their opinions and tend to advocate for a particular action or position based on their research and expertise in the field – their identification with particular institutions adds legitimacy to the informed opinions they proffer, and to the newspaper (Albæk 2011).

The voice of the parliamentary and party opposition is also well represented (31 per cent). Opposition columnists are mostly representatives of the Coalition opposition parties in parliament but there is one column by an independent parliamentarian

(Rob Oakeshott) and one by a representative of the Pauline Hanson One Nation party (John Pasquarelli). The appearance of opposition political party representatives as guest columnists is significant for several reasons. Firstly, as guest columnists these politicians are able to write their articles without the constraints they experience when journalists are the gatekeepers of their other media statements and interviews. Secondly, by having 'free rein' in this way, these representatives have another, influential, platform to promulgate their views. They are already very privileged speakers in Australian society; they are able to speak in parliament, and in media releases, and use their websites and Facebook to communicate directly with the Australian people. Thirdly, by giving them this particular space, I contend that the newspapers afford their views further credibility and legitimacy.

Why would the newspapers give them these opportunities when these writers have so many other avenues available to them? This is the question that arises when assessing the frequency of these guest columns by opposition politicians. Using Lukes's (1974) model of power, this phenomenon accords with his third dimension, which looks to the structural biases in the media 'system' to identify practices that privilege those already in power. In line with Lukes, Cottle refers specifically to practices in the news organisation culture where 'different sources are actively selected to represent the views and interests of this particular outlet' (2000, p. 434). Fray's description of the criteria for recruiting guest columnists confirms this practice (2016, pers. comm., 4 November). In this case, these elite guest columnists can use this avenue, and the newspapers' imprimatur, to attempt to modify or reinforce readers' beliefs about asylum seeker boat arrivals.

Only one guest in each period is identified as a member of a group or organisation that could be described as advocating for refugees on this issue – A Just Australia in the first period and the Presbyterian Church in the second, although the position of the church on this issue would not be clear from its name alone. The RAC is certainly absent from this list. Although several other guests could be distinguished as advocating a more sympathetic policy regime for asylum seekers, none are identified specifically as advocates on the issue. The small contribution from those who

advocate for asylum seekers means that the fantasy themes and rhetorical visions expressed by those who oppose the current policies (see chapters 5 and 6) had little representation in guest columns in these newspapers (see Chapter 9).<sup>96</sup> This selection and promotion of guest columnists and their views in these newspapers, therefore, builds on the framing of the issue in this public domain to secure the consent of the Australian people to support the ideological and rhetorical position put forward by these columnists – that is, by further privileging the voices of the elites in Australia these newspapers contribute to hegemonic practices (Gramsci 1971) in the media.

### 3.5 Sources

Carlson and Franklin (2011, p. 1) maintain that ‘Modern news is unimaginable without news sources’. The sources cited in the newspaper articles<sup>97</sup> and the order in which they appear are important for understanding the framing of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. This aspect of framing again indicates journalism’s cultural practices that exert power over who is heard on this issue in the public sphere and therefore what is known or understood. Research into ‘source networks’ (Entman 2007, p. 167) is allied to the area of agenda building and research (Zoch & Moleda 2006). In this field there is a substantial body of research that investigates the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners (e.g., Berger 2001; Carroll & McCombs 2003; Hargraves 2003; Macnamara 2012a, 2014; Sallot & Johnson 2006). Studies have demonstrated that there are beneficial outcomes for those whose public relations material is used by the media (Waters, Tindall & Morton 2010, p. 243), explaining the motive for public relations practitioners to promote the inclusion of their clients as sources in media stories. In addition, these sources are what Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989, p. 5) refer to as ‘authorized knowers’. The pairing of the newspaper with the sources is mutually advantageous –

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<sup>96</sup> When asked about the relative absence of activists from the list of guest columnists in this data, Fray (2016, pers. comm.) said that ‘activists are incredibly predictable’ and that what they have to say is generally summed up in the news articles in the paper anyway – both reasons, in his view, not to invite them to submit columns on the issue.

<sup>97</sup> In this section I refer to ‘sources cited’ to acknowledge that the journalists may use other sources without attribution.

the newspapers underscore their own authority by the association, as the sources gain authority by their inclusion in the newspapers (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989).

Sources are chosen by the writers of the articles although the editor/chief-of-staff may direct the writer to pursue a certain story (from media statements and events, for example) (Hallin, Manoff & Weddle 1993). The power to include or exclude sources is consistent with the first dimension in Lukes's model of power in that it refers to journalists' power to make decisions despite the contrary preferences of others – in this study, to choose some sources over others. It is important to note, however, that these individual decisions are influenced by the cultural patterns (Lukes 1974) of journalism (Cottle 2000) already canvassed. The first and second sources set up the way in which the article constructs the issue on the day and the reader response. This assertion accords with research into primacy effects<sup>98</sup> (Allen 1973) and into reading patterns (d'Haenens et al. 2004). That is, firstly, that the first impression frames perceptions of later information/experiences, and secondly, that readers of newspapers tend to scan for entry points (Holsanova, Holmqvist & Rahm 2006) then read a portion of the article rather than the whole (though they may return to finish reading). They read in a fragmented, selective manner (Neijens & Voorveld 2016). As both phenomena privilege the early sources cited in an article, this hierarchy of sources indicates who/what has been afforded the framing rights by the writer/journalist and consequently has the status of 'primary definer' (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts 1978) in the individual articles, after the writer/journalist herself.

Most articles in this collection cite sources. In the first period, of 411 articles, 275 cite sources (67 per cent). In the second period, of 332 articles, 219 cite sources (66

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<sup>98</sup> Primacy refers to the proposition that whatever is encountered first in a discussion sets the framework for what follows, influencing the reader's final position. For example, Allen found that, if a writer wants readers to agree with her position, 'It is advantageous to place issue-oriented messages in the primacy position' (1973, p. 138).

per cent). Therefore, together 66 per cent of articles in the entire collection cite sources.<sup>99</sup>

### **3.5.1 Source categories**

The sources cited in these articles (See tables 7.14 and 7.15) are assigned to eight groupings: government, opposition, expert, advocate/NFP, asylum seekers or their relatives, foreign sources, other and eyewitness.

- **Government**

The dominant category of sources in this collection is from government with 34 per cent of first sources in the first period originating from this group and 32 per cent of all sources cited. The second period shows a similar proportion with 32 per cent of first sources and 30 per cent of all sources from government. This category includes all government Members of Parliament (including Ministers) plus government instrumentalities on the issue, such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. The latter represent the government's policies, implement its practices, and are overseen by the relevant Minister in the government whose policies and directives they follow. Sources from the government category are often directly quoted. For example, after likening his position on border control policies to John Howard's, Samantha Maiden quotes Prime Minister Rudd: "The Australian government makes no apology whatsoever for deploying the most hardline measures necessary to deal with the problems of illegal immigration into Australia," the Prime Minister declared. "No apology whatsoever" (2009). Articles also include information provided in government reports and other documentation.

- **Opposition**

Compared to government sources, opposition sources in the first period comprise only 11 per cent of first sources and 17 per cent of all sources cited. In the second period 16 per cent of first sources are from the opposition and 21 per cent of all

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<sup>99</sup> Of the 136 articles that do not use sources in the first period, 46 are identified as columns (opinion) and 15 as editorials (also opinion). In the second period, of the 113 that do not cite sources, 36 are identified as columns and 14 as editorials. Editorials and columns are less likely to cite sources.

sources. This category includes all members of the Coalition parties (Liberal and National parties) in federal parliament as well as any other parliamentary representatives who are not in government. Opposition sources tend to be cited first when they comment on government action or inaction on the issue. For example, in an article by Malcolm Farr (2009b), Opposition Liberal backbencher, Wilson Tuckey, is quoted criticising the government for the arrival of the second asylum seeker boat in 24 hours. Tuckey claims that the government's system is a great one for letting in terrorists.

- **Expert**

Experts are those who 'make informed evaluations of statements and opinions advanced by "advocates" on a particular debate or issue and can prove extremely influential' (Cottle 2000, p. 437). Cottle uses the term 'advocate' to refer to people/politicians who advocate a particular view or policy, not only supporters or 'advocates' for asylum seekers (as in the following category). Eleven per cent of first sources are experts in the first period, and 10 per cent of all sources; this drops back to 4 per cent of first sources and 7 per cent of all sources cited in the second period. It may be that the nature of the boat tragedy is less likely than the standoff to warrant calling on experts for their perspectives. One group of experts is academics. For example, in Drew Warne-Smith's (2010) article in the *Australian* he focuses on information and comment from director and lead researcher of Ipsos Mackay, Rebecca Huntley. Another is organisations or individuals with institutional expertise in the area such as the UNHCR. Such bodies are assigned specific tasks in the oversight and management of refugee and asylum seeker matters and therefore have expertise on the issue. For example, in an article by Simon Benson (2010), Paul Power from the Refugee Council of Australia is cited as a source but his inclusion lacks prominence because it appears only after four other sources.

- **Advocate/NFP**

A minor category of sources drawn on by the media is advocates or not-for-profit (NFP) groups. They comprise 7 per cent of first sources in the first period, and 8 per cent of all sources cited. For the second period 11 per cent of first sources and 13

per cent of all sources are in this category. This category is quite heterogeneous. It includes individual advocates, such as lawyers representing the interests of asylum seekers (e.g., Noeline Perera, cited in Taylor & Guest 2009) as well as organisations that advocate for refugee rights, including RAC. For example, in an article by Pia Akerman (2010), Ian Rintoul from RAC leads as the first source cited, followed by two expert sources in the form of UNHCR and Refugee Council of Australia with Amnesty International Australia cited as the final advocate source. Examples of other smaller organisations cited as sources include the Australian Kurdish Association (Stevenson & Carey 2010), the Australian Tamil Congress (Kelly & Vasek 2010), A Just Australia (Kerr 2009) and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (Dodd 2010; Stewart 2010).

Some NFP groups such as Amnesty are formal organisations with a global reach. Others speak out on refugee rights although they may be the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), the Australian Industry Association (AIA) or an indigenous Land Council. An example of this latter group is found in an article by Paul Maley who has as his first source AWU National Secretary, Paul Howes. Maley introduces his story with a summary of the union position on the issue: 'Kevin Rudd is facing growing grassroots anger over his tough rhetoric on boatpeople, with two of the labour movement's most powerful unions warning the Prime Minister against demonising refugees' (2009c). The Labor government has close ties with the union movement and therefore this disapprobation is significant for Rudd.

- **Asylum seekers or relatives**

The voice of the asylum seeker is heard in this category. For example 'Alex'<sup>100</sup> is cited by Tom Allard (2009c) as a 'spokesman for asylum seekers' on board the *Jaya Lestari 5* during the standoff. In addition, relatives of asylum seekers in Australia or abroad are sometimes called on to communicate the stories and feelings of asylum seekers because journalists have great difficulty accessing asylum seekers, especially in the incidents captured in this study. For example, Alex's older Canadian-resident brother

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<sup>100</sup> 'Alex' is a pseudonym used by the asylum seekers' spokesperson on the *Jaya Lestari 5*. His real name was later published by Australian media. He said he used the pseudonym to protect his family still in Sri Lanka.

is cited as a source by Stephen Fitzpatrick (2009a) refuting stories that question Alex's authenticity as an asylum seeker. In the first period 17 per cent of first sources are asylum seekers or their relatives, and of all sources, 11 per cent are in this category. In the second period first sources drop to 9 per cent and all sources to 7 per cent. The majority of the citations from asylum seeker sources in the first period are from Alex on the *Jaya Lestari 5*. No equivalent spokesperson was available to journalists<sup>101</sup> after the boat tragedy.

- **Foreign sources**

Foreign governments and their instrumentalities, such as the Indonesian police, are also used as sources. These sources bring the international in to focus in the newspaper articles. Whereas RAC's communication on the issue frequently introduces the international to critique the national performance (see chapters 5 and 6), these newspaper articles predominantly include these international sources as another source for facts, opinion and perspective on the issue of asylum seekers. As these arrivals to Australia – or attempts to reach Australia – involve a boat journey, usually from Indonesia, foreign governments are involved in discussions, negotiations and communication about the issue. Foreign sources are also included from the home countries of the asylum seekers themselves, such as Sri Lanka about the Tamils at Merak. In the standoff, with the asylum seekers' refusal to disembark to Indonesia, 13 per cent of first sources cited are from foreign governments and their instrumentalities, and 14 per cent of all sources cited. With the boat tragedy, 9 per cent of first sources are in this category and only 6 per cent of all sources.

The significance of the use of foreign government sources as first sources in 13 per cent of the articles is explained by the nature of the first incident and its location, but also by the willingness of Indonesian government sources to communicate with media about the issue. For example, Cindy Wockner in the *Daily Telegraph* (2009) cites as her first source the spokesperson for Indonesian President Yudhoyono, Dino

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<sup>101</sup> Contact with Alex on the *Jaya Lestari 5* was facilitated by RAC and other advocates who had the networks of connections to asylum seekers travelling to Australia. This information was gleaned through my observant participation in RAC.



Pati Djalal, who makes a statement to media after ‘a private meeting in Jakarta’ between the Australian Prime Minister Rudd and the Indonesian President Yudhoyono. Wockner cites Pati Djalal after noting that Rudd left the meeting without making a comment to waiting media.

In another example related to the standoff, the Indonesian source is cited as a challenge to the first source, Alex. After Alex is cited about the hunger strike underway on board the boat, journalist Allard (2009a) goes on to refer to Indonesian navy commander Colonel Irawan who asserts that, contrary to Alex’s claims, those on board want to leave the *Jaya Lestari 5* in Merak. The long and complex negotiations in the standoff necessarily involve the Indonesian authorities and these authorities, unlike the Australian authorities at the time, are willing to speak to the media.

- **Other**

This category is introduced to capture those sources – individuals or spokespeople – who do not readily fit elsewhere, often because an issue about asylum seekers may have arisen in relation to a specific locale or incident, such as the Port Augusta detention facility, or the transfer of sick asylum seekers to the Royal Perth Hospital. For example, one of the later sources in an article by Maley and Nicholson (2010) is a representative of the Royal Flying Doctor Service cited in relation to the evacuation of victims of the boat tragedy to mainland Australia. Seven per cent of first sources in the first period fall into this ‘other’ category as well as 7 per cent of sources cited overall. In the second period 10 per cent of first sources are ‘other’ and they are 9 per cent of all sources cited.

- **Eyewitness**

This final category arises in relation to Christmas Island in the first and second incidents covered in this data. Christmas Island locals witness minor aspects of the first incident (as the *Oceanic Viking* moves closer and further from the Island) and are involved as witnesses and rescuers in the second. The contrast in the visibility of the two incidents is evident in the number of eyewitness first sources in each. With

the boat crash off Christmas Island in the second period 9 per cent of first sources are witnesses and 7 per cent of all sources. This compares to no witnesses cited as first sources in the standoff and only two witnesses overall in relation to this incident (much less than 1 per cent). An example of the use of eyewitness sources in the boat tragedy is Alison Rehn's (2010) article in the *Daily Telegraph*. The day after the disaster, Rehn begins her story with a narration of events as they unfold. Her first and second sources cited are Christmas Island residents 'John' and Simon Prince. Her story includes a direct, vivid, quote from eyewitness and rescuer John:

'I came out the front of my place, and I heard yelling and screaming, and I thought, "Shit what's that?", and I witnessed some people in real strife,' he said.

John rang the police straight away.

'The next thing you know there were probably 20 of us down at the water. I was yelling out, "Start your motor", but the motor was stopped – these people were in big trouble,' John said (2010).

Further into the article Rehn quotes John again – 'I saw the looks on their faces - a lot of them were praying, it was frightening.' – before moving on to cite Simon's eyewitness story. With the inclusion of the eyewitness sources the reader is able to imagine herself in their position.

### **3.5.2 Who are the sources and who dominates?**

The order in which sources appear is significant. As mentioned earlier, the first and second sources are the primary definers for the framing of the issue in the articles. I have assigned the source hierarchy by a simple recording of the order in which the sources, their material or opinions/positions appear in the writer's article.

Government sources dominate (see tables 7.14 and 7.15) in both periods as first and second sources. This is not unexpected. Government sources provide much of the information on the arrival and response to asylum seekers and refugees as they are privy to asylum seeker movements and government policies and practices, decisions

and negotiations, are often the subject of the issue.<sup>102</sup> The government has the power to materially affect the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, therefore its actions (and inaction) and pronouncements are significant for the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia.

**Table 7.14 Identity of sources cited in articles: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Sources	Govt	Oppn	Expert	Advocate \NFP	Asylum seeker or relative	Foreign source	Other	Witness	Total	%
1st	97	30	32	19	47	38	20	0	283	40%
2nd	66	38	20	14	16	25	16	1	196	28%
3rd	31	29	8	10	7	23	10	1	119	17%
4th	23	9	8	8	3	7	2	0	60	8%
5th	13	15	2	6	2	9	4	0	51	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>709</b>	
<b>%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0%</b>		

**Table 7.15 Identity of sources cited in articles: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Sources	Govt	Oppn	Expert	Advocate \NFP	Asylum seeker or relative	Foreign source	Other	Witness	Total	%
1st	76	38	10	26	22	22	23	21	238	38%
2nd	49	26	16	29	13	6	16	11	166	26%
3rd	37	21	8	11	6	4	5	7	99	16%
4th	10	23	5	12	0	3	3	3	59	9%
5th	17	23	6	3	0	3	9	4	65	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>627</b>	
<b>%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>		

### Official versus unofficial sources

Earlier research on the sources used by journalists has examined the ratio of official to unofficial sources (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989; Gans 1979; Manning 2001; McCullagh 2002; Miller 1993). Hallin, Manoff and Weddle (1993, p. 753) claim that one of the most consistently replicated findings in US journalism research is that official government sources dominate news coverage, especially of national and

<sup>102</sup> This is a point also made by Hallin, Manoff and Weddle (1993) in their study of sourcing patterns of journalists writing about national security matters.

international affairs. They refer to these as 'statist' sources (1993, p. 760). Although Marchionni (2013) points out in her paper on 'journalism-as-a-conversation' that the Internet has challenged the dominance of elite, official sources' influence on the public agenda, she acknowledges that these sources still hold sway in influential legacy media such as newspapers.

As in these earlier studies, the news media examined in this thesis tend to rely on official sources. Sixty-nine per cent of the sources cited in the two periods are from government, opposition, expert and foreign government statements – the 'official' sources. This classification is either in reference to their 'official' positions or to their status in media reports as experts because of their institutional associations. For example, Mirko Bagaric is cited alongside his association with Deakin University as law professor (Alford 2010b). Similarly, Khalid Koser is cited by Steketee (2010b) on this issue as Associate Dean of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and co-editor of the *Journal of Refugee Studies*. An earlier article by Maley and Vasek also cites Koser, this time in his role as 'a non-resident fellow at the Lowy Institute' after describing him as 'A Geneva-based expert on people-smuggling' (2010).

These institutional associations afford sources legitimacy as experts and 'official' standing on the issue in relation to the organisations' roles, policies and procedures, particularly on the issue of asylum seekers. For example, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Richard Towle, is referred to in an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* ('Boat people far from an open or shut case' 2009). However, these 'representatives' also advocate for asylum seekers, particularly in relation to government policies and practices and how these may align with refugee rights or human rights in their purview. This suggests that expert sources are not without preference or bias, as is also the case with parliamentary representatives who promote their own party political view on an event or issue. They are 'advocates' in the sense that Cottle proffers (2000), presenting a persuasive case for the position they promote.

**TABLE 7.16 Official versus unofficial sources: Period 1 The standoff at Merak**

Official		Unofficial	
Government	230	NFP/adv	57
Opposition	121	Asylum seeker	75
Expert	70	Other	52
Foreign government	102	Witness	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>523</b>		<b>186</b>
%	<b>74</b>		<b>26</b>

**TABLE 7.17 Official versus unofficial sources: Period 2 The Christmas Island boat tragedy**

Official		Unofficial	
Government	189	NFP/adv	81
Opposition	131	Asylum seeker	41
Expert	45	Other	56
Foreign government	38	Witness	46
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>403</b>		<b>224</b>
%	<b>64</b>		<b>36</b>

The representation of official sources in this collection serves to privilege official stories and disadvantage the unofficial sources who offer information and stories that may challenge government policies and practices. This has implications for the public relations work of activists seeking social change. As Elisabeth Noelle-Newman (1994) argues, such a disparity can foster a ‘spiral of silence’. That is, as is evident in this study, without alternative voices being prominent on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals, the reading public may fail to see the complexities and alternative ideas on the issue offered by unofficial sources. Readers may believe that there is little support for alternative ideas or strategies on the issue. Instead, the frame promulgated by the officials, and preferred by the newspapers, dominates, consistent with the performance of hegemony (Gramsci 1971; Morton 2013; Watson 2016).

### **State versus Civil Society**

In the public sphere (Habermas 1989, 2006) the logic of the state is in competition with that of civil society. This competition between civil society and ‘a depersonalised state or authority’ (Habermas 1989, p. 19) captures Habermas’s (1989, 2006) key function of the public sphere as a space where the state can be

held to account by the people it ostensibly serves. With this dichotomy the unofficial sources included in Tables 7.16 and 7.17 are joined by those in the experts category, as these sources are not part of government or its instrumentalities and thus belong in the civil society category.

**Table 7.18 Sources cited from State versus Civil Society**

Origin of Sources	Period 1 All sources	% of total	Period 2 All sources	% of total	Period 1 1st sources	%	Period 2 1st sources	%
<b>Civil society</b>								
Experts	70		45		32		10	
Advocacy/NFP	57		81		19		26	
Witnesses	2		46		0		21	
Asylum seeker	75		41		47		22	
Other	48		49		16		16	
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>State</b>								
Government	230		189		97		76	
Opposition	121		131		30		38	
Foreign govts	102		38		38		22	
Other/govt *	4		7		4		7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>709</b>		<b>627</b>		<b>283</b>		<b>238</b>	

\* includes the Australian Federal Police

**Table 7.19 First and second sources cited**

Origin of Sources	Periods 1 & 2 First and second sources	TOTAL
<b>Civil society</b>		<b>361 (41%)</b>
Experts	78	
NFP/advocacy	88	
Witnesses	33	
Asylum seeker	98	
Other	64	
<b>State</b>		<b>522 (59%)</b>
Government	288	
Opposition	132	
Foreign govts	91	
Other/govt *	11	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>883</b>

This comparison demonstrates that the state dominates civil society in the competition for source citations on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. In the first period 64 per cent of all sources cited are from state representatives – governments and opposition – from Australia and abroad, and in the second period, 58 per cent. In addition, state sources dominate as first and second sources, giving these institutions the framing rights in the articles. State sources are 60 per cent of first sources in the two periods and 59 per cent of first and second sources combined (Table 7.19). The bureaucratic routine and division of labour in news production (Cottle 2000; Jontes & Luthar 2015) contribute to this dominance. That is, the allocation of journalists to follow the parliament and foreign news bureaus for ‘news’ from these institutions, including their information subsidies, confers the privilege of routine access to news media on state and institutional sources. This bias in the media system confers power (Lukes 1974) and, as demonstrated in this case, the ability for state sources to influence what and how the Australian public know (and think) about the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. In addition, although one party may dispute the other’s action/inaction on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals, government and opposition state sources are in general accord on the substance of the issue. Therefore the amalgamation of numbers of sources from government and opposition on the issue illustrates not only their dominance in comparison to civil society sources, but also a consistent worldview towards asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia, belying the intent of the ‘balance’ precept.<sup>103</sup> As journalism scholar Thomas Patterson (2013, p. 33) asserts, ‘The pillar of ... [journalists’] profession – accuracy – is compromised by their dependence on high-ranking sources’. These comparisons indicate that, far from being ‘fluid’ (Foucault 1982), the power to define this issue in these newspapers is given to the already powerful state institutions and their representatives, illustrating the operation of Lukes’s (1974, 2005) three-dimensional model of power and Gramsci’s hegemony (1971).

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<sup>103</sup> In this study, an elite, institutional source, such as government, is balanced by another source from the parliamentary opposition, rather than from one of the plethora of sources outside the state’s ‘authoritative voices’ on the issue.

## **CONCLUSION**

As with the findings of a US study on 'A day in the life of the media' (PEJ 2010, p. 138), the analyses in this chapter demonstrate that 'More coverage ... does not always mean greater diversity of voices'. This is significant in relation to the operation of hegemony. The issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia is demonstrably on the Australian media agenda and thus, according to agenda setting theory and research (McCombs & Shaw 1972), on the public and political agendas. The journalism practices examined in this chapter reveal the power of the cultural norms and media systems (Lukes 1974) that frame the storytelling of this issue. Everyday decisions made by journalists, editors and sub-editors demonstrate the performance of Lukes's (1974) model of power in the representation of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. Together with the rituals, routines and biases of the media system (Lukes 1974, 1986) they exhibit practices of power in newsmaking that privilege the stories of the already powerful. The next chapter, Chapter 8, examines further patterns in journalism roles and writing forms that create a context for the appearance of the stories – as fantasy themes and rhetorical visions – reported in Chapter 9.



## CHAPTER 8: JOURNALISM TYPES AND STORY FORMS

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out two key elements of journalistic storytelling – roles in journalism and forms of writing – that express cultural patterns in the production of news stories about asylum seekers in these newspapers. Like Chapter 7, to help undertake this analysis, I draw on the second and third dimensions in Lukes’s model of power that identify power as sustained in ‘the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions’ (1974, p. 22) – in this case, cultural patterns in journalism. The news articles in this study suggest that roles in journalism and forms of writing work together to create a framework that influences the storytelling on this issue. This influence is a further marker for addressing the question of who gets to be heard on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia.

The chapter is organised in two sections. The first section sets out roles in journalism deployed in these media articles. Journalism roles are equivalent to standpoints for the journalist<sup>104</sup>. These roles influence the content and style of the article and are also likely to influence the expectations of readers (Allan 2010a, 2010b). The second section considers forms of journalistic writing evident in the collection. Forms refer to foci for storytelling that journalists call on from the store of tropes and frames in their cultural repertoire (Ettema 2010). These forms of writing style and structure produce patterns of emphasis in story development. Cottle suggests that exploring forms of writing uncovers the ways in which ‘mythic truths’ are embodied within journalistic storytelling (2000, p. 438). The roles in journalism and the forms of writing are mutually constitutive, therefore each is referenced in discussing the other.

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<sup>104</sup> I use ‘journalist’ as the generic term and go on to distinguish different roles in journalism according to types of writing.

## SECTION 1: ROLES IN JOURNALISM<sup>105</sup>

In Chapter 7 newspaper articles were classified as news, opinion or opinion/analysis. The three roles in journalism – reporter, columnist and interpretive journalist<sup>106</sup> – are partially congruent with these types of articles.<sup>107</sup> Straight news articles are produced by what I have identified as the reporter and opinion articles by the columnist. I have identified those who insert opinion into news articles, in the form of word selection and frame, as the interpretive journalist – these journalists straddle the divide between reporter and columnist. This role has no direct equivalent with the types of articles in Chapter 7 and the opinion/analysis article type has no equivalent with the roles in journalism.

### 1.1 Reporters

Reporters are categorised here as those journalists who produce stories that are predominantly about information provision, and therefore are news articles in this collection. As John Street asserts, ‘Reporting is a form of rhetoric, it is about persuading us – the readers, the viewers – that something happened’ (2011, p. 52). Any news story is framed by news values (Shoemaker, Lee, Han & Cohen 2007) and the journalist's choices in selection and salience of particular elements. On a continuum from news to opinion, journalists who write news pieces adopt a more traditional reporting style (Kaplan 2010), one that conforms to what Cottle says is ‘the ideology of objectivity’ of news production (2000, p. 434), referred to in Chapter 7 of this thesis. In his study of the history of objectivity as a defining characteristic of US journalism, David Mindich describes objectivity as ‘journalism’s most celebrated and least understood practice’ (1998, p. 2). This notion of objectivity is lauded but, as Stephens says, ‘true “objectivity” ... is impossible for us mortals’ (2015, p. 91). Instead, to the ‘kind of balance’ (Stephens 2015, p. 92) that is substituted, Mindich

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<sup>105</sup> For the purposes of clarity I am using the concept of ‘journalism’ rather than ‘journalist’ because the one journalist can perform different roles in writing for the newspaper.

<sup>106</sup> Although editorials are also included in this study, the role of ‘editor’ is not examined except insofar as editorials represent the ostensible opinion of the newspaper.

<sup>107</sup> Editorials in newspapers have been categorised as opinion in this analysis. These pieces are written by a small team at the newspapers, rather than one consistent individual known as the Editor. Consequently editors are omitted from this aspect of the analysis. See Chapter 7.3.4 for discussion of the role of editorials in the newspapers.

adds a mode of 'detachment, non-partisanship... [and] facticity' (1998, p. 2). Seeking balance has its pitfalls in that this practice may elevate what may be unreasonable positions or claims simply to balance out the views or information from a contrary source. In addition, as Mindich (1998, p. 7) points out, if a seesaw metaphor captures this desire for balance, then 'who decides who gets to sit on the seesaw? Where one places the fulcrum? And why a seesaw? Why is there room for only two sides?'. Mindich's series of questions echoes the research questions in this thesis: that is, who gets to be heard on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia (is there only space for two?) and what stories are told.

'Straight news' (Mitchell & West 1996) is a reporting of events, policies and actions as they occur without explicit opinion evident from the journalist. For example, Malcolm Farr, writes a news piece in the *Daily Telegraph* reporting on the latest information about an Australian Navy vessel 'shadowing a troubled boat' (2009c), the beginning of what becomes the standoff at Merak. Farr intersperses straightforward description with quotes from the government and the opposition, references to history and to assertions about the facts of the case. His article therefore creates a balance of multiple sources to produce a straight news piece. Yuko Narushima (2009a) produces a news piece which provides strong opinions from two dissenting sources: former Howard government Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, and Professor of Public Law at the University of Sydney, Mary Crock. The quote Narushima selects from Downer describes what he claims was the success of Howard's policies to tow back asylum seeker boats to Indonesia during the term of that government, maintaining that Howard's government had a '*sotto voce*' policy rather than Rudd's "'megaphone" diplomacy'. Narushima then includes a counter claim from Crock who challenges Downer's publicised position about the humaneness of this practice with this comment: "'For former Howard ministers to stand up now as human rights defenders is beyond contemptible" she said.' The article goes on to balance the two positions throughout with countering quotes from these protagonists on the issue without including opinion or petitioning from the

journalist herself. It is the contest of positions or arguments that produces the 'information' in this example.

In another example of the straight news article, Lanai Vasek (2011) includes a number of sources from civil society that criticise the government's actions to circumvent a recent ruling of the High Court that allows refugees to appeal decisions: the Refugee Council of Australia, Refugee Action Coalition NSW (RAC), a refugee lawyer, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and lastly, the Sub Dean of the migration law program at the Australian National University. In one paragraph he quotes RAC:

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said Mr Bowen's response was 'a despicable decision from a mean-minded government. Instead of ending discrimination against offshore asylum seekers, (the government) has acted to compound it,' he said (2011).

This inclusion from RAC communicates a key message from RAC media releases; that is, that offshore detention should be ended. The 'despicable' descriptor included in the RAC's quote is also used in the lead paragraph creating a 'frame' for the article about community responses to the government's actions.

## **1.2 Columnists**

The second role in journalism is performed by columnists. Unlike reporters, columnists do not seek to provide balance in their writing. They often eschew journalistic 'norms' (Mindich 1998, p. 2). Instead they adopt a standpoint and present or argue their case in an article that is typically considerably longer than a straight news article. Their columns can be subjective, partisan and distorted, the antithesis of the balance sought by reporters in writing their news articles. UK journalism scholar, Rosalind Coward, maintains that, 'Paradoxically these "subjective" forms of writing are seen – when in the right place – as vital to

journalism's claims to objectivity' (2013, p. 33). That is, if columnists' work stands in stark contrast to the work of the reporter, this can differentiate and accentuate the tenets that allegedly rule news reporting. Coward's reference here to 'in the right place' signals concerns about changes to the proportion and placement of opinion in newspapers away from designated 'op-ed' pages. In addition, contemporary columnists are not as clearly identified as they were in the past – not all opinion pieces are clearly labelled 'columns' or 'comment' or 'opinion' to alert the reader to the type or status of the material. Instead Coward says that on both of these counts 'the clear blue water that used to exist between commentary and news has been muddied' (2013, p. 32).<sup>108</sup>

Traditionally columnists were journalists and guests who held senior or elite positions in the profession or on the issue and would be expected to provide considered analysis and commentary to contribute to an intelligent debate on an issue (Coward 2013). Day and Golan observe that the op-ed pages in newspapers were designed originally to provide a stage for opinions that diverge from those commonly expressed in the news and editorial comments of the newspaper (2005, p. 62). They contend that, if this design was implemented, the paper would actively recruit a balance of guest sources from a variety of stances. This is not the case in this study. Of the opinion pieces in this data set, conservative columnists far outweigh progressive columnists and also comprise approximately half of guest columnists, with the rest made up of experts (see tables 7.7 and 7.8 in Chapter 7).

Unlike reporters, columnists often employ inflammatory language – what Eggins and Martin call 'attitudinally loaded lexical terms' (cited in Connell 1998, p. 13) – designed to evoke response and comment. For example, Piers Akerman refers to the rescue of stranded asylum seekers by the Royal Australian Navy as 'a ferry service for illegal immigrants' and to the asylum seekers as 'wannabe refugees' (2009a). This

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<sup>108</sup> Fray (2016, pers. comm., 4 November) contends that this practice is a response to the perception that readers 'already know the news' now and expect more than straight reports in the news sections of newspapers.

language diminishes the plight of those seeking asylum by equating them with migrants and criminalises their legitimate quest for a refuge from persecution by using the inaccurate term 'illegal'. They use clichés and provocative stories or metaphors to capture the attention of the reader and, most commonly, inflame their ire in response (Adams 2008). Reader comments or reactions extend the life of the story and develop a larger profile for the columnist concerned as well as for the newspaper (Fray 2016, pers. comm., 4 November). Columnists therefore, not only provide a window into the ideological proclivities of the newspaper publication, but also into the business model of the media.

### **1.2.1 Conservative columnists**

Conservative columnists in this collection promulgate their own conservative ideologies while critiquing the Labor government in power. Ideology is key to understanding the tone and direction of what they write. To advance their own views they often denigrate a group they call the 'bleeding heart[s]' (Devine 2016) who would advocate for anything less than rejection of asylum seeker boat arrivals. Conservative columnists adopt several styles in this collection. They are characterised here as disparaging, mocking, hectoring and misrepresenting. All proselytise but a few use less emotive terms and develop arguments rather than diatribe.

The *Daily Telegraph* provides a platform for a number of very conservative, reactionary, columnists such as Andrew Bolt, Miranda Devine and Piers Akerman. Devine also contributes two columns to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in this collection. These columnists produce inflammatory opinion pieces that attract reader and media comment. These comments can be supportive or disdainful. An example of this inflammatory style is in a column where Akerman openly disparages the Labor government, its ministers and its policies. In describing Prime Minister Rudd's attempts to devise a solution to the standoff, Akerman opines on Rudd's proposal: 'Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull rightly ridiculed such a preposterous notion' (2009b). Akerman uses his columns to promote his conservative views. In another

style common to conservative columnists, Devine in the *Sydney Morning Herald* writes her explicit opinions about asylum seeker arrivals with sarcasm and an insulting tone. I characterise hers as as a mocking style, though she too is disparaging. In an article on 7 November, in the midst of the standoff, Devine mocks Rudd and activists on the issue. She begins by telling a story about London's Conservative Lord Mayor, Boris Johnson. Johnson has been reported as rescuing a woman from 'an armed girl gang'. Devine suggests that

when push comes to shove, it is muscular conservatives with the courage of their convictions, of either sex, who are of more use in dark alleys than wishy-washy leftists, or simply people who don't like to get their hands dirty, make a judgement call or risk unpopularity (2009).

This suggestion comes in the context of her claims that, unlike Howard with *Tampa*, Rudd is unable or unwilling to take a 'clear, firm stand' in the standoff. Rudd is accused, then, of being a 'wishy-washy leftist' who does not want to 'get his hands dirty' by making the hard decisions, a charge she also levels at activists such as RAC. Janet Albrechtson adopts a similar mocking style to Devine, employing clichés and using scorn and derision against her targets. For example, after the boat tragedy, Albrechtson's column calls for a 'conversation about sustainable human rights' about the asylum seeker issue. Her tone is derisive when she refers to Julian Burnside QC as a 'human rights poster boy':

Full of sweet nothings about human rights and social justice, Burnside represents the high priesthood of a growing brigade of human-rights activists whose eagerness to pull at the heart strings sits in stark contrast to their indolence when it comes to doing the hard intellectual yards (2010).

The use of 'sweet nothings' suggests that Burnside advocates human rights and social justice to seduce readers to this 'high priesthood's' vision, mocking him and

other human rights activists by implying a cult-like pursuit/status. Emotional responses are denigrated and 'hard intellectual yards' lauded. Albrechtson, like Devine, mocks and derides the government and human rights advocates. This reference to doing the 'hard' work of decision-making is also consistent with Devine's (2009) comments in relation to government negotiations in the standoff.

Bolt is a regular conservative columnist for the *Daily Telegraph* who writes the day after the boat tragedy that 'The Gillard government has blood on its hands' (2010a). In this column and its successor (2010b), Bolt proclaims his views in a hectoring style, adopting an accusatory tone, and attributing blame for the deaths off Christmas Island to those who challenged the 'stop the boats' rhetoric. He criticises Senator Brown<sup>109</sup> and journalists who berated him for his earlier 'blood on its hands' column, accusing them of having a 'guilty conscience' from having promoted Rudd's policies 'out of a lazy desire to seem good'. Akerman demonstrates a similar orientation and style to Bolt when he apportions blame for the boat tragedy to 'Julia Gillard's lethal refugee policy... The paper trail leads directly from the asylum seeker policy Gillard boasted of crafting in 2001' (2010). Akerman goes on to compare Gillard's claims against what he says are the 'facts'. He builds his argument with reference to history. This storytelling style is similar to the way in which RAC uses the facticity analytic category and the history sanctioning agent – to diametrically opposed ends – to develop and support the rhetorical visions in its media releases. Akerman uses strong emotive words throughout the article and his own opinion drives the content and the structure of the article.

The *Australian* engages a number of guest columnists at the time of the boat tragedy who are conservative politicians, or their representatives, including Scott Morrison (2010), Julie Bishop (2011), Philip Ruddock (2011) and John Pasquarelli (2011). Coalition MP and former Howard government Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews (2009), is a guest columnist at the time of the standoff.

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<sup>109</sup> At the time, Brown is Leader of The Greens party, a political party that advocates for welcoming refugees to Australia.



His column in the *Australian* titled 'Don't punish the patient refugees'<sup>110</sup> illustrates the misrepresenting style of column. This headline is a reference to Australia's participation in the UN resettlement program for refugees and the Coalition position that asylum seekers who arrive by boat are 'queue-jumpers': Andrews says that 'Every time a person smuggled to Australia is granted refugee status, the place of another person patiently waiting in a refugee camp is taken'. In this column Andrews links the international and the national in several ways. The international rights-based story that asserts asylum seekers have the right to seek asylum is checked by the Australian story that promotes a nationalistic agenda asserting Australia's right to control its borders and resources. This column also illustrates the good versus bad refugee binary frequently expressed by Coalition politicians, in particular, and reinforces this with reference to the 'mythical' queue. This reference to the good refugee being displaced by the bad boat arrival masks particular government policy decisions. The quota on refugee intake is discussed as if it was or is a given, an inviolable fact, not open to contestation. In fact the Australian government can choose to adjust its intake figures to accommodate fluctuations in arrival numbers. In another international/national connection Andrews lauds Australia's participation in the UN resettlement program, linking immigration policy to this: 'Australia's strict immigration policies have allowed us to be one of the world's most generous nations in resettling refugees'. This linkage disguises the primacy of Australia's self-interest on this issue and ignores the nation's history of racist policies that precluded non-white people from immigrating to Australia.

Andrews's column is misrepresentative in two ways. Firstly, he misrepresents the significance of Australia's contribution to resettling the world's refugees.<sup>111</sup> Secondly, he characterises arriving by boat as 'economic opportunism' and associated with what he describes as 'unlawful migrants' arriving at the borders of European countries in far greater numbers, another reference to the international.

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<sup>110</sup> Headlines are written by sub-editors, not by the authors of the articles. However, as in this example, sub-editors generally take their lead from the language and content of the articles.

<sup>111</sup> This UN program resettles a very small number of refugees per year with Australia welcoming only 13,500 of those in 2008-2009 (UNHCR 2012c).

This association is a clear imputation that these asylum seekers to Australia are not 'genuine' humanitarian refugees (cf. Every 2008; Every & Augoustinos 2007; Gale 2004; McKay, Thomas & Blood 2011; Nicholls 1998; Pickering 2001; Rowe & O'Brien 2014). It also implies that their arrival by boat is 'unlawful'.<sup>112</sup> Here Andrews makes a leap from a focus on the binary distinctions that prescribe Australia's legal framework – that is, offshore/onshore, authorised/unauthorised and arriving to a prescribed/excised territory – to declaring their legality or otherwise. Andrews also implies that the large numbers arriving to European countries may also arrive to Australia, Rudd having 'opened the doors to the people-smugglers'.

Another conservative political operative invited to contribute a guest column to the *Australian* is Sinodinos, Chief of Staff to former Prime Minister Howard and Finance Director of the NSW Liberal Party at the time of this article. His allegiances are clear in this article. His tone is disdainful and insulting. For example, he says of Labor's asylum seeker policies that

Labor milked the alleged perfidy of the Howard policy for years and promised change that unambiguously went in one direction. This part of the Labor pre-election policy was a sop to the Left. The Labor Right, scenting power, held their noses and looked the other way (2009).

Sinodinos employs clichés and colloquial terms that reference bodily and animal functions or instincts such as 'milked' and 'sop [as in milksop] to the Left' with Labor 'scenting power' like a dog, holding 'their noses' as they ignore what he says is the bad scent of the pre-election policies favouring refugees.

Not all conservative columnists write with this type of exuberant use of inflammatory words and images, nor with the tenor of the sermoniser's righteous

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<sup>112</sup> Under the UN *Refugee Convention* the mode of arrival to a signatory country is irrelevant; that is, it not unlawful for boat arrivals to seek asylum in Australia.

wrath. Academics are engaged to write occasional guest columns for these newspapers because of their research and writing on the issue – their expertise. In addition, editors may judge that more needs to be said in the paper overall from a particular perspective to add to a news story, or that a particular perspective can be enhanced with the introduction of an ostensibly independent expert (Fray 2016, pers. comm., 31 January). For example, Adrienne Millbank from the Centre for Population and Urban Research at Monash University writes on the issue for the *Australian*. In her guest column she asks what she says are ‘inconvenient questions’ that imply rather than explicitly promote a conservative position. For example, she asks, ‘Why should queue jumpers who can afford to travel be privileged over refugees in more desperate situations who can’t?’ (2009). Despite her status as academic and expert, she too uses loaded words and phrases common to the columnist and anathema to the reporter, such as ‘queue-jumpers’, ‘privileged’ and ‘desperate’, reflecting her conservative orientation on the issue.

### **1.2.2 Progressive columnists**

Unlike conservative columnists, whose employment is more regular and stable, progressive columnists are rare in this collection. All progressive columnists, bar one, are guest columnists rather than regular journalists contributing to the publications. The only exception is a column by Ross Gittins, who usually focusses on economic issues. He (2011) writes on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals and its relationship to racism with a progressive perspective. The imbalance of columnists engaged by the newspapers confirms that conservatism is preferred in the Australian newspaper landscape. This is consistent with Song’s 2003 study which found that the ideological orientations of news media influence the selection of opinion pieces (cited in Day & Golan 2005, p. 63). All of the progressive guest columnists in this collection were experts on the issue, except for the one independent journalist, John Pilger.

The work of the expert as progressive columnist is demonstrated in a column by Tony Kevin (2011), author of a book about the sinking of *SIEV X* in 2001 when over

353 asylum seekers drowned. As a former diplomat he also has insider knowledge that he uses to dispute the internal report by the Customs and Border Protection Command that exonerates it from responsibility for the asylum seeker drownings in the Christmas Island boat tragedy. Kevin writes about the capacity the organisation has to detect and surveil boats in the region, countering the claims in the report that the Command was ignorant of the location of *SIEV 221* on its fatal journey to Christmas Island in December 2010. Although as a columnist he is not bound by the expectation of objectivity and balance, in his role as expert Kevin adopts a mild tone as he relays information and personal experience relevant to his story. He avoids the inflammatory language and hyperbole exemplified in most of the conservative columns. This contrasts with the conservative column of another expert, Millbank, mentioned earlier.

### **1.2.3 Middle ground**

A small selection of columns are classified as neither conservative nor progressive on this issue. Instead the columnists tend to provide information, close analysis and commentary without reference to an ideological position. They therefore occupy a middle ground in stance, style and function and are often senior journalists or experts in a particular field. Like the other columnists, they do not adhere to the 'objectivity' aspiration (Kaplan 2010, p. 26) in that their perspectives become apparent as they build their story. For example, a senior journalist and columnist for the *Australian* newspaper is Paul Kelly. On the spectrum of conservative to progressive, Kelly does not sit consistently in either camp. He tends to use his columnist position to pursue the 'watchdog' role of the journalist (Eriksson & Ostman 2013; Macnamara 2014; Matheson 2010) – he rationally and deliberately examines information and statements on the issue to present his position 'in the public interest'. For example, on 17 October 2009 Kelly develops a story about the dilemma faced by Rudd in his purported 'tough but humane' stance on the boat arrivals of asylum seekers (2009b). In this article Kelly employs three elements that reflect key themes/categories in this thesis, facts, history and emotive illustration (see Section 2 of this chapter for explanation of the latter), to conclude with what he says is a bedrock truth: 'there is an unresolved conflict between the rights of the

democratic state and the rights of asylum seekers'. With this assertion Kelly pinpoints the collision between the national and the international on this issue. However, there are instances where Kelly clearly voices his opinion, often after his analysis of a claim or situation. For example, in another column, he disputes the claims by Rudd that the asylum seekers on one of the boats in the standoff, the *Oceanic Viking*, are not getting special treatment in return for their disembarkation to a detention centre in Indonesia. Kelly provides information from documents he has on the issue. His use of loaded words like 'desperate' to describe Rudd's government, and the context of the headline – 'Rudd is treating us like mugs'<sup>113</sup> – produce Kelly's judgement on Rudd's claim (2009a). Although the nature of this column overlaps with the 'interpretive journalism' role, explored in the following sub-section of this chapter, it is longer than a news article, has a more marked analytical bent (that builds towards a position) than that of the interpretive journalist and Kelly is referred to in the paper as 'editor-at-large' (a senior designation for columnists).

A column by Brendan Nicholson in the *Australian* is also an example of a balanced column that provides information, analysis and a variety of sources. For example, appearing directly after the boat tragedy, Nicholson's column (2010) documents deaths at sea in an historical frame. He includes information from official sources about processes and their consequences, analysis from several expert sources, and statistics and information about circumstances in the countries from which asylum seekers flee, as well as in detention centres *en route* to Australia. This is a comprehensive, analytical, thoughtful column that presents the challenge, in Nicholson's quote from the Refugee Council of Australia, that 'much more must be done to build regional and international cooperation to protect refugees in Asia'. This use of cited sources is unusual in this collection of columns.

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<sup>113</sup> This headline reflects Kelly's language. In radio and television interviews he uses the term 'mugs' in this way.

### 1.3 Interpretive journalists

The third role in journalism is what I call the interpretive journalist. Articles from journalists in this mode are typically news articles in length and general tenor but with insertions of single words or phrases that carry connotations not consistent with straight news coverage that aspires to the objectivity norm. Only a small number of articles in this collection fall into this category. For example, in an otherwise unremarkable recitation of the latest events, Steve Lewis in the *Daily Telegraph* amplifies the suggestion of panic and disorganisation from the sub-editor's headline, 'AFP rushed to the asylum front line', when he refers to Australia's 'emergency talks' with Sri Lanka on the 'crisis' (2009a). Maley in the *Australian* employs battle metaphors in his story titled 'Parties vie for tough talk title'.

The federal opposition looks certain to harden its policies on asylum seekers, amid fears it will be politically outflanked by Kevin Rudd, who is toughening his government's position in the face of the rising tide of boat people (2009b).

Apart from the mixed metaphor, 'outflanking' the Prime Minister is a battle reference, as is the headline itself which refers to a sporting title bout, usually applied to a boxing or wrestling match. Maley goes on to say that 'the major parties prepared for a bidding war on who was tougher on unauthorised migration', adapting the war metaphor for one about auctions. The inclusion of these metaphors adds a dimension of interpretation or opinion, demonstrating a level of framing by the journalist, over and above that commonly found in news articles.

## SECTION 2: FORMS OF WRITING

This section explores the second element of journalistic storytelling that makes up the oeuvre of stories about asylum seekers, the forms of writing in the newspaper articles. This analysis creates a further interrogation of the articles identified in Chapter 7 as news, opinion, analysis, and opinion/ analysis. These further writing forms are also akin to journalism genres (Deuze 2005) in that they display a

particular format, style and emphasis. The four forms of writing I have identified in this data are fact, history, petitioning and emotive illustration. Several of these forms echo the sanctioning agents located in the activist stories in chapters 5 and 6 – the fact, resonance and connectedness sanctioning agents are found in the fact, history and emotive illustration story forms. What is illustrated in this section is that, by adopting a particular form, journalists highlight or give importance to this element in their depiction of the issue. These forms overlap. As patterns of storytelling (Bormann 1985a) these writing forms exhibit further ‘cultural patterns’ (Lukes 1974) in journalism practices of news production about asylum seekers and demonstrate ways in which ‘mythic truths’ (Cottle 2000, p. 438) are generated or evoked.

## **2.1 Fact**

The first standard form is what I call fact stories. In this chapter facticity emerges in a new form. The fact form of writing in these media articles is closely allied to the notion of objectivity and embraces sources of data, expert opinion and an empiricist orientation – the belief that the world is ‘knowable and nameable’ (Mindich 1998, p. 95). It hails from the perception that journalists are ‘in the truth business’ (Stephens 2015, p. 23), that truth is there to be reported, and that news discourses embed ‘evidentiality’ (Bednarek & Caple 2012, p. 90). The power of the fact form lies in two elements: in its attachment to the notion of evidence, akin to concepts of scientific proof; and in reader expectations of the function of the news media to satisfy their need to surveil their worlds (Mitchell & West 1996, p. 11). In his book on ‘the need for knowledge-based journalism’, Thomas Patterson cites Walter Lippmann on the importance of facts: ‘Incompetence and aimlessness, corruption and disloyalty, panic and ultimate disaster, must come to any people which is denied access to the facts. No one can manage anything on pap. Neither can a people’ (2013, p. 3).

In this study journalists call on facts about the boat arrivals of asylum seekers in a number of ways: from institutional sources, on events as they arise, in quotes from politicians on events and policies, and in information provided by ‘insiders’ such as

Refugee Action Coalition (RAC). The 'fact' designation may be contested depending on the source of the information.

### **2.1.1 Facts from institutional sources**

Journalists employ information from institutional sources on the issue of asylum seekers. The credibility accorded the institutional source for this issue (Franklin & Carlson 2011), and the nature of the information, denote a 'factual' orientation. For example, statistics are used as a fact form to provide points of comparison for the journalist and the reader. Journalist Laurie Oakes sources statistics from the Immigration Department and the UN on global people movements and asylum claims made to Australia to include in his story on 17 October (2009b). Oakes's story employs these statistics to challenge 'the scare campaign the Coalition is trying to whip up over boat arrivals'. He is therefore using facts from these institutions to dispute political posturing on the issue by members of another institution, the Australian parliament. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* Mark Davis also compares these statistics in the contemporary 'mini-surge of asylum-seekers': 'While the numbers are miniscule by world standards, and significantly lower than the 13,000-plus asylum-seekers who arrived in 2001, they have sparked a vociferous debate' (2009). Davis's article provides several paragraphs of statistics from the UN – an international institutional source – on the movements of Sri Lanka's Tamil asylum seekers to industrialised countries as part of resettlement programs. Davis also cites from an academic paper, another institutional source, reporting research on the motivating factors in asylum seeker applications for resettlement. His article combines the use of the fact form with elements of journalistic interpretation.

The fact form can also be seen in references to reports from institutional sources. For example, a report by the University of New South Wales is used to challenge the Department of Immigration in an editorial in the *Australian*. The article cites an increase in cases of self-harm and violence at detention centres to introduce the outcomes of the report. The report is quoted throughout the article (unusual for editorials in this collection):



‘a clear picture emerges that the more punitive approaches, in particular detention, are expensive to administer and also have deleterious effects on individuals,’ the report says. ‘These negative effects appear not to be counteracted by speedier or more efficient status resolution’ (‘Self-harm cases in detention centres on rise’ 2010).

The source of the report has the status of the expert outsider – the University of New South Wales – despite its commissioning by the Department of Immigration. The credibility of the university rests on the objectivity of its research processes and recommendations. It raises a theme that appears in all three cites in this thesis: the health of asylum seekers in Australia’s care. The article uses the report’s findings on the disadvantages of the current detention system and its recommendations to challenge the government and the Immigration department.

This fact form appears in the columnists’ work as well as the reporters’ news articles. For example, the fact form is used in conjunction with the columnist’s interpretation in Paul Sheehan’s column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* entitled ‘Migration: the true story’ (2009). He argues that Australia is not a xenophobic nation, making ten points to support his claim. These points refer to statistics, as well as screening, deterrence and quota policies on refugee arrivals. He singles out Muslim refugee numbers. Sheehan includes references to laws and Conventions and goes on to state his position on the Tamil Tiger history in Sri Lanka. Thus this article provides an example of a columnist who has used facts from institutional sources to build and elaborate an argument that promotes his conservative views.

### **2.1.2 Facts on events as they arise**

Another form of fact-based writing reports information as it comes to hand. Its function is to bring readers up to date on the issue. A number of articles appear using this form at the time of the boat tragedy, using sources on Christmas Island and government departments. In the *Australian* newspaper these articles are flagged with the headline ‘CHRISTMAS ISLAND TRAGEDY’ (e.g., Maley & Nicholson 2010;

Alford 2010a). Some articles list the timeline for the incident (e.g., ‘The route from Iran and Iraq – Christmas Island tragedy’ 2010), others list those known to have died on similar boat journeys since 2001 (e.g., ‘Disastrous record – Christmas Island tragedy’ 2010). The *Daily Telegraph* (e.g., ‘UN calls Australia on rights’ 2011) has a number of short articles that simply relate the latest news bulletin without attribution to a journalist or source.

### **2.1.3 Facts from politicians’ statements**

A further fact form used cites representatives of parliamentary and departmental institutions who make statements on the issue. These quotes are facts in that they are official positions or reporting on aspects of the issue as well as statements that can later be held up as records of their actions, intentions or interpretations. This writing form intersects with the credibility sanctioning agent (see chapters 5, 6 and 9). An article by Farr illustrates this fact form:

However, the Coalition’s Pacific Solution and detention centres were not as effective as it claimed, according to Immigration Department figures released by the government. ‘About 8500 asylum seekers arrived in the two years after Mr Howard and the Liberal party adopted temporary protection visas,’ Ms Gillard said (2009c).

Here Farr is attributing this information to Prime Minister Gillard, emphasising that she, and her party/government, have alerted the journalists and the Australian public to this aspect of the debate on the issue – a refutation, in this instance, of claims circulating about the effectiveness of the Coalition policies on the issue when they were in government. This introduces the ambivalence that is built into the logic of any institution. That is, government and opposition parties may attract the credibility imprimatur as institutional news sources but may also be seen to be self-serving and therefore less believable in their communication on this and other issues.

## 2.2 Facts about experiences from ‘inside’ sources

The final fact form includes information and perspectives from asylum seekers and from their advocates, who are ‘insiders’ to the asylum seeker experience. This type of fact form again demonstrates the instability of facts in that the speaker’s perceived credibility may both hinder and help in claiming veracity. The hindrance arises in the advocates’ and asylum seekers’ lack of institutional backing and the credibility and authority such backing would commonly bring. Unlike parliamentarians, activists are not elected representatives to a venerable and powerful institution. Paradoxically, the help lies in the asylum seekers’ and advocates’ lack of association with an institution with a vested interest in the issue. Although asylum seekers have much to gain from the storytelling on the issue (and much to lose), in contrast to both asylum seekers and parliamentarians, advocates such as those in RAC are not motivated by personal gain. Instead they participate in the issue because of their convictions (Stockemer 2012) and therefore may be given the credibility of disinterest – they may be perceived as doing their work out of the goodness of their hearts.

Narushima’s article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* provides an example of information provided by refugee advocates in this fact form. She reports on what Ian Rintoul from the RAC was able to tell her about conditions in detention:

An Afghan asylum seeker has been transferred to hospital after trying to hang himself in Curtin detention centre yesterday, a refugee advocate said. Ian Rintoul said the man attempted suicide about 7 am and was transferred to Derby hospital after suffering a neck injury... Mr Rintoul said 300 men had spent Monday night fasting in the rain and 700 were on hunger strike in their rooms (2011).

Narushima does not state the details about the hunger strike, nor the attempted suicide, as bald fact. Instead she uses the source to relay the particulars, at the one time providing the information while also allowing the reader to assess its credibility

– or ‘fact’ status. This is consistent with what Bob Franklin and Matt Carlson, in their study of credibility of news sources, call ‘distancing by attribution’ (2011, p. 32). They describe this as a strategy ‘to distance the journalists from potentially dubious sources’, shielding them and their news organisations against charges of erroneous publication.

### **2.3 History**

The second mode of storytelling in the media articles is the history form. History is a mode of storytelling that appears throughout this thesis. The RAC, and the RAC interviewees, deploy history as substance and sanctioning agent in their storytelling about asylum seekers. It is also found in many articles in the collection and illustrates how they encapsulate ‘mythic truths’ (Cottle 2000, p. 438). The history form is used to provide the context for an event or statement reported in the story or as the basis for an argument or opinion on policies, actions and outcomes. It provides a calling to account for the participants in the issue. Its use is consistent with the role of the media as the ‘fourth estate’ and watchdog of the state (Hampton 2010; Matheson 2010). This is particularly important in relation to a recitation of governments’ past practices and policies. In his exploration of ‘news and memory’, Andrew Hoskins asserts that news media ‘seem to shape in an ongoing way an historical consciousness of today’s events’ (2010, p. 460). Nonetheless, there is little scholarship on the relationship between news media and social and cultural memory (Hoskins 2010, p. 460). Barbie Zelizer claims that journalists are not themselves very conscious of their ‘agency in social remembering and forgetting’ (outlined in Hoskins 2010, p. 460).

In this collection of articles, the history form sometimes overlaps with the fact form. References to history are diverse and are employed both as a broad canvas and for detailed analysis. References to historical moments span the global and the local, the large and the small scale, the distant and the near past. Firstly, the history form often uses war as a reference point. The wars range from those in Iraq and Afghanistan, sources of many asylum seeker arrivals to Australia, to World War II,

where the focus is on the treatment of those seeking to escape persecution from the Nazis at that time. Secondly, local events that are significant to the issue of asylum seekers are referenced, with journalists making comparisons between them and the White Australia Policy. Thirdly, there are references to previous governments and their treatment of asylum seekers. Fourthly, journalists use the history form in quite a personal way to remind readers and current and former politicians of statements or claims they have made, comparing them and holding them to account (an extension of the role of the fact form that relates to politicians' statements). Examples from the collection of articles demonstrate use of multiple categories of the history form in the one article.

### ***2.3.1 Distant history: International tropes for violence and loss***

John Pilger's article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 November 2009 is an example of multiple and varied uses of the history form, including references to distant and recent wars as well as past statements of politicians. It is rare for the *Sydney Morning Herald* to invite a guest columnist as radical as Pilger, a well-known progressive or left-wing activist, journalist and author. The column is an excerpt from a lecture he gave at the Sydney Opera House after being awarded the Sydney Peace Prize. It canvasses a number of issues, including Australia's treatment of asylum seeker boat arrivals. Pilger begins his story by talking about Australia's role in Afghanistan. He links the arrival of Afghani asylum seekers to Australia to Australia's participation in that war. He aligns Prime Minister Rudd's statements about the rationale for Australia's participation in the Afghan war with John Howard's statements about former President of Iraq Saddam Hussein and the (later discredited) claims about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. He puts these recent comments by Australian Prime Ministers Howard and Rudd in the context of what happened to Australian soldiers at Gallipoli and the misinformation provided in that conflict: 'Do the young people who wrap themselves in the flag at Gallipoli every April understand that only the lies have changed?'. He then goes on to quote from Rudd's 2006 essay for the *Monthly* (before he became Prime Minister) entitled 'Faith in politics', combining references to international tropes for violence and loss with accountability for past statements:

Rudd wrote that ‘We should never forget that the reason we have a United Nations Convention on the protection of refugees is in large part because of the horror of the Holocaust when the West (including Australia) turned its back on the Jewish people of occupied Europe who sought asylum’ (Rudd, cited in Pilger 2009).

Reference to the Holocaust here is a reference to the most powerful, iconic symbol of evil in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – it was the Holocaust that precipitated the development of the *Refugee Convention*, as Rudd notes. Pilger references an event with global resonance, elevating Australia’s actions and inaction to greater significance. Pilger then hones his point by comparing the words in Rudd’s essay with Rudd’s more recent comments: ‘I make absolutely no apology whatsoever,’ he [Rudd] said, ‘for taking a hard line on illegal immigration to Australia’. Pilger then asks ‘Are we not fed up with this kind of hypocrisy?’, calling Rudd to account for these contrary sentiments.

In this article, Pilger makes a further historical connection between Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and the indifference of onlookers to the plight of those imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II. He tells the story of the mother of an Israeli journalist friend of his who

was being marched from a cattle train to the Nazi concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen when she saw a group of German women looking at the prisoners, just looking, saying nothing. Her mother never forgot what she called this despicable ‘looking from the side’.

This story is told directly after a paragraph that describes Australia’s detention centres on Christmas Island as concentration camps. The implication is clear: for Australia and Australians to do nothing, or to ‘look from the side’ at the plight of asylum seekers, is also despicable. Tim Blair in the *Daily Telegraph* – ‘the columnist you can’t ignore’<sup>114</sup> – also references the Holocaust. He begins his column by

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<sup>114</sup> This is the attribution given to Blair by his newspaper.

creating a parallel between images of Holocaust survivors and the power of images of the asylum seekers drowning off Christmas Island.

We've heard about it so frequently over so many years that mention of the six million Jews slaughtered in WWII barely registers. Yet a single photograph of perhaps five or six Holocaust survivors, or footage of a lone graveside execution, still generates horror. Images, and this isn't exactly an original observation, are more potent than words... Australians discovered anew the power of pictures following the terrifying crash last week of an asylum seeker boat on the cliffs of Christmas Island (2010).

In this case Blair is asserting that it is the power of these images that has engaged the consciences of Australian readers and thwarted successive governments' efforts to maintain the facelessness (Anna 2012, pers. comm. 6 September; Marr 2010) – the invisibility – of the asylum seekers and their plight.

### **2.3.2 Local history: Earlier Asylum seeker events for Australia**

A second way in which history is deployed in these articles is the recitation of historical events in Australia that are seen as relevant to this issue. Laurie Oakes (2009a) employs the history form in this way when he likens Rudd's position in relation to the *Oceanic Viking* (in the standoff) to that of the captain of the *Tampa*. This reference recalls a notorious time in the recent history of Australia's treatment of asylum seeker boat arrivals (see Chapter 4 for fuller description). The dilemma for the *Tampa's* captain was that, while wanting to safely deliver the asylum seekers he had rescued so that he could continue with his own journey, the asylum seekers did not want to go to Indonesia, and Howard did not want them to land on Christmas Island. Oakes leads his article with this comparison: 'Kevin Rudd might as well be on the bridge of the *Tampa*. He is in pretty much the same position Captain Arne Rinnan was back in 2001'. Rudd is negotiating with Indonesia and the asylum seekers to have them disembark to Indonesia from the *Oceanic Viking* (as it is an Australian Customs vessel). Oakes's comparison is favourable for Rudd because Rinnan garnered international attention and support for his rescue of the *Tampa* asylum

seekers and for his determination to fulfil his obligations to them. In another article, Glenn Milne also likens the standoff to Howards' *Tampa* when he says that 'The Oceanic Viking is Rudd's Tampa with all the pain and none of the domestic political reward' (2009). This comparison, however, is less flattering than Oakes's: 'so, politically Rudd finds himself in the worst of all worlds' and, unlike Rinnan, this is of Rudd's own making.

In another style of this history form, Mark Dodd invokes the adage of 'learning from past mistakes'. His article in the *Australian* refers to the eighth anniversary of the loss of so many lives on the *SIEV X*.<sup>115</sup> Here, Dodd uses history to tell his readers, by his selection of cited sources, that Australia should have learnt from these past mistakes (2009b). The *SIEV X* marks another notorious incident in the recent history of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, in that those aboard were not rescued in a timely manner and Australia's inaction was blamed. In this 'learning from past mistakes' style, history is used as a sanctioning agent to provide legitimacy and validation to the thrust of the refugee advocate's argument included in Dodd's article. Dodd cites Frederika Steen, advocate and 'former immigration official', who says that '[n]o way can we go back to the cruel and inhuman temporary protection visa regime of Howard which made that dangerous boat journey the only means of family reunion for the 353 and many more who drowned'. By his use of Steen's quote, Dodd delivers a message about past mistakes in Australia's treatment of refugees.

### **2.3.3 Local history: Australia's past policies and statements**

Australia's history of immigration policies that excluded non-white peoples is also an historical reference in these data, and is advanced as a barometer for current practices. In the column mentioned earlier, Pilger alludes to Australia's history of racism and its White Australia Policy in connection with the standoff. 'Imagine a shipload of white people fleeing a catastrophe being treated like this. No Indonesian

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<sup>115</sup> The *SIEV X* was the boat referred to earlier in this chapter in reference to Tony Kevin's book on the incident which saw 353 asylum seekers from the boat drown on their way to Australia.



solution for them' (2009). Here Pilger takes on the role of interpellator (Bell & van Leeuwen 1994), using this history form to hail the reader as an ethical world citizen and as a contemporary inhabitant of multicultural Australia, as someone who can see in the current circumstances relationships to these past shameful practices. In a similar vein and style to Pilger, Tamil-Australian academic Suvendrini Perera asks in her guest column:

To what lengths are Australians willing to be led by a historical anxiety over invasion and the 'natural right to secure borders' to which our leaders lay claim? Is it time to face this fear for what it is: a form of aggression against the most vulnerable to shore up our own sense of power (2009)?

Like Pilger, and the RAC interviewees, Perera refers to the circumstances that motivated the world community to establish the *Refugee Convention* after World War II. She also uses the history form when she chronicles the history of Sri Lanka to explain the motivations of Tamils fleeing the country, a matter on which she can offer both personal and expert insights.

Mike Carlton, a journalist who writes in an often humorous style for his column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, also links the current political debate to the bigger issues of racism and the White Australia policy when he says that

To hear the Opposition tell it, the Asiatic hordes are upon us, queueing up for a brass band welcome on a red carpet rolled out to them by Kevin Rudd, a refrain taken up and amplified to a deafening roar by the usual reactionary media hacks (2009).

Here, like Perera, Carlton implicitly invokes Australia's historic fears of invasion from Asia – the 'invasion narrative' (Walker 2012, p. 98). In his column, Carlton positions the reader in the text to join him in viewing these past fears with derision and, with this, to dismiss the current fears about asylum seeker arrivals.

### **2.3.4 Near history: Holding to account for previous statements and actions**

This use of the history form becomes a powerful tool when journalists hold current politicians to account for – and remind their electors of – their previous statements and actions or the actions of their colleagues in government/opposition in the past. For example, conservative columnist Piers Akerman refers to Prime Minister Rudd as ‘born-again hardliner Rudd’ and cites a paper written by Rudd seven years prior that, Akerman says, ‘demonises’ those who express concern about people smuggling and illegal immigration (2009a). In other words, he accuses Rudd of changing his approach over time and, with this, calls into question the sincerity of Rudd’s current professed positions. Similarly, Malcolm Farr reminds readers of a statement made in 2002 by the Liberal Party’s Deputy Opposition Leader, Julie Bishop, on the issue of regional cooperation about asylum seekers (2009a). Farr asserts that this statement is at odds with her current position. Milne also documents statements from different politicians over time on factors influencing the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia, using them to challenge current proclaimed positions (2009).

History also appears in references to previous governments, ministers and prime ministers, their actions and policies and the outcomes of their approaches to the asylum seeker issue. For example, in a news piece by reporter Farr, the Opposition spokesperson for immigration, Sharman Stone, is quoted:

Ms Stone said that if the policies of the previous coalition government had been retained ‘we wouldn’t have the problem... because we had zero boat problems, effectively, when we were in government’ (2009c).

Paul Toohey deploys the history form when he sets forth the differences and similarities between the policies and practices of the Labor government and the former Howard government. Toohey’s assessment is that ‘[t]hings have changed’ under the Rudd government (2009). He lists the points that support his argument, overlapping with the summary fact form as he brings readers to the present day, a time when asylum seeker arrivals had begun to increase again. Cameron Milner

writes an article in the *Australian* on 18 December 2010, three days after the boat tragedy. In it, he repeatedly references history to reflect on what can be done in response to the recent asylum seeker deaths at sea. He writes about the Children Overboard incident in 2001 (see Chapter 4 for description), as well as the Port Arthur massacre in 1996 and the gun law reform that followed: 'We changed our flawed gun legislation. Let's do the same with immigration laws.' Milner is a guest columnist, lobbyist and former secretary of the Queensland branch of the Labor Party. He rants against people smugglers and sends a rallying cry for a humanitarian approach to asylum seeker arrivals. His article resembles the history form mentioned earlier, in reference to past events in Australia's treatment of asylum seekers. However, in this article he looks to these events not only to 'learn from past mistakes' but also to learn from past bold policy changes made in response to a tragedy and in the face of opposition from vested interests. He challenges current political leaders to take courage and do the same.

Also in the wake of the boat tragedy, columnist Lenore Taylor uses the history form to remind readers of the repercussions that can arise from inflammatory public comments by parliamentarians. Taylor writes in her column about comments attributed to opposition spokesperson Scott Morrison in the Coalition party room. Morrison is alleged to have suggested the party should exploit the community's fear about Muslim immigration. Taylor reminds readers of the consequences of such tactics. She writes that

John Howard's longest serving immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock, is said by colleagues to have been one of the most vehement critics of Scott Morrison's suggestion the Coalition go on the political attack over 'Muslim immigration'. Maybe that's because it rang a few warning bells. Ruddock was in Parliament in August 1988 when then opposition leader Howard said it might be 'supportive of social cohesion' if Asian immigration was 'slowed down a little'. The remark provoked a huge political backlash (2011).

History is both a device for journalistic writing and a sanctioning agent for tales of errors and victories of the past. The journalists' use of this form works to 'shape in an ongoing way an historical consciousness of today's events' (Hoskins 2010, p. 460).

## **2.4 Petitioning**

The third form identified in the articles is petitioning. In the petitioning form, the article takes a stand and appeals for particular actions to be taken or stopped. This form mimics the way in which the RAC calls for action about asylum seekers in its media releases. Petitioning describes writing that embeds either implicit or explicit judgements on the issue. It is evident in two ways: firstly, when those sources who are quoted or paraphrased make a statement about what should or could be done, taking a stand on current actions; and secondly, when the journalist suggests a course of action or makes clear her or his position on the issue or an aspect of the issue. The former is typical of the reporter, the latter of the columnist. In contrast to reporters, columnists are free to give opinions, offer advice and make demands of – or petition – those they target. Unlike the other three forms of writing evident in this study, there is no significant related discussion in the literature about petitioning in news articles. In most cases, petitioning in relation to this issue is directed at government representatives and, occasionally, opposition spokespersons or political parties.

An example of the first way in which petitioning occurs is in the *Daily Telegraph*, where Neil Keene writes an article that includes a quote from Oday, the brother of a man who lost his wife and two children in the boat tragedy. The survivor has been flown to Sydney to attend the funerals. Oday petitions for his brother to be allowed to stay in Sydney after the funerals so that he is close to remaining family.

His brother, Oday, an Australian citizen living in Sydney, said yesterday that Mr El Ibrahimy was desperately unhappy and should be brought to Villawood detention centre to be closer to family and friends. 'Everything is bad for him right now. He should be here,' he said (2011).

A number of articles about Seena, the orphaned Iranian boy at the heart of the Sydney funerals coverage, also include sources who petition the government to allow him to stay in Sydney, rather than be returned to detention on Christmas Island (e.g., Needham 2011; Neighbour & Taylor 2011; Taylor 2011b).

The second way in which petitioning occurs is when the journalist ‘takes a stand’. This is common to columnists in this collection, with varying degrees of partisanship evident. Piers Akerman and Sheehan are conservative columnists who petition in an unambiguously partisan manner. For example, at the time of the standoff, Akerman in the *Daily Telegraph* explicitly petitions for the reintroduction of the asylum seeker policies of the previous Coalition government. In another example, Sheehan ends his column with petitioning in the form of a clear directive, rather than an appeal, to the government:

The Oceanic Viking needs to be reclaimed, secured, prepared for sea, then sail for Sri Lanka with the 78 recalcitrants on board. They have rejected Indonesia. Anything less is a capitulation to moral blackmail, where children have been used as props and pawns. The impasse is not a test of rights but a test of wills (2009).

Like Sheehan, another columnist, Oakes, also petitions the Rudd government, although in a less peremptory style: ‘The best way to stop Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka and paying people smugglers to get them to Australia is to make things more tolerable in their own country’ (2009b). He goes on to imply that the Rudd government should pressure the Sri Lankan government – ‘has Rudd heaved the government in Colombo? Not so as you’d notice.’ Oakes’s tone is moderate and his petitioning modest. Dennis Shanahan (2009) is a middle-ground columnist who also petitions the government, this time to nurture or encourage sympathetic community attitudes, not undermine or misrepresent them.

## 2.5 Emotive illustration

The final standard form is what I refer to as emotive illustration. This form of writing provides a window into the experiences of those seeking asylum, refugees settled in Australia and others captured in the issue. Emotive illustration deploys what is traditionally called ‘the human interest angle’ in journalistic writing (Newsom & Haynes 2017) or ‘personalisation’ (Bednarek & Caple 2012 p. 44). As journalism writer Jack Lule describes it, ‘reporters ... draw on a fundamental story of earthly existence, a universal and shared story of mankind [sic]’ (cited in Ettema 2010, p. 290). In this collection of articles, this form is employed in two ways, which differ in terms of the framing rights they confer. Firstly, emotive illustration is used as the lead (Yopp, McAdams & Thornburg 2010) in a story. Secondly, it is used as one of several components in the body of the story. When used in the first way, the article will lead with a quote or a story that primes the reader to use the asylum seekers’ lived experience to understand the rest of the article. Narushima begins a story in the *Sydney Morning Herald* with such a lead:

Ramash carries a plastic bag as he shuffles into the Dulwich Hill Uniting Church Hall. The 25-year-old produces a bottle of cranberry soda and offers it to his friends, two men he didn't know in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, but with whom he'll form a surrogate family to adjust to life in Sydney. The men are all Tamil refugees (2009b).

This opening paints a picture of distress and hope. Narushima goes on to quote the asylum seekers as they describe their experiences in Sri Lanka. However, the surprise in this story is that these asylum seekers arrived to Australia by plane ‘like 96% of asylum seekers to the country’. By using plane arrivals for this emotive illustration, Narushima underlines the expectations created by persistent emphasis – by media and politicians – on boat arrivals of asylum seekers. Thus, this story not only immerses the reader in the experiences of the asylum seekers but challenges preconceptions about Tamils and boat arrivals. An article written by Tim Vollmer in the *Daily Telegraph* also illustrates the use of this emotive illustration form. It begins:

Under the cover of darkness, the Abdula family grabbed their four young children, including a newborn baby, and set off on an arduous four-month trek halfway across the globe in a desperate bid for freedom (2009).

In the body of the article, more details about the lives of the Kurdish couple are revealed and they are directly quoted talking about their experiences in their hometown of Kirkuk in Iraq. Again, the use of direct quotes from the refugees allows the reader to get inside the lived experience of this family and to identify with its struggles. It gives this Kurdish couple a voice in the representation of the issue in the Australian media. Vollmer's whole article is an example of the emotive illustration form. It explains this family's experience with the police in Indonesia and their lack of genuine identification documents and, with this explanation, creates rare insight, and some rationale, for their actions.

Milner's guest column in the *Australian* leads with the 'near history' form mentioned earlier. He goes on to demonstrate the second mode of the emotive illustration form. In the body of this article Milner asks readers to imagine themselves in the position of those asylum seekers on the boat that was destroyed at Christmas Island. His appeal is both rational and emotional:

[T]o those whose hearts are too hardened to recognise our true national character – of standing up for a fair go and decency – I say there but for the grace of God that wasn't you on the boat fleeing persecution. It wasn't your child or grandchild in the water at dawn on December 15. Moments of great tragedy and loss of life should be marked by an equal act of courage and decisiveness by those fortunate still to be here (2010).

With this he petitions for a change in policy: 'it's time to put out the welcome mat, open the door wide and set another seat at our Christmas table, as we have done before', a view also expressed by the RAC in its media releases (see Chapter 6). The

novelty of Milner's approach to the issue is evident when the column itself becomes news in a front page article by political reporters Franklin and Dodd (2010) on the same day. Its newsworthiness is enhanced by Milner's former position as a Labor Party secretary and 'key adviser' to Julia Gillard in her election campaign. That day's editorial is also devoted to Milner's challenge, calling on Australians to accept more refugees ('Playing our part for refugees' 2010). Milner's column incorporates three of the four forms of writing found in the articles in this collection, history, petitioning and emotive illustration. It is perhaps this integration, as well as the actual substance of the column, that creates an effective and thought-provoking article that prompts approving responses, even from the paper's own journalists and editors.

## **CONCLUSION**

The roles in journalism explored in this chapter demonstrate associated norms of content and style, including varying attachment to balance as an approximation of objectivity. They exhibit cultural patterns in journalism (Cottle 2000; Lukes 1974) that, like the processes of news production in newspapers examined in Chapter 7, influence who gets to be heard on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. The writing forms of fact, history, petitioning and emotive illustration illustrate the ways in which 'mythic truths' (Cottle 2000) are constructed and evoked in storytelling about asylum seeker boat arrivals. These forms refine readers' understandings of what stories are told on the issue, and the ways in which they are told. The fact writing form draws on the power of facts as 'truth'. Journalists also draw on history to frame their stories. Whereas the RAC uses history to critique the government's actions and storytelling, for example by alerting readers to histories of racism on this issue, the media articles are less tethered to a purpose or particular ideology and are thus more diverse in their deployment of history as a theme. For example, history can appear in simple references to politicians' previous statements, as well as to international historical tropes of violence such as World War II. The emotive illustration and petitioning forms are deployed in the media articles in ways that resemble the use of petitioning and human-interest stories in the RAC media releases. However, where the RAC embeds emotive illustration in larger stories of



asylum seeker lives and trauma to make its point, the media articles that do include this form tend to let the story stand alone, without context that promotes a position. Together, journalism roles and writing forms expose internal structures of the media stories and contribute to an understanding of who gets to be heard and what stories are told about asylum seeker boat arrivals.

This review of journalism's cultural patterns as contexts for media storytelling about asylum seekers sets the scene for the following chapter, Chapter 9, which examines the substance of the media articles for the fantasy themes and rhetorical visions expressed in the stories they tell.

## CHAPTER 9: FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS OF MEDIA ARTICLES

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 demonstrated the prominence of the asylum seeker boat arrival issue on the media agenda, and who gets to speak and frame the issue in the newspapers in this study – that is, who is heard on the issue. Chapter 8 added an assessment of the writers of the media articles and the writing forms they adopt. In this chapter, I analyse what these speakers and writers say on the issue – that is, what stories they tell about asylum seeker boat arrivals.

The analysis in this chapter is based on a significant archive of newspaper articles. A total of 743 articles were collected in the two periods being analysed. The fantasy themes and rhetorical visions (Bormann 1985a; Cragan & Shields 1992) identified in this analysis are the outcomes of the news production processes and journalistic practices outlined in chapters 7 and 8. These rhetorical visions capture how the issue has been represented to the readership of the newspapers. They are an outcome of both a news production process and the stories readers encounter in the process of public opinion formation on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals (Gunther 1998; Zerback, Koch & Kramer 2015).

As with the earlier chapters that reported the analysis of the RAC activist stories in interviews (Chapter 5) and media releases (Chapter 6), this chapter uses Fantasy Theme Analysis to ascertain the fantasy themes, rhetorical visions, sanctioning agents and master analogues present in the media articles. As Ernest Bormann contends, 'the force of fantasy is just as strong in mass communication as it is in small group communication' (1985b, p. ix). However, unlike the communication from the RAC activists, the rhetorical visions in these media articles often coalesce around questions rather than positions, capturing stories and sources in conflict or competition. This contestation is in the nature of news making; it is consistent with the journalistic tradition of presenting a more global view of an issue, incorporating competing sources and stories in the one article to achieve a semblance of balance

(Stephens 2015). This contest should be understood in the context of the dominance of the official sources explained in Chapter 7, giving them the primary definer role (Hall et al. 1978) on the issue which results in a narrow fantasy theme focus, and consequent effects on the media, political and public agendas.

This chapter is organised in three sections. The first and largest section identifies the fantasy themes evident in these media articles and the rhetorical visions they produce. Unlike the discussion in chapters 5 and 6, here I present the rhetorical visions at the time of the standoff and the time of the boat tragedy together. This merger allows for some level of comparison between stories told about asylum seekers in relation to the two markedly different incidents. The second section presents the analysis of the sanctioning agents used by the journalists to provide the authority for the stories reported in the first section. The third section examines the master analogues that underpin the rhetorical visions that appear in this collection, revealing the assumptions – and values – on which the rhetorical visions in the media articles are founded.

### **SECTION 1: RHETORICAL VISIONS**

Four rhetorical visions are discerned in the media articles across both incidents. Rhetorical visions 1 and 2 appear in both periods, although there are some differences in emphases and prominence of particular fantasy themes in relation to the two incidents captured. Rhetorical visions 3 and 4 appear only in relation to the boat tragedy. In addition, I discuss two fantasy themes that arise at the time of the boat tragedy and, from my subsequent observation, go on to attain significance in the public discourse on the issue after the periods examined in this study. These are introduced in this first section.

**Rhetorical vision 1: These boat arrivals are unwelcome and Australia should make every effort to prevent these asylum seekers from coming to settle here.**

This rhetorical vision (RV) appears with the prominence and space that marks it as the dominant frame in the media agenda on the issue in this study. It addresses the

question of 'Who or what is to blame for the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia?'. The assumption underpinning this RV is that these arrivals are unwelcome and that Australia should make every effort to prevent them from settling in Australia. The blame in the question implies this – who is at fault for their unwanted arrival? Unlike the RAC's RVs, RV1 assumes that Australia must not attract asylum seekers to Australia. Also unlike the RAC's RVs, this RV focuses on what the storytellers see as the national interests of Australia, rather than the RAC's assessment of Australia in relation to its international responsibilities. In this RV, Australia should not be seen to be 'soft' on asylum seekers and so must call on its regional neighbours to participate in repelling or preventing these asylum seeker journeys to Australia. People smugglers are vilified, pursued and prosecuted.

- **The push/pull debate**

The push/pull fantasy theme (FT) presents competing positions on factors that attract or repel asylum seekers in their choice of Australia as a refuge. Those who argue that Australia's policies attract asylum seekers to Australia are on the pull side of the contest: those who argue that factors outside of Australia's control are to blame for their arrival here, advocate push factors as the cause<sup>116</sup>. For example, reporter Mark Davis (2009) writes an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* entitled 'Push and pull of a human tide'. In it, he addresses the push versus pull arguments of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull. Using the fact form, Davis begins by providing some background to the exodus of Tamil asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, which introduces Rudd's argument that persecution of Tamils is a push factor for recent arrivals of asylum seekers to Australia. Davis then produces Turnbull's position that 'the government has gone soft on border protection: asylum seekers are being "pulled" by Labor's softer policies rather than pushed by global trends'. Davis cites the Sri Lankan ambassador to the United Nations who, he says, 'is backing the "pull factors" story big time'. A quote from the ambassador accords with Turnbull's position that a flight from persecution should have taken the Tamils to closer neighbouring countries, rather than to Australia. The

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<sup>116</sup> Occasionally, 'push' is also used to describe the 'push back' policies of previous governments, in particular, such as the call to 'stop the boats'.

implication is that they are economic migrants rather than refugees (cf. Kampmark 2006; McKay, Thomas & Blood 2011). Davis's (2009) news article on the 'the pushmi-pullyu affair' provides balance in his sources and their claims, consistent with the reporter role.

Proponents of the push/pull FT cite statistics to bolster their position and compare asylum seeker numbers in different years and with different governments in power. For example, Adrienne Millbank (2009) is a partisan academic guest columnist who devotes the majority of her article in the *Australian* to an account of the changes wrought by the Rudd Labor government when it took office. She contends that pull factors explain the current surge in boat arrivals and she summarises Rudd's policies to illustrate this, claiming his government's position is 'disintegrating'. She uses a combination of the fact and history forms to expound on this argument, detailing the policies over time and the related arrival numbers for asylum seekers.

The Sri Lankan government again enters the push/pull debate in an article by Angus Hohenboken (2009). He leads his story with this report: 'Sri Lanka has dismissed any suggestion Tamils are oppressed within its borders, saying those aboard the *Oceanic Viking* were drawn to Australia by its "magnetism" rather than the need for asylum' (cf. Klocker & Dunn 2003; Nicholls 1998).<sup>117</sup> The article continues:

[Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary] Mr Kohona said there were no push factors forcing boat people to leave Sri Lanka, only pull factors from Australia... 'It's the magnetic attraction of Australia that has brought these people to Australia's shores illegally'.

By using this quote from a Sri Lankan government official, Hohenboken gives prominence to the blame-shifting position of a government which has been the subject of UN human rights abuse enquiries and claims of persecution by Tamils seeking Australia's protection. The journalist's inclusion of Kohona's reference to

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<sup>117</sup> This charge of illegitimacy is one also found in Rowe and O'Brien's study of parliamentary discourse (2014), and Every and Augoustinos's similar study (2007).

illegal entry signals the illegal/legal, illegitimate/legitimate binaries found in other studies about asylum seekers (e.g., Rowe & O'Brien 2014). It also again (like Kevin Andrews's column referred to in the previous chapter) moves beyond the binaries that determine Australia's treatment of asylum seekers – onshore/offshore, authorised/unauthorised and arrival to prescribed/excised territory – to assert a false claim that boat arrivals are illegal. This claim goes unchallenged by either Hohenboken or other sources in his article.

At the time of the boat tragedy, the media and its sources have a focus for their blame – the very visible deaths of the asylum seekers from the boat involved, the *SIEV 221*. This loss of life is blamed on pull factors, with the occasional reference to push factors in the countries from which these asylum seekers have fled. Paul Maley (2011b) creates a poetic opening to his pull story: 'like the Statue of Liberty, Christmas Island beckons to refugees instead of deterring them'. In the *Daily Telegraph*, conservative columnist Miranda Devine (2010) explicitly blames Labor government policies for asylum seeker boat journeys and, in particular the *SIEV 221* tragedy. She uses a combination of the fact and history forms to compare numbers during the Howard administration with the numbers currently arriving under Gillard. Devine represents the pull of these policies as 'the growing tragedy of lives lost in Labor's sugar trap'. Sugar trap is a reference to what she says is the term used by Indonesians when asking Ruddock what Australia was doing about the 'sugar' in its attractive policies. This metaphor is repeated in the editorial of the *Australian* the next day, where the deck reads 'The Prime Minister needs to "take the sugar off the table"' ('Labor must not fall for a policy wedge on boats' 2010).

In contrast, Peter van Onselen (2010), a contributing editor to the *Australian*, criticises both conservative commentators and refugee advocates for blaming the politicians for the boat tragedy. He represents the push argument when he says the blame belongs with 'the brutal dictators of overseas regimes asylum seekers flee from, or indeed the people smugglers who trade on human misery'.

In only a few articles are refugee advocates and scholars given the opportunity to argue that global factors including wars and oppressive regimes push people from their countries of origin and towards Australia. For example, in Dodd's (2009b) article at the time of the standoff, mentioned in Chapter 8, he includes Frederika Steen's comment that '[s]o-called push factors driving Afghan and Sri Lankan refugees to risk their lives in a hazardous boat journey to Australia were not "economic" but "life-and-death"'.

- **Tough/soft**

In the tough/soft FT, the story is about domestic politics and which political party, government and policy is or was tough or soft in its treatment of boat arrivals of asylum seekers. In this case, 'tough' denotes both communication on the issue by the parties involved and policies they adopt or promote. At the time of the standoff toughness is lauded, with different politicians vying for the toughness imprimatur. Laurie Oakes (2009b) offers an example of this competition when he says in his column that 'in case there are any votes at stake, [Prime Minister] Rudd is determined to sound every bit as hairy-chested as [opposition leader] Malcolm Turnbull'. Communication and policies are designed to thwart asylum seekers' efforts to reach the Australian mainland and Australia's protections. In another article, Oakes (2009a) goes on to cite the Home Affairs Minister's spokesperson, who characterises the voyages as 'people smuggling ventures' rather than the efforts of desperate people to seek asylum from persecution. With this inclusion, Oakes foregrounds the people smuggler 'business model', points to the criminality of this activity, and taints the asylum seekers by association (cf. Every & Augoustinos 2008a; Grewcock 2009; Rowe & O'Brien 2014). The Minister also perpetuates a falsehood in this article – uncontested by the journalist or an alternative source – when he says that it is 'illegal' to travel to Australia by boat to seek asylum.

In coverage of the boat tragedy, fewer references are made to tough policies than at the time of the standoff. Instead there is an emphasis on Labor's soft communication on the issue – 'soft' is used as a pejorative term – or policies that are deemed to have failed in deterring these refugee arrivals, attracting blame for their deaths. The

language is a masculinist posturing, with both sides (opposition and government) claiming the tough position. For example, at the time of the standoff, the *Daily Telegraph* columnist Piers Akerman (2009a) comments on Rudd's claim that he is taking 'hardline measures'. Akerman summarises his disdain for Rudd's claim with his final comment: 'Rudd's talk of hardline measures is no more than soft soap'.

In another example, Samantha Maiden and Amanda Hodge (2009) refer to public opinion on this contest of tough/soft when they report on a Newspoll conducted for the paper. They say it found that '46 per cent thought the government was "too soft" while only 16 per cent believed the government's policies were "too hard"'. This hard/soft dichotomy is embedded in the survey questions and has a flow-on effect on public discourse on the issue, at the least through reporting of results in these terms. Like the example of van Onselen in the push/pull debate, Mike Carlton's (2010) column in the *Sydney Morning Herald* also derides commentators for their 'blame game' in his reference to the tough/soft FT. He says 'the rat pack of the loony right went for the jugular' even as victims' corpses were still to be recovered. Tim Blair's (2010) column in the *Daily Telegraph*, referring to soft Labor policies, is an example of the object of Carlton's criticism: 'It is the fury and bitterness of those who endorsed Labor's softened and boat-attracting asylum seeker policies, and who now can't avoid the hideous outcome'. Blair argues that even Labor's supporters should now be convinced of the danger of the policy changes in this area – the 'softening' under Labor – now that 'it's right there in front of them. There are pictures'. Editorials in the *Daily Telegraph* also develop this theme: for example, 'For some considerable time the *Daily Telegraph* has warned of the problems implicit in a soft policy on asylum seekers' ('Deaths show folly of Labor's too-soft policy' 2010).

- **National/international**

The third FT in RV1 expresses a tension between national and international factors that may be blamed for the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia. This national/international tension is a key motif throughout this thesis. The actions and inaction of Australia's regional neighbours are canvassed to consider the part they



play in the story of these arrivals. This is juxtaposed with Australia's responsibilities, particularly as a signatory to the *Refugee Convention*, as well as its diplomatic relations with its neighbours.

First, national politics is a frequent context, if not focus, for the articles produced in relation to the standoff and boat tragedy. This is particularly the case in the *Australian*. For example, at the time of the standoff, Maley focuses on the implications of the issue for domestic politics:

The Coalition see[s] illegal immigration as a rich political environment, but only if a clear point of difference between itself and the government can be established... If Rudd were to stem the flow of boats, the result could be catastrophic for the Coalition (Maley 2009a).

This emphasis on the ramifications for domestic politics is also evident in the many references to opinion polls in the articles, particularly those results published by the Lowy Institute.<sup>118</sup> Commentators assess the attractiveness of soft or tough approaches of the political parties and their leaders against these results. In a column in the *Australian*, political editor Dennis Shanahan opines on the state of domestic politics on this issue. He argues that in the 'raw politics' of Australia's domestic political landscape there is so much 'cant' 'hypocrisy' and 'dissembling' that 'it'd choke a big brown dog', making the issue more 'divisive' than it should be (2009a). This 'raw politics' is starkly evident in relation to the cost of bringing to Sydney the bodies and the families of those who died in the boat tragedy. The opposition's Morrison declares that it is an unreasonable cost to the taxpayer and leader Tony Abbott agrees. In an article by Simon Benson titled 'Coalition rift', shadow treasurer Joe Hockey is quoted disagreeing with them both:

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<sup>118</sup> The Lowy Institute (2016) is a self-described international policy think tank located in Sydney, Australia. It is independent of government and political parties, founded by a leading Australian immigrant businessman. It conducts research, events and conferences on global issues.

No matter what the colour of your skin, no matter what the nature of your faith, if your child has died or a father has died, you want to be there for the ceremony to say goodbye, and I totally understand the importance of this to those families (2011b).

As Hockey looks to find a common 'humanity' in the debate, his references to skin colour and faith signal that these factors are implicit contributors to the debate. Therefore, while he draws on a trope used by the RAC and other liberal commentators to minimise a focus on differences, Hockey simultaneously foregrounds these differences. On the same day, the *Daily Telegraph* editorial agrees that Australia should 'put aside politics in time of tragedy' ('Put aside politics in time of tragedy' 2011). Morrison's stance proves alienating and is abandoned after considerable public condemnation. It is clear that the nature of the boat tragedy prompts different responses to those of the standoff, with less tolerance for internecine issues in Australia's domestic political scene. This public and political reaction to Morrison and Abbott on this point also resonates with the RAC interviewees' stress on the importance of this issue for who/what Australia is as a nation – for its identity.

Second, in reference to the international context for RV1, the standoff focuses on relations with Indonesia and Sri Lanka while the boat tragedy expands this international scope to include Timor l'Este and Malaysia, two countries (in addition to Indonesia) Australia attempts to co-opt for regional processing of asylum seeker claims. At the time of the standoff, some articles canvass Indonesia's part in the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia. Stephen Fitzpatrick (2009b) balances foreign affairs spokespersons from Australia and Indonesia in a news article about the crisis talks underway in Indonesia to resolve the standoff. Fitzpatrick goes on to quote the Indonesian spokesperson: "'(We need) a win-win solution,'" Dr Sujatmiko said. "If there is an Indonesian solution there should also be an Australian solution'". In this article, Indonesian spokespeople 'flex their muscles' – with nationalist interests (cf. Gale 2004; O'Doherty & Augoustinos 2008) evident on both sides. There is a threat that the Australian Customs vessel (the *Oceanic Viking*) will be required to leave

Indonesian waters if the deadline expires without a resolution: “If the permission is expired, that’s it, they have to go”, said Colonel Darwanto’. Fitzpatrick’s reference to what is known as Rudd’s ‘Indonesian Solution’ identifies Rudd’s efforts on asylum seekers with Howard’s Pacific Solution. The use of ‘solution’ in this way in both cases connotes the ‘Final Solution’, Hitler’s plan to exterminate the Jewish people in World War II (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum n.d.). This connotation is powerful for this issue in Australia as it also alludes to the history of treatment of asylum seekers just before World War II, when Jewish asylum seeker boats/ships were turned away from a number of countries, with many refugees returned to Europe and their deaths. The power of the history of the issue for Australia (and the world) is evoked in the use of this term.

Third is the foreign affairs and trade implications of the government’s efforts to inveigle regional governments to join Australia in its attempts to stem the flow of asylum seekers. For example, columnist Paul Kelly writes on Australia’s relations with Indonesia at the time of the standoff. He refers to Australia’s reliance on Indonesia’s cooperation to intercept asylum seekers travelling to Australia by boat. Kelly claims that this reliance is ‘a risky proposition’, especially if Indonesia’s ‘pro-Australian’ President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono leaves office. He quotes the Australian Immigration Minister: “Our arrangements with Indonesia and the rest of the region are absolutely vital”, Evans told this column yesterday. “International responses are at the core of this problem”. Kelly then concludes with, ‘So the aim is to keep the boats away from Australian waters’ (2009b). In accordance with this, as Paul Toohey (2009) points out in his earlier article, with Manus Island and Nauru closed under the Rudd government, ‘Indonesia is it’. This reliance is also given prominence in negotiations over the fate of the asylum seekers on the *Oceanic Viking*, discussed in another article by Fitzpatrick (2009c).

In the lead-up to the boat tragedy, Prime Minister Gillard proposes a detention centre on Timor l’Este – described as a ‘risible’ idea by Chris Kenny (2010) in the *Australian* – but the proposal is rejected by the Timor l’Este government. Dodd

reports this rejection with a quote from Timor l'Este's Deputy Prime Minister, Jose Luis Guterres: 'Why not in Australia itself which has an immense territory and available resources?' (2011). In his column in the *Australian*, Kenny describes this Timor l'Este proposal as damaging Australia's interests and 'an egregious and unforced foreign policy error that needs to be rectified quickly'. Kenny asserts that the Australian government fails to understand the regional view of people smuggling – this assertion echoes those of several of the RAC members (e.g., Ben, Chris, Jenna). Kenny goes on to declare the pull FT, when he says that it 'is seen as Australia's problem'.

The fourth aspect of this national/international FT is the influence Australia may wield because of its financial and technical aid to a number of countries in the region. Indonesia, Timor l'Este and Sri Lanka receive Australian aid in a number of forms. Australia's consequent influence highlights its position as a First World, and postcolonial, nation in South-East Asia. This is a point also made by RAC interviewees, who accuse Australia of using its position as a wealthy nation in the region, providing aid to others, to 'bully' its neighbours into cooperating to deter asylum seekers from journeying to Australia. In her column, Hodge writes about the inducements Australia is offering Sri Lanka to prevent Tamil asylum seekers from leaving for Australia. She refers to the Australian government 'bearing gifts in the hope of winning cooperation in its bid to reduce asylum seeker numbers' (2009). Hodge also comments that 'Both [gifts] bore the whiff of appeasement'. As with the earlier reference to 'solution', the word 'appeasement' is another historical allusion to World War II, this time to pre-war negotiations with Hitler. On the international stage, Sri Lanka is being challenged for human rights abuses that continue after the civil war between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ended. Thus, Australia is colluding with a regime accused of human rights abuses against Tamils who, at the time of the standoff, comprise the majority of those making the journey to Australia to flee persecution.

The provision of inducements is also canvassed in an article by Dodd in the *Australian* at the time of the standoff. Dodd cites the Dean of the Melbourne

University law school, James Hathaway, who says that the government is trying to 'buy its way out of responsibility' in 'paying off partner states' (2009b). Hathaway goes on to refer to Prime Minister Rudd as conscripting the Indonesians 'to do our dirty work'. This alludes to a corrupt practice as well as to images of servile (and unwilling) countries and their peoples doing the tasks colonial powers eschew. Opposition immigration spokesperson Sharman Stone is also cited, referring to the government's actions as 'calling on Indonesia to do the heavy lifting'. This standpoint also reflects the views of the RAC interviewees. For example, Chris refers to Australia's negotiations with Indonesia and Timor l'Este as colonial arrogance driven by the domestic political imperative and the allegiances that Australian money might buy (2012, pers. comm., 9 October). In a corollary to the notion of gift-giving, Kenny in the *Australian* points out that 'Malaysian and Indonesian politicians cannot afford to be seen as willing lapdogs to chauvinistic Australian imperatives' (2010).

- **People smuggling**

In RV1, the articles that mention people smuggling report on the views of the various politicians on this issue. This is a minor FT at the time of the standoff, but it becomes prominent in relation to the boat tragedy. The underlying assumption of this FT is that people smugglers are to blame for asylum seeker arrivals. Many stories in this study demonstrate the 'new racism' (Barker, cited in Gale 2004, p. 323), particularly those about people smugglers and people smuggling. This new racism is evident when state sources in government and opposition condemn people smugglers but also condemn asylum seekers by association. It is a sleight of hand, consistent with what Danielle Every and Mary Augoustinos call the 'slippery nature' of the new racism (2007, p. 411). By focussing on deterring people smugglers, there is little argument about asylum seekers raised – which would perhaps be in poor taste (to blame the victims) after the boat tragedy deaths – and yet they are the 'casualties' whether or not they use the boats.

Journalists cite politicians who argue about which policies might deter or encourage people smugglers, much as they argue about deterrence measures against asylum seekers. In the articles about the standoff, journalists' stories about people

smuggling ignore the history of this practice in World War II. That is, people smugglers played a vital role in saving Jews and other victims of German persecution in World War II and many were subsequently celebrated for their actions. In this collection of articles, terms such as 'solution' and 'appeasement' connote Hitler and World War II but journalists make no similar allusions to the historical practice of people smuggling and the relevance of understanding its place in contemporary global people movements. This unequivocal stance towards people smugglers is demonstrated in a column by Steve Lewis in the *Daily Telegraph* when he declares 'That people smugglers are scum, and the dangerous trade they ply is demonically most vile, is indisputable' (2009b).

In the 14 months after the standoff there is a move to further demonise people smugglers in communication from parliamentarians, media commentators and columnists. Prime Minister Gillard is quoted extensively referring to people smuggling as an 'evil trade' (e.g., Coorey 2010), attempting to shift onto it the 'blame' for the arrival of the asylum seekers. This is a call echoed by the opposition and the government in relation to the boat tragedy. An editorial in the *Australian* in the wake of the boat tragedy adopts Gillard's descriptor when it condemns people smuggling as 'an evil trade' ('Tragic loss of life at the island' 2010). This editorial not only blames people smugglers for the boat wreck and loss of life, it also finishes with the point that the message of deterrence must also be directed at 'those they seek to exploit', the asylum seekers. A few months later, an editorial in the same paper diverges from this blame directed at the asylum seekers. Instead, the writer says that the opposition can condemn people smugglers 'for preying on others' desperation', but not the asylum seekers who 'should not risk their lives in this way, but we understand why they do' ('Hard-headed, not hard-hearted' 2011). Use of the terms 'industry' and 'trade' in the earlier editorial (and in other articles) signal congruence with the 'people-smuggler business model' metaphor promulgated by politicians and columnists in media coverage. For example, in Dylan Welch's article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he quotes Prime Minister Gillard who wants to 'smash the people-smuggling business model' and remove 'the very evil product that they sell' (2010).

These designations for people smuggling focus on the exchange of money for these journeys (trade), the profit motive behind their operation (business), and the organisation required to get the journeys underway (industry) – and not on the action and inaction of nation states in the region in delaying processing of asylum seeker claims, a trigger for many to undertake these boat journeys. Russell Skelton refers to ‘sophisticated people smuggling syndicates’ (2011), an additional inference to size in a network across the region. Many writers blame the people smugglers for the boat wreck, reporting the search for the crew and organisers responsible for *SIEV 221*’s journey to Christmas Island (e.g., Paige Taylor 2011a; Alford & Maley 2011; Alford, Maley & Zumaidar 2011a; Alford, Maley & Zumaidar 2011b).

In comments about the boat tragedy, politicians state that ‘politics should stay out of this’ (‘Heroic deeds in a disaster’ 2011) but it is refugee advocates and conservative columnists who blame the government for the deaths. Two articles, one in the *Australian* and the other in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, adopt a mixture of the fact form and emotive illustration when they quote Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the RAC, expressing the advocates’ position. For example,

‘The Australian government are to blame,’ said Ian Rintoul of the Refugee Action Coalition. ‘They should be processing people in Indonesia. They should be dropping the anti-people-smuggling laws so that people feel they can safely contact Australian authorities without any recriminations’ (Needham, Stephenson, & Allard 2010).

These two articles communicate key messages from RAC media releases on the issue: for example, a ‘welcome refugee policy’ (RV5 in Chapter 6), Australia is responsible (RV1 in Chapter 6), and people smuggling laws are dangerous (RV1 in Chapter 6). Condemnation of people smugglers is strongly resisted in the interviews with the RAC activists. Apart from these two quotes from Rintoul in the newspaper articles, any defence of people smuggling is entirely absent from this corpus of media articles. Another RAC interviewee, Anna, says:

Whatever their motivations, they [people-smugglers] are providing a service to desperate people whose lives would be very damaged, if not ended, if they weren't able to get access to the ability to move around the world (2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

Anna adds that 'Oscar Schindler was a people smuggler... He had a business model', another reference in the interviews to World War II.

### **Rhetorical vision 2: What is the human story behind these journeys to Australia?**

The second, minor, RV expressed in these media articles is the human story of asylum seeker journeys to Australia and what prompts their flight from the sites of their alleged persecution. It is minor in that it occupies much less space and prominence than RV1 in the articles on the issue, although it gains more attention in relation to the boat tragedy, a human drama. Unlike RV1, this RV is not riven with tensions – the FTs in RV2 do not capture competing stories. Instead, the articles allow the asylum seekers to explain why they left Indonesia, and their homelands, and what conditions in detention are like for them. The nature of the boat tragedy creates two additional FTs in RV2 that relate specifically to this incident – the witness experience, and the story about the visibility of asylum seekers in this tragedy. RV2 is most often evident in the emotive illustration form but also takes the fact or history forms when stories are about conditions in the home countries of asylum seekers or in detention facilities in Indonesia and Australia. Petitioning in this RV occurs when asylum seekers plead for a change to their circumstances, when advocates call for change, and when the occasional columnist calls for action to ameliorate the suffering of asylum seekers in Australia's care. This RV captures the RAC perspective that appealing to shared human experiences will engender empathy and compassion in the Australian people towards asylum seekers. These human stories appear in several ways.

First, there are some articles where the asylum seekers are quoted providing information about current circumstances or conditions. For example, Tom Allard (2009b) uses the emotive illustration form to tell the asylum seeker story of the



standoff in a sympathetic tone. The reporter was able to collect notes wrapped in plastic bags and secretly thrown overboard by asylum seekers on the *Oceanic Viking*. In this article, Allard refers to this communication as ‘a variation on the message in a bottle’, suggesting that the asylum seekers are stranded, isolated and desperately seeking help. The article explains in quotes why the asylum seekers left their home countries and Indonesia:

‘For four, five years we waited until we’re tired before finally departing illegally by boat’ the note said. It was a plea for sympathy and an attempt to show Australians [that] those on board were refugees, not freeloading economic migrants.

Allard then offers his opinion on the asylum seekers’ stories: ‘It was certainly credible. Hundreds of Sri Lankans live in an agonising limbo in Indonesia, waiting years for a country to take them, along with Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistanis’. Readers hear the voices of the asylum seekers in the context of factual information about ‘the hidden engine driving people smuggling’. Allard also comments on the political ‘point-scoring’ that surrounds the issue, using the fact form to underline his point in a reference to the push/pull debate. He notes that the facts of very low resettlement numbers mean ‘That’s plenty of “push” – and a long queue’. This article provides a rare glimpse into the factors that prompt asylum seekers to make their journeys from Indonesia.

Second, news stories in this second RV relate facts that present the human dilemma, often provided by refugee advocates. For example, Dodd leads his news story by chronicling the health problems faced by those on *Jaya Lestari 5*, the second boat involved in the standoff: ‘The health of 255 asylum seekers crammed on a wooden boat that is anchored off the Indonesian port of Merak is deteriorating’ (2009a). Dodd’s story relies on information from advocates in direct contact with the asylum seekers, illustrated in this quote: ‘The Merak asylum seekers have just one communal toilet for more than 250 people, said Saradha Nathan, of the Australian Tamil Congress’.

Third, journalists tell the stories of the human toll for asylum seekers. For example, Brendan Nicholson writes a feature article, titled 'For those in peril on the sea', in which he employs the history form to detail other journeys, painting a vivid picture of the terror faced by asylum seekers on these boats:<sup>119</sup>

But it is certain that many hundreds more men, women and children taking a desperate route to Australia on smugglers' dilapidated boats have died in terror-filled darkness far out to sea, sometimes lashed to railings without lifejackets in fierce storms or locked away below decks (2010).

Often one person or one story represents the asylum seeker experience – a characteristic of the 'human interest angle' (Gillman 2015; Newsom & Haynes 2017). For example, Seena, the nine-year-old boy orphaned in the boat disaster, becomes the face of this tragedy in the Australian media. David King and Patricia Karvelas (2010) use Seena's story to introduce statistics on the numbers and conditions for unaccompanied minors in detention facilities. Paige Taylor (2011b) covers the subsequent funerals of Seena's family in Sydney in February 2011. She says of Seena that he is 'known inside Christmas Island's family camp as the boy with a blank stare'. Such sympathetic stories create the opportunity for readers to get inside the asylum seeker experience – this personalisation (Bednarek & Caple 2012) is a technique used by journalists and public relations practitioners to elicit understanding and an emotional response from readers.

Seena's story is emblematic of orphaned asylum seekers and the travails of unaccompanied minors in detention. However, not all stories of unaccompanied minors are sympathetic. Maley (2011a) includes a quote from then-shadow Cabinet secretary and former Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock. Ruddock says that children are being used as a means for entire families of refugees to come to

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<sup>119</sup> This headline, produced by a sub-editor, references the last line of a Navy hymn associated with civilian seafarers as well as the US and UK Navies. It was also the last song played on the Titanic (Christiansen, *The Telegraph*, 22 September 2007).

Australia – an ‘anchor’, as the opposition’s Morrison has said.<sup>120</sup> Here Ruddock is demonising the childrens’ journeys – in a strike back at the tenor of human interest articles to date – claiming Australia is being manipulated by the children’s families. This story in Maley’s article presages a new FT that gains prominence and momentum in later months and years.

Fourth, several articles at the time of the boat tragedy and its aftermath canvass the successful transitions of Vietnamese refugees into Australian life. They read as ‘success stories’, with refugees portrayed as part of the Australian community, contributing and productive, holding positions of esteem. For example, in a mix of the history and emotive illustration forms, Malcolm Brown (2011) tells the story of an asylum seeker who arrived in Australia when she was only 18 months old and has become a doctor – Dr Duong. He quotes her:

‘You get so much bad press about boat people and asylum seekers,’ she said...

‘They are just humans... in desperate situations... wanting to make a better life’.

- **The witness experience**

The boat tragedy was different to most other deaths at sea in the region in that it was witnessed by so many Australian residents of Christmas Island. This witnessing by Australians is also a key difference from the standoff which occurred in Indonesia and out of sight of Australians, including journalists. Consequently, a number of articles focus on the trauma suffered by the witnesses of the incident and, significantly, to a lesser degree on the asylum seekers’ trauma. These eyewitness stories (Mortensen 2015) are important in that the incident is seen through the eyes of ordinary Australians. For example: “‘There was a really sickening crack,” Prince said. “It was something I’ll never forget”’ (Perpitch, Guest & Barrass 2010). The frustration and distress of the witnesses is related in this story: ‘Unbelievable horror. There were literally

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<sup>120</sup> Under the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* children are entitled to request that their parents get residency if they are settled in a country because they are refugees. At the time of the boat tragedy there has been an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors – 41 per cent – in a few months.

mothers holding babies up on the boat before it hit. There was just nothing any of us could do'. The inclusion of stories of the witnesses' trauma exemplifies the tendency of Australia's media to, first, focus on Australians and, second, to sympathise with those like ourselves. This is consistent with newsworthiness principles of proximity and human interest, as well as with cultural theory (Ettema 2010). Referring to the witnesses' trauma, Maiden writes an article for the *Australian* quoting Morrison, who addresses the Christmas Island residents when he says 'Lending any assistance at all was a Herculean task' (2010). He calls them 'heroic' and says 'We stand by them today as fellow Australians'. Not stated is that we Australians also stand by the asylum seekers. This is a clear example of positioning the asylum seekers as the 'other' by omission (cf. Green 2003; Masocha 2015; Rowe & O'Brien 2014).

- **Out into the light – making the asylum seekers visible**

A significant FT in RV2 with the boat tragedy, and absent from the standoff coverage, addresses the visibility of this tragedy for Australians (not just the eyewitnesses). Andrew Stevenson from the *Sydney Morning Herald* reports an islander saying that 'the disaster had made the refugees more human' (2010). The islander also said 'You can't sit and watch people drowning in front of your face and feel helpless to save them without being affected'. This visibility undermines successive governments' policies that have kept asylum seekers away from public view – 'faceless and nameless' – in remote and mostly inaccessible detention centres.

Ross Gittins, in his column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, considers the impact of the visibility of the asylum seekers affected by the boat tragedy when he assesses what made Gillard change her mind about the treatment of the nine-year-old orphan, Seena:

What changed? Here is a clue: in the efforts to gratify and exploit public resentment of 'illegals', governments of both colours have given the highest priority to preventing individual boat people from telling their stories to the media... Our attitudes towards asylum seekers may be impervious to rational argument, but they're not to... the positive emotion of empathy (2011).

Here, Gittens articulates the theme evident in the interviews with a number of the RAC activists that the government has a deliberate policy of ‘keeping [the asylum seekers] inhuman’ not allowing them to say ‘I want my story to be known’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

David Marr, a progressive columnist with *The Sydney Morning Herald* who authored a book on the *Tampa* incident<sup>121</sup>, makes a similar point:

Until now, these horrors have happened out of sight. Back in the Howard years, extraordinary precautions were taken to make sure the public never saw ‘humanising images’ of suffering refugees. The idea, it seemed, was to maintain the rage against boat people (2010).

The *Daily Telegraph* editorial two days earlier also refers to the impact of making the asylum seekers visible – ‘Now Australia has witnessed graphic and distressing evidence’ – but links this to the government and its responsibility for ‘a supposedly humane system’ (‘Deaths show folly of Labor's too-soft policy’ 2010).

### **Rhetorical vision 3: Asylum seekers cost the Australian taxpayer dearly.**

RV3 also appears at the time of the boat tragedy. It captures several FTs that express concerns for the Australian taxpayer about the costs of asylum seeker arrivals: of onshore, alternative and Christmas Island detention; of court processes, such as appeals and compensation; of detaining people awaiting the appeal process (‘non-refugees’ Laming 2011); of Labor's border protection policies, in general references; and, most controversially, the costs of flying to Sydney for their funerals the victims of the boat tragedy and their families. Although these cost themes refer specifically to the issue of asylum seeker arrivals, cost to the taxpayer is a concern that expresses a more generic Australian RV, and a vision of the role of the journalist in the community as watchdog of the public interest (Macnamara 2014).

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<sup>121</sup> See Chapter 4 for description of this incident that occurred during the Howard Coalition government's tenure.

FTs that contribute to this RV often follow the fact-based news story, detailing the latest court case, information on detention costs, and the broader border protection costs in staffing patrol boats and funding refugee status determination processes and detention. However, interpretive journalists<sup>122</sup> sometimes insert emotive or inflammatory words into stories that are otherwise relatively benign statements of fact. For example, in a news article Lewis (2011a) in the *Daily Telegraph* writes of the ‘blowout’ to the budget for border protection, that taxpayers are ‘forking out’ many millions of dollars and this is since ‘Labor softened its border protection policies’. Costs of detention are mentioned in reference to unusual or alternative accommodation provided. In another example, reporter Benson’s page one story in the *Daily Telegraph* is headlined ‘Asylum seekers’ \$2.5 million hotel bill’ (2011a). Benson develops the balance of views style of writing in a fact-based form. He introduces Morrison, who says the government ‘is paying five-star rates for roadside motel accommodation’, a claim then refuted by refugee advocates who say it is ‘no grander than a demountable camp’. A spokesperson for the Minister then defends the costs of alternative accommodation: “‘Immigration detention is expensive – whether it’s onshore or offshore”, the spokesman said.’

Morrison is the subject of the most contentious references to costs, as noted earlier. Van Onselen is one of many columnists who comment on Morrison's public statements about the costs of asylum seeker funerals. Van Onselen (2011) writes that, despite Morrison’s talent for ‘getting a headline’, these comments are ‘more than a little unedifying’. He goes on to say ‘shame on’ Morrison for reflecting opinions like those of One Nation, rather than ‘trying to reshape [this] opinion with leadership’. The backlash against Morrison's comments comes at a time when images of Seena at his father’s funeral have appeared in all newspapers, prompting sympathetic responses by politicians and the media.

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<sup>122</sup> Journalists who write in this way are designated interpretive journalists in this study (see Chapter 8).

#### **Rhetorical vision 4: Multiculturalism and racism.**

Like RV3, the fourth RV that appears at the time of the boat tragedy belongs to a larger realm than the issue of asylum seeker arrivals. Multiculturalism is a RV that can be claimed by the Australian state. It is a trope that is deployed in all three sites in this study. Multiculturalism is both a descriptor for Australian society and a policy. Since the final abandonment in 1973 of the White Australia policy, there has been bipartisan support for multiculturalism and efforts to reject racism.<sup>123</sup> However, in February 2011, a number of articles appear about multiculturalism and racism. Three events occur that precipitate the emergence of this commentary: firstly, in response to Morrison's comments about funding the funerals, the Labor Prime Minister says in parliament that this marks an end to bipartisan efforts to avoid racism; secondly, the media reports Morrison's comments in the Coalition party room about making use of community fears about Muslim immigration for political gain; thirdly, the government is reported to have reinstated a multiculturalism portfolio in the Ministry, to some internal consternation.

Days after the boat tragedy, and before Morrison's comments, Drew Warne-Smith presages the upcoming theme about multiculturalism and racism. He writes a 'review' in the *Australian*, titled 'We appreciate our immigrants – if they earn it' (2010). In this feature-length article he writes about Australian immigration, its history and its relevance for the current debate about asylum seekers. His column displays a combination of the history and fact forms. He cites research for 'The Immigration Nation Report', saying that 'The unpalatable truth is that Australians today are less likely to support asylum seekers – even if they are proven to be genuine refugees – than we were 30 years ago'. He says that the research indicates drivers for 'our fears' of asylum seekers range 'from concerns about sustainable population and the strain on already stretched public services, welfare programs and infrastructure, to xenophobia and security concerns'. On the last point, the research he cites found that Australians still see asylum seekers as 'the likely perpetrators' of

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<sup>123</sup> As a policy it is entwined with anti-racism measures and enshrined in a number of laws such as those that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic background or religion. Successive governments have funded and supported services that sustain and encourage multiculturalism.

attacks by 'home-grown terrorists'.<sup>124</sup> He adds a quote from Ipsos researcher Rebecca Huntley that there is 'more than a hint of that distinctly Australian egalitarian sensibility in which we bridle at anyone expecting a favour'. She says. 'It's: "No mate, wait your turn, you've got to queue up"'. This exemplifies new racism strategies that 'present practices of exclusion and oppression as legitimate... [including] liberal tropes of equality and fairness' (Every & Augoustinos 2007, p. 413). It is consistent with a number of studies (e.g., Grewcock 2009; Kampmark 2006; Rowe & O'Brien 2014) that identify new racism as a means of avoiding rejection explicitly on racial grounds. Warne-Smith's article also presents the distinction in government and media communication between good and bad refugees. Those who wait patiently in queues in refugee camps overseas are good refugees; those who travel to Australia unannounced in boats are bad refugees (if they are refugees at all).

One of the earliest articles about multiculturalism in this period is a negative story by guest columnist John Pasquarelli (2011), an advisor to Pauline Hanson, leader of Pauline Hanson's One Nation,<sup>125</sup> a party well known for its stance against immigration and refugees (Savage 2015). Pasquarelli begins by writing about former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's establishment of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs in 1978. He says 'In the blink of an eye, the multicultural die had been cast and, while ordinary Australians didn't know it then, their once stable and ordered society would never be the same again'. Pasquarelli says that those who supported Fraser 'share the responsibility and the shame for selling out mainstream Australia', which he calls a 'betrayal'. Pasquarelli's repeated, normative references to 'ordinary Australians' hails white Australians in a call to arms and further echoes sentiments of the White Australia policy. Like other new racism strategies, it is an effort to reframe public debate on the issue as a quest to preserve 'our' culture (Every & Augoustinos 2007, p. 426).

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<sup>124</sup> This link was first made by Prime Minister John Howard soon after the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001.

<sup>125</sup> Pauline Hanson has been described by cultural studies scholar Ien Ang (2003, p. 51) as standing for 'the anxieties and prejudices of White Australia'.



In the *Daily Telegraph*, Piers Akerman is scathing about 'a kumbaya concept like multiculturalism' and condemns the Labor government for wanting 'Australians to pay migrants to maintain their customs and traditions when they come to this nation' (2011). In his hyperbolic style he writes that 'The zombie of multiculturalism must be returned to the crypt where it belongs.' Akerman rejects non-Western immigrants and disparages asylum seekers, expressing an explicitly racist view on the issue. In an article by Lewis, Liberal Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for supporting families, Cory Bernardi,<sup>126</sup> says 'Islam itself is the problem' (2011b). In this article, Bernardi asserts that multiculturalism has 'failed' and links this to 'concerns about the isolation of Islam'. This rash of articles on multiculturalism and racism appears after months of coverage of the boat tragedy and the funerals that initially expressed compassion before moving to apportion blame. Bernardi and Akerman exemplify the rejection of even this compassion. Rejection of Islam and multiculturalism is a barely concealed attack on asylum seeker boat arrivals.<sup>127</sup>

Talk of racism arises in response to Morrison's comments to his Cabinet colleagues that they should exploit fear of Muslim asylum seekers. In an effort to understand and explain Australia's apparent antipathy towards boat arrivals, Gittins writes about Australia's 'xenophobia' from an evolutionary standpoint (2011). In this column he says that evolution 'has left us with an instinctive fear of outsiders', which is 'visceral' and 'not susceptible to rational argument'. Gittins refers to the bipartisan agreement not to 'tap this vein' of 'fear and resentment' that is 'just beneath the surface' and brings out 'the worst in the Australian psyche'. He includes a quote from Prime Minister Gillard to make his final point:

'People easily fear change. People easily fear difference,' she said. 'It is the job of national leadership to reassure in the face of that fear, to explain to people that there is ultimately nothing to be afraid of'.

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<sup>126</sup> Bernardi was on the far right of the Liberal Party and a social conservative. He has since resigned from the party (February 2017) to form his own conservative party.

<sup>127</sup> Asylum seekers on board the *SIEV 221* that crashed off Christmas Island were mostly Muslims from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.

With this column, Gittins reminds Gillard and her parliamentary colleagues of the need for leadership if this fear is to be ameliorated.

The concept of race and the presence of racism underpin Australia's position on asylum seeker boat arrivals at the times of the standoff and the boat tragedy. It is a legacy of evolution, as Gittins writes, and Australia's historical treatment of Indigenous Australians, migrants and asylum seekers. Australia's multiculturalism project is an RV for the nation to abandon fears of difference and embrace diversity. However, support for multiculturalism is not universal, as evidenced in the columnists and politicians cited in these examples. The juxtaposition of a repudiation of multiculturalism with discussion about asylum seeker arrivals makes prominent the role of racism in the rejection of asylum seekers. It emphasises the 'otherness' of these boat arrivals and the desire for those who author these stories to maintain a semblance of the white Australia they hanker after.

### **Additional fantasy themes**

A number of FTs arise at the time of the boat tragedy that do not coalesce into a composite that can be described as a RV at this time. Two of these are noteworthy for this study. The first marks the genesis of a theme, and later RV, that will go on to become significant and prevalent in communication on the issue in the years that follow. The second is notable because it is a decided, though brief, break with the dominant worldview on the issue.

- **It is humane to stop the boats**

A guest column in the *Australian* by Liberal MP (and former Howard Immigration Minister), Philip Ruddock (2011), introduces what has since become a dominant RV in government and opposition communication about asylum seeker arrivals. In it he claims that the Coalition's policy to stop the boats when it was in government was 'humane'. Ruddock folds in two key themes in this column: firstly, that stopping the boats is humane because it will prevent deaths at sea; and secondly, that stopping the boats interferes with the people smuggler business model. The first theme is consistent with new racism strategies used to conceal negative views of others

behind a cloak of respectable concern for care and fairness (Every & Augoustinos 2007). It also reflects a body of scholarly work about the 'politics of hospitality' (Taylor 2015, p. 341) and the ways in which social justice frames are used against asylum seekers. Every argues that, rather than justifying a policy of inclusion towards asylum seekers, 'humanitarianism is being defined in such a way as to exclude asylum seekers' from Australia and elsewhere (2008, p. 211). This is evident in this FT. Ruddock's themes build momentum to become the justification for deterrence policies in general, a justification that continues in 2016. Journalists appear to appropriate this FT. For example, in September 2015, three years into the Syrian civil war and amid the mass exodus of Syrians to seek safety in neighbouring countries, Mark Kenny, chief political correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, writes a column defending Australia's 'stop the boats' asylum seeker policy (2015). In response to an editorial in the *New York Times* that refers to Australia's policies as heartless, Kenny says:

Yes the Abbott government's policy has stopped asylum seekers from making it to Australia's shores, but the more important point is that it has stopped deaths at sea by preventing people from trying. Plus, it has decimated the cruel commerce in human souls.

Here Kenny promulgates this FT, whose import is that an inhumane action has humane consequences. This FT provides successive governments with a rationale for Australia's exclusionary policies that purports to be compassionate while serving the interests of those Australians who reject Australia's international obligations towards asylum seekers.

- **There are alternatives to the current asylum seeker policies**

The deaths of asylum seekers in the boat tragedy appears to pierce some resistance to canvassing alternative approaches to asylum seekers in media articles. For example, in an article by Pia Akerman (2010) immediately after the deaths, the RAC is quoted suggesting a 'welcome refugee policy', with an improvement in timely processing in Indonesia and a larger Australian resettlement program for refugees

from Indonesia. Nicholson's (2010) article in the *Australian* also canvasses not only the facts of asylum seeker deaths on journeys to Australia, but also a number of different sources for their thoughts on addressing this problem. Although these several articles give exposure to refugee advocates and their alternative proposals for treatment of asylum seekers, they are only a fleeting break in the overwhelming RV that focuses on blame for allowing these asylum seekers to reach Australia.

## **SECTION 2: THE SANCTIONING AGENTS**

In this section I assess the sanctioning agents that bolster the legitimacy of the stories in the media articles in this collection. As I found in the interviews with the RAC activists (Chapter 5), and in the analyses of their media releases (Chapter 6), journalists and guest columnists who write the media articles also seek support and authority from the credibility, connectedness and resonance sanctioning agents. However, with the dominance of RV1 in these articles – the RV that focuses on who is to blame for the arrival of asylum seekers – the credibility and resonance sanctioning agents are much more significant in this analysis than the connectedness sanctioning agent. These three sanctioning agents intersect with three of the four journalistic writing forms described in Chapter 8; that is, with the fact, history and emotive illustration forms. The fourth writing form, petitioning, has no close relationship to one sanctioning agent.

- **Credibility**

The credibility sanctioning agent is used by journalists to elicit confidence in their storytelling. It can be understood in terms of the newspaper itself, the entire newspaper article, and in reference to the contributions of particular elements/sources within each article. However, I acknowledge that, just because the journalists refer to particular sources or reports in this way, it does not necessarily follow that readers will accept the offering in the way intended (Barnlund 2008; Mortensen 2008).

The credibility sanctioning agent appears most consistently in the fact and history forms of journalistic storytelling identified in Chapter 8. Firstly, fact stories call on the credibility sanctioning agent to engender the readers' trust in the story. For example, conservative columnist Sheehan uses statistics and information on policies in his article about what he says is 'the true story of migration in Australia' (2009). With these facts, he seeks to establish credibility for his argument that Australia is not a xenophobic nation. In addition, journalists tend to use particular categories of sources as a means of establishing the credibility of what they report (Bednarek & Caple 2012, p. 91). Scholar Zvi Reich reports research that found journalists ranked credibility as 'the most influential factor in source selection' (2011, p. 19). The journalists often rely on official sources – that is, government, opposition, foreign and expert. This official status confers some credibility, in that it is the reputations or positions of these institutions that sanction the material or positions presented by the journalists. In particular, the use of facts from institutional sources is a marker for this sanctioning agent (See Chapter 8, 3a). Paradoxically, although journalists invoke the credibility sanctioning agent when they use official sources, they also invoke it when they include unofficial sources that challenge the positions or statements of the officials. This competition for credibility is a hallmark of what David Mindich calls 'good' journalism (1998, p. 8).

Secondly, credibility is engendered through the use of the history form of journalistic storytelling because, with this, journalists track events, political actions and relationships over time to provide context and credibility for the storytelling about the contemporary environment for asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. Journalists therefore appear to be 'on top' of the issue over time. For example, Kelly in the *Australian*, refers to the history of Australia's relationship with Indonesia to add credibility to the story he tells in his column at the time of the standoff: 'history suggests relying on Jakarta, while inevitable, is a risky proposition. What happens when the most pro-Australian president in Indonesian history finally quits or relations hit another rough patch?' (2009b). Credibility is also attached to the role of journalist as watchdog of the public interest (Eriksson & Ostman 2013), demonstrated in the fact and history forms of storytelling.

- **Connectedness**

The connectedness sanctioning agent appears most commonly in the emotive illustration form of journalistic storytelling described in Chapter 8. This writing form presents what is also called the human interest angle (Gillman 2015), so that the article tells the story, not from a bald statement of fact or opinion, but from a personal experience.<sup>128</sup> The connectedness sanctioning agent is employed extensively in a minor RV, RV2, to tell the human story behind asylum seeker experiences. Australians are invited to identify with these asylum seekers, feel a connection with their plight, and recognise their common humanity. The use of this sanctioning agent in the articles echoes the sentiments expressed by the RAC interviewees that refugees are 'just like us' and that they just 'want to live their lives' like Australian families (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September). The stories of the witnesses to the boat tragedy also evoke this connectedness.

- **Resonance**

In the media articles the resonance sanctioning agent appears in the temporal (history) and spatial dimensions, also found in the analysis of the RAC interviews in Chapter 5. The temporal dimension dominates. This is exhibited in the history form of journalistic storytelling described in Chapter 8 when journalists include the history of past statements, policies, incidents, and relationships. Allusions to World War II in the data also resonate with past practices and the dire consequences for asylum seekers from that conflict.

The spatial dimension of the resonance sanctioning agent overlaps with the temporal dimension in recounting the history of Australia's relationships with other nations in the region. The spatial dimension captures the geo-politics of the region in RV1 where one FT expresses the tension in the national/international binary. It harks back to Australia's role as a postcolonial power, a Western country situated in Asia, and a provider of aid to a number of nations in the region. On the flip side, these nations are important trading partners for Australia. Consequently, although

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<sup>128</sup> This is similar to one of the uses of the term 'story' in narratology (Herman 2012).

Australia has the resources to 'bully' (Jenna 2012 pers. comm., 27 November) some of its neighbours into cooperation on the asylum seeker issue, some of these articles suggest that its power may be checked by the national interests of Indonesia and Timor l'Este, for example.

Any of these sanctioning agents can appear in the petitioning writing form identified in Chapter 8. For example, the resonance sanctioning agent may be used in opinion/analysis articles where writers call for the government to act on the basis of history or fact. The status of the source that petitions within a news article can invoke the credibility sanctioning agent. A number of columns do not include sanctioning agents to ground the writers' stories. It may be in the nature of polemical columnists, in particular, that they do not employ these sanctioning agents. For example, conservative columnist Akerman often simply expresses his viewpoint with no recourse to an authority outside of his own opinion – it is enough. He expresses righteous wrath about these 'wannabe refugees', uses incorrect language to describe them ('illegals'), and courts indignation and even outrage over asylum seeker boat arrivals (2009a). In this collection he does not use sanctioning agents to justify or support his position/s.

### **SECTION 3: THE MASTER ANALOGUES**

In this section, I again employ the concept of the master analogue from SCT (Cragan & Shields 1981, 1992; Endres 1994), this time to explore the worldviews that drive the newspaper coverage of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. This section considers the presence or absence of righteous, social and pragmatic master analogues in the media articles.

- **Righteous master analogue**

Driving and sustaining these media articles is the consistent and commanding assertion that there is a right way for asylum seekers to seek Australia's protection, that travelling by boat to Australia is the wrong way, and that policies or people who enable these journeys are to be condemned for doing the wrong thing.

Consequently, the righteous master analogue dominates in these media articles, as it also dominates in the interviews with the activists (Chapter 5) and in their media releases (Chapter 6). This master analogue is evident in many of the positions taken by those represented and/or quoted in the stories, but, more significantly, also in the general tenor of the stories.

The righteous master analogue is most effectively expressed in the first RV, which asks who is to blame for asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. Each of the push/pull, soft/tough and domestic/international FTs looks to apportion responsibility. Righteousness is apparent in the assumptions of what is the right behaviour, by both asylum seekers and political parties. There is no conflict in the FT about evil people smugglers with only a handful of articles failing to blame or condemn them when mentioned. Here, the righteous master analogue is evident not only in judgements of the people smugglers but also in the ostensible concern expressed about this 'cynical industry['] ('Tragic loss of life at the island' 2010) manipulation of vulnerable asylum seekers, particularly after the deaths in the boat tragedy. Compared with RAC stories, what is missing from the representation of this righteousness is a critique of Australia's part in the arrival and continuing suffering of these boat arrivals, its role as a world citizen and signatory of the *Refugee Convention*, and its obligations as a wealthy developed nation in the Asia-Pacific region. The only righteous position that references these factors is espoused by refugee advocates in a few articles. Absent, too, is discussion of Australia's part in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that contribute to the influx of refugees at the time of the boat tragedy.

Representation of multiculturalism and racism in RV4 also expresses the righteous master analogue. However, unlike RV1, which mostly presents bipartisan support for the worldview that looks to repel asylum seekers, the righteousness in RV4 tends to drive different columnists to take contrary stands. For example, Pasquarelli's (2011) column condemning multiculturalism is underpinned by a righteous and racist presupposition that white Australians are entitled to preserve 'their' culture and dominance in Australia, and prevent 'others' from entering their domain. In contrast,



and yet still righteous, Gittins (2011) lauds the values of multiculturalism and grapples with Australia's racist tendencies when he presents the evolutionary context for Australia's xenophobia. Explicit discussion of racism is rare, appearing mostly when columnists or those cited in the articles denounce aspects of immigration policy – such as Muslim immigration – but offer seemingly rational reasons for exclusionary positions. Again, this is consistent with the new racism explored in a number of studies about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia (e.g., Every & Augoustinos 2007, 2008a; Gale 2004).

Of particular note is the FT that appears immediately after the boat tragedy and goes on to become the authoritative RV for both government and opposition parties and politicians on the issue into the period that I write this thesis, 2016. This FT asserts that it is humane to stop the boats. It is a righteous position – government, opposition and journalists alike profess that to stop the boats is to save lives, an appropriation of the humanitarian concept. They hold that Australia is not pursuing this path for its own self-interest but for the sake of the lives otherwise lost at sea on these journeys to Australia. Who could argue? This use of a 'humanitarianism' motif runs counter to the RAC's notion of humanitarianism and is consistent with what Every found in her study – that the Australian political discourse makes exclusionary humanitarianism seem 'obvious, natural and right' (2008 p. 212).

- **Social master analogue**

Those media articles that tell the human stories behind the asylum seeker journeys to Australia in RV2 are founded on the social master analogue. This master analogue is allied to the connectedness sanctioning agent and is also most commonly expressed in the emotive illustration writing form. By making visible those people who have been denied access to Australia's protection, by allowing them the opportunity to tell their stories to the Australian people, the journalists foreground human relationships, desires and trials. In relation to the boat tragedy, the FTs about the witness experience also hail from this social master analogue, although these accounts encourage identification with the traumatised witnesses more than the asylum seeker victims.

- **Pragmatic master analogue**

The pragmatic master analogue values practical considerations such as efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This master analogue appears in fact-based stories where journalists recount detention costs, UN convention requirements, and details of the latest court case. On this point, this master analogue underwrites the credibility sanctioning agent. Despite the media's professed watchdog role (Eriksson & Ostman 2013; Macnamara 2014) for the Australian taxpayer, this master analogue does not make a significant appearance in the articles in this collection. Nonetheless, that it appears at all is in marked contrast to the RVs in the interviews with RAC activists (in Chapter 5) and in their media releases (in Chapter 6).

Having accounted for the stories and storytelling in the three sites in this study, the next chapter, Chapter 10, concludes this thesis with a discussion of the relationships among these sites and stories, in the contexts of power, activism and media.

## CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

The politicisation of asylum seeker boat arrivals since the Howard government era has moved this aspect of immigration policy 'to the centre of electoral politics' in Australia (Kampmark 2006, p. 2). Australia is, as Luke Taylor has said, 'at the vanguard of the international trend towards securitising migration laws and treating asylum seekers as threats' (2015, p. 353). As a world 'leader' on strategies to repel asylum seekers from seeking sanctuary in its territories (e.g., AAP 2015; Saffi & Kingsley 2016), Australia attracts considerable international condemnation for offshore and extended mandatory detention, as well as for its 'turn back the boats' policy. Therefore, Australia's story is significant, not just for those asylum seekers who are directly affected by its policies, but also for the example it sets to the Western world of how inhumane treatment is justified and domestic electoral support garnered on the back of a nationalistic agenda.

### **The national story dominates**

The analyses in chapters 7, 8 and 9 demonstrate that in 2009–2011 there was a dominant and powerful national story about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. The media stories analysed in this study demonstrate a public debate that is narrow, exclusionary and nationalistic, from a xenophobic nation seeking to sidestep its responsibilities to asylum seekers who arrive by boat. The White Australia policy may no longer exist in law but it is alive and well in the Australian imaginary. Key to this thesis is the recognition of the power of stories that characterise non-citizens who cross borders as a threat to the nation (cf. Every & Augoustinos 2007; Gale 2004; Taylor 2015). This is not news. These stories – and the values they imply – continue Australia's narrative of rejecting those who are outside its borders and exercising its right to control immigration in its own self-interest. Australia's story is of a 'bounded community' (Taylor 2015, p. 341). I have established in this thesis that Australia's national story reflects and revives its racist past and is imbued with the assertion of sovereign rights and laws that sanction the righteousness of its narrative. The dominance of this national story illustrates a group consciousness in the media and

in politics on the issue – such as with the push/pull, tough/soft fantasy themes – and thus the expression of a group consciousness in the Australian citizenry about asylum seeker boat arrivals (Entman 2007; McCombs 2004; Noelle-Neumann 1994; Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007).

Blame was a key component of rhetorical visions in all sites in this study. The government and opposition blame each other's policies and communication for the asylum seekers arriving to Australia. The activists blame the government and opposition for the conditions asylum seekers endure if they seek out Australia's protections. The newspaper articles tell the story of a government doing all it can to avoid assisting those who flee persecution, and an opposition supporting the thrust of the government story. Although the scope of the coverage on the issue ranges from the rabid to the rational in style, the substance is largely contained within the national story of self-interest and political posturing about who is to blame for the boat arrivals of asylum seekers.

### **An alternative story**

A significant finding in this study is the mapping of the compelling alternative story that challenges the national story. The Refugee Action Coalition NSW (RAC) is part of a network of local, national and international organisations and individuals that constitute a social movement advocating for asylum seeker rights and protections. The RAC is a local group that summons the international to challenge and admonish the national, to remind Australians of their country's international commitments. In addition, the RAC tells the human story of asylum seeking, emphasising not just Australia's connections to international law and global people movements, but also to other humans in strife – going beyond the international to make a call for Australians to recognise what they have in common with asylum seekers, their humanity. This connectedness motif looks to build an alternative group consciousness in the Australian public that is sympathetic to asylum seekers. The RAC also tells a national story, but one that is critical of Australia's actions and calls out the government for the racism and ethnic nationalism (Every & Augoustinos 2008a) its national story reveals. RAC members propose that Australia could and

should have a different national story – one that welcomes refugees and lauds them for their courage and resilience in escaping to Australia.

### **Racism, Australian nationalism and facticity**

This thesis has traced Australia's national story and its challengers in terms of the analytic categories I identify as racism, Australian nationalism and facticity. The story of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia is a deeply racist story. Across all three sites, references are made to Australia's long history of policies of racial exclusion. However, whereas RAC members see the current treatment of asylum seeker boat arrivals as a continuation of this racist history, the politicians cited in the media articles represent racism as part of Australia's past, not its present. These state sources exhibit the 'new racism' (Martin Barker 1981, cited in Gale 2004, p. 323) that seeks to disguise the racist roots of their stories and policies. In this case, new racism appears in the guise of notions of national security and 'border protection'. The journalists and media empower the stories from these sources by giving them a platform and, for the most part, excluding significant challenges to their racist rhetorical visions. The media articles characterise the 'brown', predominantly Muslim, asylum seekers as transgressors, trying to breach Australia's borders and steal places in its humanitarian program (the quota) from good refugees who wait until they are asked to come to Australia. By contrast, rather than drawing on racism, the RAC rejects racism and interpellates its presence in the national story. This interpellation is also exemplified in a guest column by John Pilger (2009). In his story Pilger calls on readers to imagine Australia's response if a boatload of white, Christian, English-speaking asylum seekers appeared at its borders.

In reference to the second analytic category, it is Australian nationalism that drives the national story. This is expressed as a righteous position. In this national story the overall message is of Australia's self-evident right to exert its sovereignty and repel asylum seekers. Contrary to this, the RAC challenges the national story by deploying notions of the local and international. This too is a righteous position. The RAC asserts that Australia should abide by its international commitments and change its policies to assist rather than deter asylum seekers. The international in this instance

is found in references to the UN and its instruments, the local in the individual stories of asylum seeker persecution and survival.

The assertion of facticity is the third analytic category I apply throughout this thesis. Different storytellers call on facts that support their values. The clash of fact-based stories occurs in part because of their origin in different frames – international, national, or local. For the RAC and other advocates, Australia’s commitment to the international conventions that protect refugees is a bedrock of the critique of the Australian government’s treatment of asylum seekers. However, the international has limited resonance in the Australian media stories. In addition, Australia’s comparative wealth in the world, and particularly the region, is a fact used by the RAC and some media articles to appraise Australia’s behaviour as a nation that can afford to welcome those who flee persecution. The RAC’s use of international institutions to sanction its stories confronts the nationalistic story that predominates in the media articles on the issue of boat arrivals. In contrast to the RAC, the politicians call on facts that focus on which party has been more or less successful in repelling asylum seekers from reaching and settling in Australia, a focus that supports their preference for the precedence of Australian nationalism and sovereignty in storytelling on the issue. Australia’s purported self-interest has always governed its immigration policy and its contemporary treatment of asylum seekers is no exception. Australian nationalism therefore appears in media stories that cite the facts of the nation’s sovereign rights. In this study, the national interest story holds sway, as it does in law on this issue.

The ways in which different – and competing – participants in the storytelling call on facts to make or bolster their stories points to the constructedness and malleability of facts in this case. This relationship of fact to ‘truth’ was explored, to some extent, in this thesis. However, I think this relationship warrants further scrutiny.<sup>129</sup> Facts are presented in a number of ways, including those that either misrepresent or falsify the ‘facts’ of the case. For example, referring to boat arrivals as ‘illegal’ is incorrect.

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<sup>129</sup> This is particularly pertinent in light of recent debate about ‘fake news’ in relation to the 2016 US presidential election and the role of social media sites in the promotion of these stories.

Reporters who include quotes from sources that make these claims, without also pointing to inaccuracies or seeking another source to do so, present a misleading story to the Australian public. Columnists who actually promote these falsehoods, unfettered by the notion of balance (Stephens 2015), are more culpable. As journalists, it is one thing to fail to use stories from counterpublics (Fraser 1992) that contest the dominant rhetorical vision; it is another thing again when columnists substitute information and a semblance of balance for deliberate misinformation or dubious and inflammatory opinions.

### **Themes of history, righteousness and connectedness**

In addition to exploring the stories and storytelling in this study using the analytic categories of racism, Australian nationalism and facticity, the themes of history, righteousness and connectedness reappear in the three sites in the study. Storytellers often allude to history. It is present in a number of forms, most consistently in reference to the national and international histories of treatment of asylum seekers. The media articles use history most often to compare Australian arrival numbers and policies over time in the context of politicians' claims to be more successful in deterring asylum seekers. The RAC uses history in both a national and an international frame. In countering the dominant national story, the RAC grounds contemporary practices in Australia's history of racist policies. In the international frame, the activist interviewees reference the circumstances in World War II that were the genesis for international instruments that today are designed to protect those who seek asylum. These international tropes of historical violence and horror are also called on by journalists and the occasional guest columnist who tell their stories to elicit compassion and to implicitly remind Australians of the remorse felt by many in the world community who had turned away Jewish asylum seekers in those times.

Stories in all sites are driven by righteousness – and yet the import of the stories themselves differs dramatically. It is the prerogative of the nation state to implement its international commitments in its own image that stirs the righteousness underpinning many stories from civil society, state sources and

columnists. Australia can choose to honour its international obligations or not. It can choose to increase its humanitarian quota to accommodate boat arrivals. It is the moral, righteous story of the activists, and the social movement to which they belong, that stimulates their demands for change – they say it is the right thing to welcome asylum seekers, bring them to Australia, and help repair their shattered lives with care and support. By way of contrast, the Australian governmental regime of stopping the boats, of mandatory, offshore, indefinite detention, is characterised in the media articles as protection of Australia’s borders and citizens – thereby portraying asylum seekers as a threat to the nation and its peoples. This, too, is a righteous stand. Thus, righteousness is at the heart of stories that welcome refugees and at the heart of those that seek to deter them. The rhetorical visions capture different imaginings of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. The righteousness that underpins them can be deployed to help or to hinder asylum seekers. As with facts, righteousness is not neutral.

While the national story represents connectedness as limited to those already within its borders, the existing citizenry, the RAC promotes a call to identify with a common humanity. In some media articles, Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers in mandatory detention draws scrutiny and condemnation. However, the only counter-stories to the national story that reliably break through media resistance are poignant human-interest stories that foreground the connectedness the RAC promotes. The media ‘suck up’ (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October) these stories.

There are three interrelated concerns about the media’s focus on this aspect of the asylum seeker story. The first is Chris’s concern that this focus provides only an *ad hoc* insight into the issue from the asylum seekers’ perspective. His worry is warranted – this pattern is confirmed by this study. The stories that provide these insights are episodic and fail to make connections that would inform a structural critique. This reduces these asylum seeker stories to ‘individual and disconnected specks of dust’, as Gramsci (2007, p. 213) has described it.



Secondly, these stories about individual asylum seekers can obscure the 'fundamental issues' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October). Karina Horsti echoes Chris's point about this when she says that 'for activism to challenge politically, asylum seeking should also be understood as a social and political issue, and, thus, framed structurally' (2013, p. 80). With an overemphasis on the personal (a characteristic of tabloids in particular) readers are denied 'the means to recognise the structural basis of power relations in society as a totality' (Sparks cited in Allan 2010b, p. 126). This is a significant problem for the representation of the asylum seeker issue in Australian media. Many members of the RAC organising cadre (e.g., Chris, Anna, Ben, Hugh and Germaine) are acutely aware of the pitfalls of providing these human-interest stories to the media when the media framework is so narrow. However, with the RAC rhetorical visions otherwise marginalised in the media, the RAC's public relations work that seeks to establish human connectedness finds some success in countering the powerful and persuasive national story.

Thirdly, in her Finnish case study of three instances of mediatised anti-deportation advocacy, Horsti found that the advocates for the individual asylum seekers – and the journalists who told their stories – 'de-ethnicised' the subjects of their campaigns (2013). That is, by framing these asylum seekers as 'just like us' they were separated from their fellow asylum seekers and effectively 'de-othered' – with this, they stood as exceptions. By treating them as exceptional, 'othered' from the bulk of asylum seekers, advocates and journalists who write human interest stories can create, not a shift in attitudes towards asylum seekers *per se*, but sympathy for the one exception. This can cement the othering of asylum seekers.

### **What stories are missing?**

This study captures a standoff between a nationalistic story and a story of human connectedness and international obligation – and the values and beliefs that underpin them (the master analogues). The newspaper storytelling helps shape the issue as it is understood by the Australian people. The RAC members argue that, if left unchallenged, these stories will fashion Australia into 'a very, very divided society' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October). If, as John Dewey (1947) says, a

society exists by and in communication, this storytelling about asylum seekers figures and disfigures Australian culture. As Daniel Berkowitz asserts, 'the ability to influence the news also equates to long-term control over cultural meanings' (2009, p. 111). News is a product of journalism practices, the bias of the system (Entman 2007), and the selected contributions of those who seek out media (or are sought out) to tell their stories. On the whole, the issue is represented in these newspapers from a Western, white Australian worldview.

Drawing on the concept of hegemony as it is applied to journalism practices, this thesis has accounted for the cultural patterns in journalism, how they express power relations (Lukes 1974) and realise the hegemony (Gramsci 1971) in the public storytelling about asylum seeker boat arrivals. By also examining the stories and storytelling in and by an activist group this thesis has highlighted the competition in storytelling on this issue in the public sphere, as well as absences from those stories that appear in the newspapers. Journalists can choose to seek out stories beyond the limited range evident in this study. They can choose to challenge assertions in source citations with further source selection and their own research and analysis. Most of the storytelling in the media releases from this small local activist group was not cited in the media articles. The power of the national story is significantly assisted by bipartisanship – journalists seek out the 'opposing' state players on the issue to demonstrate 'balance' in their stories, but when these players present a united nationalistic story the national story gains further power. The media fail to enable enough space and prominence to stories from civil society 'counterweights' (Fraser 1992, p. 112), and the storytelling becomes a 'stage show' (Roberts & Crossley 2004, p. 5) of political posturing.

The watchdog role in journalism (Eriksson & Ostman 2013; Hampton 2010; Macnamara 2014; Matheson 2010) may be a professed characteristic of Australia's practitioners, but the hegemony of the national story in these articles suggests the journalists did not act to guard the public interest by providing information and perspectives that adequately capture challenges to the government/opposition frame of reference. The import of the dominant rhetorical vision – that focusses on

blame for the asylum seekers' boat arrivals – is rarely challenged on a structural basis. It is the RAC, rather than the majority of journalists (there are notable exceptions), that acts as watchdog on this issue in the public realm. RAC members see themselves as guardians of the truth, of facts, of history and of all that refutes the government stories, a role borne out in the storytelling in the RAC's media releases. In this sense, the RAC bears witness to the asylum seekers' plight and acts as a public conscience on the issue. It monitors, corrects, reminds and connects. Again, it is a righteous position. The RAC members' ideological frame of reference – to broader issues of social and economic inequality – plays a key role in their commitment to asylum seekers but is not explicit in the RAC's public storytelling. Instead, the RAC caters to the proclivities of the media (Newsom & Haynes 2014; Wilcox & Reber 2013) whilst performing as watchdog and mobiliser.

The omission from the media stories of a key RAC rhetorical vision that proposes welcoming asylum seekers is not the only notable absence. Absent from all sites is an alternative story about asylum seeker boat arrivals that expresses the pragmatic master analogue. In member interviews, and in RAC media releases, the RAC spurns the deployment of the pragmatic to solicit change in asylum seeker policy, contending that it would undermine the moral argument. Surprisingly, the media articles also fail to address pragmatic arguments that would stress the extraordinary financial costs to Australia of indefinite, mandatory and offshore detention. Where there is a standoff on values, there is a shared silence on these financial and logistical aspects of the issue. This is particularly surprising in light of journalism's professed role to monitor and critique the state in the public interest (Hampton 2010; Matheson 2010). It is understandable that neither the government nor opposition in these media stories scrutinises the costs and cost-effectiveness of the detention and boat turnback policies – firstly, because these state parties agree on the principles of the regime, but secondly, I suggest, because these practices are indefensible on financial grounds.

However, this is a story ripe for journalists to follow and yet, in this collection of articles, they do not pursue this line of inquiry. Why not? Is it that they are so

dependent on their source networks – their bureaucratic routine (Jontes & Luthar 2015) – for prescribed storylines that they rarely go beyond the limits of what state sources define as the frame for the story and the issue? Is it a consequence of the depletion of staff at most news outlets, so that this dependence is further exaggerated? If the latter, then why is it that the RAC's media releases get so little traction in these newspapers when many present verifiable facts and historical references (i.e., readymade stories)? I contend that it is as Lukes (1974) asserts in his model of power. The power of the cultural practices in journalism and the biases in the media system continue to privilege sources with institutional power (Gramsci 1971). It is an ideological phenomenon as much as a bureaucratic accomplishment. If there is bipartisan support for a focus on blaming the other party for the arrival of asylum seekers by boat to Australia then, as Anna and Eli say in their interviews, this distracts the media (and consequently the Australian people) from the 'real issues', not least of which is the remarkable financial cost to the Australian nation of its inhumane and repugnant policy. Although RAC stories spring from both the righteous and the social master analogues, with both the RAC and the journalists' prime storytellers (the state) choosing to ignore the pragmatic, there is a story waiting to be told by other counterpublics in the social movement on this issue. It would then be up to journalists to step outside the media's narrow frame of reference on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals and investigate these alternative ways of imagining the issue. Such a story would challenge the state stories on their own ground (cf. Every 2008), maintaining a national frame and serving Australia's financial self-interests. It might also serve the interests of those most vulnerable and needy in the world community, such as those asylum seekers who make their way to Australia in search of protection.

### **Why use Symbolic Convergence Theory?**

The deployment of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) and its associated method, Fantasy Theme Analysis, is key to the aims of this thesis. It has uncovered the stories and storytelling processes that develop or sustain a group consciousness that can lead to collective action or inaction on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals – in the RAC, in its public storytelling, in the media, and in the Australian public. Together

this theory and method have provided this study with the 'facility to explore and understand meaning constructed through the convergence and competition of alternate symbolic worlds' (Page & Duffy 2009, p. 110). The activist public and the media stories represent widely divergent values that are captured in the fantasy themes and rhetorical visions in this study and examined as master analogues that drive the visions. This study has uncovered the social realities that these participants in the public sphere on this issue express, endorse and promote. As stated earlier in this thesis, newspapers are influential organs in the public sphere that can and do enable or obstruct the nature of debate on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. They are 'key terrains of the ongoing political struggle over the right to define the "reality" of public issues' (Allan 2010a, p. 119). Even though the convention of the 'balance' in newspaper articles (Stephens 2015) suggests that conflicting narratives and ideologies would be evident in the articles, as has been discussed, this is not the case in this study. The conflict rarely touches on fundamental and structural aspects that challenge the predominantly white Australian nationalistic view of the issue. SCT has enabled this to be made evident.

Another innovation of this thesis is the analysis of three distinct (political) spaces. The relationships between the three sites reveals who gets to be heard on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. The use of SCT across the three sites has allowed an alternative story (to the national) to be heard and an assessment made of whether or not it appears in the media stories. The relationship between the first site – the members of the RAC – and the second – the RAC's media releases – shows a clear translation from the members' stories to the organisation's stories, demonstrating a coherent group consciousness on the issue in both sites. However, in its public storytelling – its public relations work – the RAC self-censors to temper the passion and ideology that bolster members' stories. Instead, in these 'fossilised remains' (Ball 2001, p. 221) of the members' shared group fantasies, RAC media releases provide journalists with specificity that grounds the RAC's claims and counter claims, showcasing the activist public's knowledge of the history and contexts for contemporary asylum seeker arrivals and the long involvement of the activists in the issue.

The relationship between the second site and the third – the articles in the newspapers – demonstrates that activist voices (and not only the RAC's) are marginal in the media representation of the issue. Instead the media enable the stories of those in positions of privilege to frame the issue, and marginalise stories from challengers in civil society. The bipartisanship in the fantasy themes in the media articles is a fundamental problem in the representation of this issue – one that the RAC members recognise. This 'high level of consensus' (Bennett 2010, p. 113) narrows debate, increases the power of stories from government and opposition and lessens public accountability. Journalism scholars point out that the cultural practice of balance/objectivity that enables this dominance 'reflects a world dominated by white men, [and] that it too often serves the status quo' (Mindich 1998, p. 4). Instead, as a CNN reporter declared, "'objectivity" must go hand in hand with morality... giving all sides a fair hearing' (cited in Mindich 1998, p. 4). Using SCT for the analysis of stories across these three different sites makes it clear that there are other stories that merit a 'fair hearing'.

As a 'semiotic resource' for the readers (van Leeuwen 2005, p. 3), the stories that appear in these newspapers impact on what the Australian community understands about the issue and thus how it may be influenced to respond to the plight of asylum seekers. As Moya Ball says of SCT, it is a theory of communication that is able to account for the 'way in which messages are transmitted from small groups, to public speeches, to mass media, and, eventually, to the larger public' (2001, p. 217). Ernest Bormann argues that, as these stories take hold in 'larger publics', they 'serve to sustain the members' sense of community, to impel them to action... and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions and attitudes' (1972, p. 398). The 'chaining out' of rhetorical visions occurs in newspapers as a 'mass' medium, as it does in 'all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a given society' (Bormann 1972, p. 398). Studies have found that the 'slant' of news stories has a significant effect on perceptions of public opinion (e.g., Gunther 1998; Zerback, Koch & Kramer 2015). Coupled with the support for Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence theory (e.g., Brasted 2005; Campbell 2007; Indermaur 2006; Stoycheff 2016), it becomes clear that, when readers are faced with the

dominant rhetorical visions in these media – that substantially preclude the activists’ powerful alternative stories about the boat arrivals of asylum seekers – it is not only their social reality that is shaped, but also their perception of whether and what alternative visions are ‘acceptable’ on the issue. This then supports the RAC’s quest to let those who would want to support asylum seekers know that they ‘are not alone’ and provide opportunities for them to participate in a movement to change the story for asylum seekers.

Another key contribution of this study is the addition it makes to an understanding of activist communication as public relations work. Specifically, it contributes to the development of an understanding of public relations as storytelling (Elmer 2011), notably in its use of SCT and Fantasy Theme Analysis. If, as Taylor says, ‘public relations’ role in society is to create (and re-create) the conditions that enact civil society’ (2010, p. 7), then public relations storytelling by activist publics is crucial to this enactment. Like other textual analyses, in this study I have unpacked ‘the naturalness of the ideological codes implicated in their representations of reality’ and have demonstrated the far-reaching consequences ‘for the cultural reproduction of power relations across society’ (Allan 2010b, p. 98) in relation to this issue. As John Street has said, ‘the way the story is told...will determine the way the political process is imagined’ (2011, p. 62).

### **Where to now?**

This study took place at a watershed moment in legacy media, and newspapers in particular. The decline in newspaper readership has accelerated since the period explored in this study (2009–2011), with the newspaper ‘business model’ in serious trouble in the online world. The uptake of social media opens opportunities for disrupting the hegemonic influence of institutional storytellers on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals. This is also an opportunity for researchers to investigate storytelling in this space. Bormann suggests that SCT ‘seems to have been serendipitously designed for the World Wide Web, the Internet, satellites, cyberspace, the digital world, virtual reality, and whatever new purveyors of fantasy

themes are on the horizon' (2001, p. ix). He encourages its adoption for investigating digital storytelling in all its forms. I agree with this prescient comment and suggest that similar studies driven by SCT could be conducted on similar social justice topics as they are narrated across new media platforms. In addition, there is more research to be undertaken to discern how journalists understand their practices of selecting and giving salience to stories that they use as resources in their storytelling in the legacy and new media spaces.

This study examines a national phenomenon in Australia. However, the issue of policies and communication about asylum seekers is relevant to other nations and other nationalisms. The recent election in the US of President Donald Trump is one of a number of examples that illustrate that Australia is not exceptional in its orientation towards asylum seekers. President Trump's decision to build a wall on the US border with Mexico and impose a temporary ban on entry to the US of people from seven Muslim-majority states ('Trump's Executive Order On Immigration, Annotated' 2017)<sup>130</sup> – source countries for many of the world's refugees – highlights the operation of American nationalism in this latest debate. Of particular note for this study is that President Trump has also suspended US participation in the UN refugee resettlement program. In his Executive Order, and in subsequent tweets, Trump says that by these actions he is protecting Americans from terrorists. With this he explicitly links terrorism with refugees and Muslims.

In addition, Trump (at the time of writing this chapter) has been in a very public 'spat'<sup>131</sup> with Australian Prime Minister Turnbull about former US President Barack Obama's agreement to take refugees from Australia's offshore detention centres on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea) and Nauru. On Twitter, Trump has called it a 'dumb deal' and has said that Australia wants to export to the US 'the next Boston bombers' (cited in Visser 2017). In the continuing saga, defending his dislike of the deal, Trump has told the media that these confirmed refugees are 'illegal immigrants

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<sup>130</sup> The seven states are Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen.

<sup>131</sup> The conversation between the two leaders was 'private' but its contents were leaked to the media and prompted considerable coverage in Australia and the US, including comment from both leaders.



in prisons' (cited in Reuters 2017). Although the prisons comment is fair,<sup>132</sup> the 'illegal immigrant' moniker is again untrue and, like the Australian national story told in this thesis, criminalises refugees and characterises them as a threat to the security of nations (cf. Bradimore & Bauder 2011; Gale 2004; Kampmark 2006; O'Doherty & Augoustinos 2008). Turnbull can hardly quibble with Trump's characterisation of those detained in Australia's offshore centres when his own government has also characterised them in this way, although with more subtlety.

Civil society is understood as a key aspect of a democracy (Dahlgren 1995; Demetrious 2013; Fraser 1992) and yet the results of this study demonstrate that its voice is muted in key media spaces that dominate the public consciousness on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. Although this thesis suggests that in many ways the RAC's story is marginal in the national story about asylum seeker boat arrivals, this is not to suggest that activism on this issue is ineffective or unnecessary. There is a long history of minority voices effecting change through activism. Examples include removing legislation that embedded the White Australia policy, ending Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, recognising Indigenous land rights, decriminalising homosexuality and, on the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals, pressuring the Howard government to remove children from mandatory detention (although this practice has since resumed). In today's media landscape, the momentum for change can be built more readily than even six years ago. RAC members' vision, motivation and combined knowledge about the issue across many decades is a valuable resource in the public debate on the issue and, despite setbacks, as Gillian Triggs, President of the Australian Human Rights Commission<sup>133</sup> has said, 'In the end the facts and the truth do matter... Don't be deterred... speak out' (cited in Murphy 2016).

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<sup>132</sup> Australia's detention centres resemble prisons in their appearance, restrictions for 'inmates', and regimens.

<sup>133</sup> Professor Triggs's contract at AHRC ends in the middle of 2017. After many months of friction between Triggs and the Turnbull Coalition government, Prime Minister Turnbull announced that her contract would not be renewed (Koziol 2016).

## **Appendixes**

Appendix A: Interview questions for semi-structured interviews

Appendix B: Tables

5.1–5.3

6.1–6.5

## Appendix A

### Interview questions for semi-structured interviews

#### Preamble

As I said in the material I sent you about the project, I'm looking at media depictions of the issue of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia. This interview is part of the study – I want to discover what stories activists in RAC tell about the issue and whether and how they turn up in media depictions. I also want to know your personal perspective and experience with the issue.

Let's start with that.

#### 1. Personal relevance/problem recognition

- Tell me what helped you form your views about asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia?
- Some people talk about the importance of personal relevance for people to be involved in an issue. Is that your experience? Can you tell me how that has been an influence on what you have been doing for asylum seekers?
- What other influences might there have been on your involvement?
- Was there a particular event that was very important to you?

#### 2. What is the issue?

- What would you say is the story about asylum seeker arrivals to Australia? Tell me what you think is going on.
- It started quite a while ago. What do you know of the history?

#### 3. Dramatis personae

- Who are the main people involved in the issue over time, and what can you tell me about their involvement (politicians, advocates, departments, etc.)? (If interviewee gives a name) What would you say about his/her/its involvement?
- In my preliminary analyses of media coverage one of the themes that has come up has been about relations with Indonesia and other nations in the region. What would you say about that?

#### 4. Language about asylum seekers

Terms that are used in media coverage refer to 'boat people'. What is your perspective on the use of 'boat people'? Tell me what you think when you hear talk of or read about 'people smugglers', 'illegals', 'queue jumpers'? What do you

feel?

**5. How should Australia respond to asylum seeker boat arrivals?**

What do you think would be a suitable approach to asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia?

**6. Constraint recognition**

- What would you see as obstacles to achieving more humane policies for asylum seekers?
- What are obstacles for activists? (Or, what would stand in the way of these changes (per answer to question about how Australia should respond to asylum seeker boat arrivals)?)
- What do you think you could say to the Australian people/politicians/media that would move them to support or represent your perspective?

**7. RAC**

- What is your history with RAC?
- What do you think RAC's role is in relation to this issue?

**8. Perceptions about the three incidents**

I am going to ask you about three incidents or developments that occurred between 2009 and 2011.

- 1) On 16 October 2009 the Australian Customs vessel, the *Oceanic Viking*, rescued 78 asylum seekers in Indonesian waters. The vessel took the asylum seekers back to Indonesia.

If you remember this incident, tell me in your own words what happened and why.

- 2) On 15 December 2010 *Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) 221* sank off the coast of Christmas Island and approximately 50 asylum seekers drowned.

Again, tell me about the incident.

- 3) The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced on 6 July 2010 that she was proposing a regional processing centre for asylum seekers. After failing to secure an agreement with East Timor, she announced on 7 May 2011 that Australia was close to signing a bilateral agreement with Malaysia.

Again, tell me about this development.

**9. Interpretation of the contexts for the contemporary situation in Australia**

If these aspects had not already been addressed in the responses to earlier questions, the interviewer pursued the following for further stories and storytelling on this issue.

- Describe what you see as the international contexts for the arrival of asylum seekers to Australia. (For example, the context of the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, other conventions and global movements of refugees, the wars in their home countries.)
- Describe the current situation for refugees in relation to Australia's history on this issue.

#### **10. Demographic details**

- What is your age?
- What is your gender identification?
- What is your main occupation or employment?
- What are your educational qualifications?
- Where do you live?
- Do you belong to a political group or party? Please specify.
- How long have you been affiliated with this group?
- Have you had previous memberships or co-existing memberships of political groups or parties?
- Do you belong to other activist groups? Which ones?

## Appendix B

**Table 5.1**

**Rhetorical vision 1:** As a wealthy signatory nation (to the *Refugee Convention*), Australia is obliged to act on its responsibilities and accommodate the small number of asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

Fantasy theme	Examples
<p>1. Australia is a signatory to the UN Conventions relevant to asylum seeker arrivals and therefore has obligations to help asylum seekers.</p>	<p>‘look at the <i>Refugee Convention</i> which has been adopted by the <i>Migration Act</i>. So it is law, made law. The <i>Refugee Convention</i> is law within Australia’ (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).</p> <p>‘now you’ve got Australia, previously an exemplary signatory to this at an international level, now undermining it at an international level and UNHCR do not like that at all’ (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).</p> <p>‘interpretation of what obligations attach to us as a result of having signed the Convention is contestable’ (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September).</p> <p>[and should] ‘assume its share of the burden’ (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September).</p> <p>[other signatory countries] ‘have huge populations of people who are already in poverty and so in some ways it’s fair enough that Australia should have more of a responsibility to deal with this problem than the rest of’ (David 2012, pers. comm., 14 September).</p>
<p>2. Australia is a wealthy nation in the Asia Pacific region that can afford to help asylum seekers.</p>	<p>‘it’s [Australia’s] clearly affluent, clearly secure, the least we can do ... etc., etc.’ (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September).</p> <p>[Australia is therefore a] ‘nation that can actually afford to have a humanitarian program and accept asylum seekers’ (David 2012, pers. comm., 14 September).</p>
<p>3. People are allowed to seek asylum regardless of the method they use to get here.</p>	<p>‘it’s actually not true to say that people are illegal, if you look at the refugee convention. We all know this, that it’s not illegal. You can seek asylum by any means basically. If you have a legitimate claim to asylum it doesn’t matter really what you did basically. That’s essentially what the refugee convention says’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p>
<p>4. The number of asylum seeker boat arrivals to Australia is very small in</p>	<p>‘Australia gets this very small number, comparatively speaking, of people claiming asylum by boat and to an extremely high proportion they’re among the most</p>

regional and global terms.	vulnerable and dispossessed people in the world' [refers to number of boat arrivals assessed as refugees by UNHCR] (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September).  [It] 'is a trickle – an absolute drop in the ocean – compared to the number of people trying to enter Europe ... We utterly exaggerate how big this is as an issue' (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November).
5. Australia has a history of the White Australia Policy and treatment of current asylum seekers reflects the nation's racist past.	'there's a long history of the fear of the invasion of the borders and so forth in Australian history. Obviously the nature of Australia as a colonial settler state and the anti-Aboriginal racism that has been such a big feature of Australian history but also the anti-Asian racism that went on: you had these white settlers in the middle of Asia ... so in that sense you're tapping into something that's already there' (Fiona 2012, pers. comm., 26 October).  'the White Australia Policy is the thing which underpinned the whole way in which refugees were portrayed or seen ... so there's that kind of continuity that you see' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).

**Table 5.2**

**Rhetorical vision 2:** Australia should welcome refugees – they are just like us. RAC needs to publicly demonstrate about the issue to inform and mobilise Australians about the damage the detention regime causes refugees.

Fantasy theme	Examples
1. Asylum seekers should be welcomed.	'I'm a welcome boat person ... people who come to the Australian border, in whatever way they come, should be welcomed at that border and should be processed' (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).  'Obviously I welcome the boats' (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October).  'As far as I'm concerned, let's welcome them all except if you're worried about our capacity to handle large numbers – there's this big filter that already exists, the ocean' (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September).
2. Australians all arrived here by boat.	[Australia's colonial history began with] 'the massacre of indigenous Australian Aborigines' (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).  Australia's built on boat people. We all came here by boat' (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).  'We're all boat people here' (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November).

3. Refugees are just like us.	[We have] ‘a common interest in wanting to just lead our lives, have decent lives, be able to afford to feed ourselves and our families and whatever’ (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September).  ‘people generally want to have lives, they want to be part of society, they want to bring their kids up, they want to go to work’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).
4. If Australians knew the facts they would be more compassionate.	[Support for asylum seekers in polls] ‘appeals to people’s better instincts, so they’re certainly there to be appealed to’ (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).  [The same polls indicate] ‘an aversion to “boat people”, [explained as] bringing out all the prejudices in the prevailing news that have all been socially created’ (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).
5. Activists need to conduct public demonstrations to mobilise Australians on this issue.	[The community needs to see and understand that there is opposition to the policies put forward by the Government and the Opposition.] ‘[W]hat an activist group like RAC can do is to reach out to that population and say, you’re not alone and that’s where very public appearances of what you stand for are very important ... because otherwise people won’t know that there is an opposition and that there is a different standpoint’ (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).
6. There are connections between events, campaigns and actions on this issue and among issues that have mobilised the Australian community in the past.	‘we’re not starting from no-one’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).

**Table 5.3**

**Rhetorical vision 3:** The government deliberately communicates in an untruthful and misleading manner to divide the community and distract it from other issues. Its communication is consistent with Australia’s racist past. Government policies of isolation foster a calculated dehumanisation of asylum seekers.

Fantasy theme	Examples
1. The arrival of asylum seekers by boat is only a “problem” because the government presents it that way.	‘it’s a manufactured problem, (David 2012, pers. comm., 14 September).  ‘[I]t’s been politicised to make out that it’s a problem or it’s something that’s got to be dealt with (David 2012, pers. comm., 14 September).  ‘We utterly exaggerate how big this is as an issue. This is — the actual practicalities, the pragmatics of giving



	<p>asylum to — rightly or wrongly, justified or not — to just give asylum to 8000 people per annum every year for 10 years, isn't going — it's no skin off anybody's nose. Really' (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November).</p>
<p>2. The Government and the media are responsible for this inhumane treatment and the attitudes that support it.</p>	<p>[They] 'lead this inhumanity' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p> <p>[The government claims that] 'it is just being dragged to do all these racist things by the millions of racist Australians' ... — 'if that were the case why does the government and the media spend so much time and energy demonising, telling lies ... They have to tell lies in order for us to accept this vile policy' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p> <p>'It is a political body that has poisoned people's minds and has created, in fact, a right wing element that they now have to pander to in their elections' (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).</p>
<p>3. Australia's communication and actions are an abuse of the human rights of asylum seekers.</p>	<p>'What is actually going on, victimising — demonising — the victims of war, abusing the victims of war, is actually a sickening form of public [bullying], a nation bullying people' (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).</p>
<p>4. Australia's policy is about punishment and that is damaging to asylum seekers' physical and mental wellbeing.</p>	<p>'It's left a lifelong stamp on him [a resettled refugee] and he's still quite fragile, damaged by that, it's damaging' (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).</p> <p>'we are visiting atrocities on people. Slow kind of — slow poisoning, atrocities' (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November).</p> <p>a 'punishment regime' (Fiona 2012, pers. comm., 26 October).</p>
<p>5. The government's treatment of refugees is hypocritical and amounts to state violence.</p>	<p>[The way the Government treats refugees is] 'an example of state violence and it's just entirely hypocritical in light of the propaganda you get from both major parties about the values that they claim' (Hugh 2012, pers. comm., 28 September).</p>
<p>6. The Government deliberately isolates asylum seekers to prevent 'humanising' stories from reaching the Australian public.</p>	<p>'it's part of keeping them inhuman, keeping them faceless ... They're all presented as faceless and nameless' (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p>
<p>7. Australia has a history of racist policies and practices and the Government's story about asylum seeker arrivals is consistent with this.</p>	<p>'It's going back to what we've had since Federation — the White Australia Policy — we've had the yellow peril, the red devils, reds under the bed and then the towel heads and the asylum seekers. It is just part of this whole historical racist rhetoric' (Jenna 2012, pers. comm., 27 November).</p>
<p>8. Racism is used to divert</p>	<p>[Racism is used as a] 'diversion from the real problems'</p>

attention from other issues.	<p>(Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p> <p>[and] ‘from our real enemies ... and on to other desperate people like refugees’ (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September).</p> <p>‘so it’s always, “look over there, there’re scary refugees arriving”’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p>
9. Government communication about this issue is designed to divide the community.	<p>‘[They are] sowing the seeds in the wider public to set up barriers between us and them, to create suspicion’ (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).</p> <p>‘People are jealous enough of their own position in the world, to be against those that they feel might be threatening their own position (Isla 2012, pers. comm., 1 November).</p> <p>[Government communication creates a] ‘poisonous sense of hostility towards outsiders’ (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October).</p> <p>[creating] ‘brown scapegoats arriving in boats’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p>
10. The Government could choose to tell a different story about asylum seeker arrivals.	<p>‘imagine if the government and the media using the same facts change the way they presented them. So, instead of saying, “Oh my god, four and a half thousand people arrived by boat in Australia in 2011” they said “How wonderful, four and a half thousand people have managed to escape from persecution and find their way to Australia”’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p> <p>‘our basic attitude should be “thank god you made it here, how can we help you?”’ (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September).</p>
11. The Government represents the issue in terms of good versus bad refugees.	<p>‘a good refugee is someone who’s done what they’re told, gone through the right channels, fitted in with the criteria established by the government. Bad refugees are people who’ve arrived unannounced or who challenge in some way’ (Chris 2012, pers. comm., 9 October).</p> <p>‘suggest that people who come by boat are somehow some kind of inferior refugees who are skipping some mythical queue’ (Fiona 2012, pers. comm., 26 October).</p> <p>[the government says that] ‘oh, look we do accept people as this orderly queue, if only people would come in the right way then we would welcome them but the problem is these people all come in this nasty way’ (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September).</p>
12. The deliberate use of particular words and stories	<p>[use of terms like ‘illegals’, ‘queue jumpers’, ‘people smugglers’] ‘it is so mischievous. It is actually evil</p>

<p>in discussion about asylum seekers have consequences.</p>	<p>because you cause people’s deaths by it. There are consequences — if only people could realise their words have terrible consequences that lead to death and destruction and misery and injustice’ (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).</p> <p>“Queue jumpers” is both factually incorrect and deeply offensive because it doesn’t acknowledge the need for people to flee at almost no notice and the fact that often people have no other channel to reach a Convention country other than to do it this way. And also it’s just objectively incorrect because in so many countries from which they flee there is no queue in existence’ (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October).</p> <p>‘they use that so-called “illegality” of people to demonise them and to try to imply that there is a legal way to do it which they’re not taking which, of course, is rubbish’ (Eli 2012, pers. comm., 27 September).</p> <p>‘I think government, opposition, shock jocks, tabloid writers, whatever, are attempting to sow seeds of distrust and hostility [by using these terms]’ (Ben 2012, pers. comm., 11 October).</p>
<p>13. What the government has said is factually wrong or misrepresents the issue.</p>	<p>‘The Refugee Convention is law within Australia ... [and it] clearly says that ... coming by any means is not illegal, coming without documents is not illegal ... those that say it is [illegal] know that they are wrong’ (Germaine 2012, pers. comm., 13 September).</p> <p>‘they could very easily present these facts in a way that would have much more purchase on reality’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p> <p>‘They had to tell lies in order to try and make us accept this vile policy’ (Anna 2012, pers. comm., 6 September).</p>

**Table 6.1**

**Rhetorical vision 1:** Australia is trying to avoid its responsibilities for the experiences of those seeking Australia’s protection as they flee persecution, including for the deleterious effects of detention.

Fantasy theme	Examples
<p>1. This latest boat dispute is emblematic of Australia’s responsibilities for asylum seekers.</p>	<p>‘The fate of the Merak Tamils says everything about Australia’s punitive policies that push asylum seekers to risk the boat journey to Australia’ (RAC 2010d).</p> <p>‘They always were the responsibility of the Australian government. They remain the responsibility of the Australian government. If Australia does not resettle</p>

	<p>them, they have no future' (RAC 2010d).</p> <p>'Asylum seekers on their way to seek protection in Australia are Australia's responsibility. Timor-Leste and the other poor countries in the region should not be expected to take responsibility for them' (RAC 2011g).</p>
<p>2. Australia is avoiding its responsibilities.</p>	<p>'[Former Howard government Immigration Minister] Ruddock spent his whole political life as Immigration Minister trying to make sure Australia took no responsibility for asylum seekers' (RAC 2009e).</p> <p>'it [the Pacific Solution] collapsed because no third countries, like Canada or New Zealand, were about to take asylum seekers who were clearly Australia's responsibility' (RAC 2009b).</p> <p>'The regional processing centre proposal was always about Australia avoiding its obligations to asylum seekers under the Refugee Convention ... the Gillard government is trying to deny asylum seekers' their rights and dump them onto East Timor' (RAC 2011f).</p> <p>'Offshore processing is an attempt by the Australian government to avoid its obligations to protect asylum seekers' (RAC 2011g).</p>
<p>3. Detention centre conditions are harmful to asylum seekers.</p>	<p>'the conditions of mandatory detention are taking a terrible toll on their mental health' (RAC 2011d).</p> <p>'overcrowding in the detention centre [at Christmas Island] has seen a series of fights erupt over the past three days ... The overcrowding, the boredom, the delays and the misery is turning the detention centre into a hothouse of frustration' (RAC 2011k).</p> <p>'Mandatory detention itself inflicts severe mental trauma on every asylum seeker and that is reason enough to release them all. But the anguish that the Department is inflicting on the survivors of the Christmas Island disaster beggars belief' (RAC 2011i).</p> <p>'The Minister says that he is treating the asylum seekers with dignity and respect, but it has been no such thing. By insisting that immigration department policies require [orphaned Iraqi child] Seena to be returned to detention when he has family in Sydney to care for him exposes the immigration Department as an unfeeling bureaucratic machine' (RAC 2011j).</p>
<p>4. Australia has the resources to adequately care for these asylum seekers.</p>	<p>'Indonesia does not have the resources to deal with asylum seekers. The Rudd government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to buy Indonesia's silence' (RAC 2009b).</p>

	<p>‘They [the asylum seekers at Merak] should be brought to Australia and their refugee claims processed here. It is quite obvious that Indonesia cannot guarantee their safety. It is also obvious that with adequate resources and Australian guarantees, asylum seekers in Indonesia can be processed in between four and six weeks’ (RAC 2009a).</p> <p>‘Australia is by far the best equipped, and the best resourced country in the region to process and resettle refugees’ (RAC 2011g).</p>
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**Table 6.2**

**Rhetorical vision 2:** Australia’s communication on the issue is untruthful and untrustworthy; it resorts to subterfuge and misdirection and does not keep its commitments.

Fantasy theme	Examples
<p>1. The Australian government is not open or honest about what it is doing.</p>	<p>‘it is a dilemma and political crisis of the Rudd government's own making. Rather than bluster about people smugglers and border protection, Kevin Rudd should face up to the fact that asylum seekers are a fact of life’ (RAC 2009b).</p> <p>“‘there seems to be a concerted effort to discredit the asylum seekers at Merak,” said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition. A story in today's (Wednesday) edition of the <i>Australian</i> quotes “Western aid officials” saying there was a fight on the boat that resulted in 15 Tamils disembarking. “But there are no Western aid officials monitoring the boat. The Indonesian authorities have restricted access to the port since the IOM<sup>134</sup> left a week ago. No media or paid officials are allowed to visit the boat” (RAC 2009d).’ These are later referred to as ‘false stories’ in this media release.</p> <p>‘If the government truly wants to avoid more tragedies, we need more than political posturing’ (RAC 2010a).</p> <p>‘Chris Bowen has not even been honest enough to admit they have taken away appeal rights’ (RAC 2011h).</p> <p>‘The furtive way the department has gone about such sensitive arrangements ... [the funerals of the CI victims]’ (RAC 2011i).</p>

<sup>134</sup> IOM is the International Organization for Migration, an inter-governmental body that assists in providing information and services to migrants and refugees. It has 165 member states (IOM 2016).

<p>2. The government makes promises it doesn't keep.</p>	<p>'the Labor Party should live up to its declared policy of using detention as a last resort' (RAC 2009e).</p> <p>'It does no credit to a government that promised to establish a humane refugee policy in place of the divisive policies of the Howard era' (RAC 2009b)</p> <p>'The Immigration Minister should act on his promise to introduce complementary protection legislation to ensure asylum seekers are not returned to danger. The government well knows that Afghanistan is not safe' (RAC 2011j).</p> <p>'Despite departmental denials this morning, detainees were told that the Department will process the applications more quickly. That commitment may not be in writing' (RAC 2011c).</p>
<p>3. Government departments/partners are covering up the facts of the situation.</p>	<p>'Serco and the immigration department should stop covering up the scale of the protest inside Curtin. The lies to the media about the Curtin protest are inflaming the situation' (RAC 2011b).</p> <p>'We need an end to the culture of lies and cover-up that dominates the immigration Department. The promise to process claims quickly must be kept' (RAC 2011c).</p> <p>'The Department's determination to cover up and remain unaccountable was on display throughout the crisis (RAC 2011c).</p> <p>[In reference to the proposal for a regional processing centre on East Timor] 'now that leaked "Regional Assessment Centre" document has revealed more detail' (RAC 2011f).</p> <p>'The Minister has made all sorts of excuses for why the survivors were returned to Christmas Island after the funerals in Sydney, but they don't stand up to scrutiny. None of them wanted to go back to Christmas Island. The letter to the Minister sent the day after the funerals said as much' (RAC 2011a).</p>

**Table 6.3**

**Rhetorical vision 3: The RAC gives a platform for the voices of asylum seekers so that their stories reach out to the Australian people**

Fantasy theme	Examples
<p>1. RAC is at detention centres to record the messages on asylum seeker banners.</p>	<p>[in response to the Queensland floods] 'They have painted a large banner which states: "Dear Queenslanders: we asylum seekers are with you in this</p>

	<p>difficult times with flooding” (RAC 2011m).</p> <p>‘where are our human rights?’, ‘Stop playing games with our lives, we want positive outcomes’, ‘protection not detention (RAC 2011j).</p> <p>[during the Curtin hunger strike] ‘Protection not detention’, ‘stop playing with our lives, we want freedom’, ‘where are our human rights?’ (RAC 2011d).</p> <p>‘We condemn this unfair process’, ‘don’t let us down with inhuman acts’, ‘we want freedom’ (RAC 2011b).</p>
<p>2. RAC is in close communication with asylum seekers.</p>	<p>‘Refugee advocates in touch with the asylum seekers on the boat at Merak, Indonesia, have refuted media claims’ (RAC 2009d).</p> <p>‘People are very angry’, one Curtin detainee told the Refugee Action Coalition. ‘People are waiting many months. Some have not got a decision yet’ (RAC 2011j).</p> <p>‘many of us come from countries that regularly experience terrible natural disasters and, from the bottom of our hearts, we would like the Australian public to know that we are genuinely willing to participate in the clean-up and re-building’ (RAC 2011m).</p> <p>[quoting an excerpt from a letter from survivors of the Christmas Island disaster not attending the funerals in Sydney] ‘we don’t want the government to bring them back’, the caller said. ‘We know them. Some don’t sleep. They are troubled all the time. Here is no good for them’ (RAC 2011l).</p>
<p>3. We can tell you the truth – direct voices of asylum seekers from their own public communication efforts in letters, complaints, petitions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• state the facts</li> <li>• appeal to Australia's humanitarian instincts</li> <li>• appeal to humanity – connectedness</li> <li>• look for justice in equal treatment of asylum seekers from <i>Jaya Lestari 5</i> and <i>Oceanic Viking</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Facts:</b> ‘now many of those people are suffering. 27 women hold 31 nutritionally deprived children who are losing weight’ (RAC 2009a).</p> <p>‘109 people on the boat have UNHCR refugee status. Another 24 have UNHCR letters stating they are in the final stages of refugee determination’ (RAC 2009a).<sup>135</sup></p> <p><b>Connectedness:</b> ‘many people in Australia will recognise our situation because they know other refugees or have faced similar circumstances, having the same fears and fleeing the same dangers’ (RAC 2009a).</p> <p>[We have been] ‘abandoned by the IOM’ (RAC 2009a).</p> <p>‘We are refugees. All we are asking is that we are treated</p>

<sup>135</sup> These statements are documents attached to the RAC media releases and distributed with them.

	as human beings' (RAC 2009c). <sup>136</sup>  <b>Equal treatment:</b> 'We are refugees and should be treated equally' (RAC 2009a).
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**Table 6.4**

**Rhetorical vision 4:** The RAC condemns the government's behaviour towards asylum seekers, who have already suffered enough. This treatment of asylum seekers brings Australia's international reputation into disrepute.

Fantasy theme	Examples
1. The government's behaviour continues the asylum seekers' suffering.	'They have suffered enough' (RAC 2010a).  'Department officials [should] come to Curtin to explain why they are suffering such long delays ... The asylum seekers deserve answers. They are victims of the government's visa freeze <sup>137</sup> last year and have been waiting for months' (RAC 2011b).
2. The government's behaviour is shameful and a national disgrace.	'It [the standoff at Merak] is an unseemly and unnecessary political fiasco' (RAC 2009b).  'To inflict mandatory detention onto those that have survived the horror of the tragedy at Christmas Island would be a national disgrace ... To treat the survivors in this way would be unconscionable' (RAC 2010a).  [The number of children still in detention] 'is a complete disgrace' (RAC 2010c).  '[If Australia responded to the plight of the Merak asylum seekers it would] ... address the shameful policies that persecute asylum seekers warehoused in Indonesia on Australia's behalf' (RAC 2010d).  'it is a despicable decision from a mean-minded government' (RAC 2011h).
3. The Australian government is being judged by its behaviour towards asylum seekers.	'in the end, just like those detained on Nauru, the world community will judge that the Sri Lankans and other asylum seekers in Indonesia are Australia's responsibility' (RAC 2009b).  'it is the Sri Lankan government and the Australian government that are on trial, not Alex [spokesperson for the asylum seekers on the <i>Jaya Lestari 5</i> ]' (RAC 2009f).  'It is hard to keep our hopes alive, but we still hold on to

<sup>136</sup> This letter was attached to a RAC media release.

<sup>137</sup> Australia's processing of visas for Sri Lankans and Afghani asylum seekers was suspended in 2010 (see Chapter 4).



	the belief that there will be justice for us' (RAC 2009a).
4. The Australian government does not treat all asylum seekers equally.	'all asylum seekers should have the same rights. But the government is insisting there is one law for those who arrive by plane and another for those who arrive by boat' (RAC 2011h).
5. Australian processes are unfair and subject to political interference.	<p>'the increased rejection rates of Sri Lankans and Afghans are the result of political interference in the offshore processing system. Large numbers of initial rejections are being overturned on appeal' (RAC 2010c).</p> <p>'without confidence in the present offshore refugee determination process, there can be no confidence in the outcomes of that process. Offshore processing remains susceptible to political manipulation as can be seen by the increased rates of rejection of Afghan and other asylum seekers' (RAC 2011m).</p> <p>"The determination process is seriously flawed and open to political manipulation' (RAC 2011j).</p> <p>'But Chris Bowen [Minister for Immigration] has manipulated changes to offshore processing, removing Merits Review appeals in the hope that more asylum claims will be rejected. It is an abuse of the asylum seekers' right for their claims to be judged fairly and independently. The asylum seekers are right to protest' (RAC 2011d).</p> <p>'It has been the government's political meddling in the offshore processing that has resulted in higher rates of rejection. Offshore processing is discriminatory and unfair. It should be scrapped' (RAC 2011c).</p>
6. By dealing with corrupt governments, the Australian government is complicit in their abuses.	<p>'The Sri Lankan government is trying to hide its shocking record of human rights abuses. It is the Sri Lankan government that has to answer for the abuse of the rights of Tamils in Sri Lanka. It is the Australian government's Indonesian solution that is on trial ... Unless the Australian government delegate John McCarthy raises the human rights abuses with the Sri Lankan president, the Australian government will be complicit in the ongoing abuse of Tamils in Sri Lanka.' (RAC 2009f).</p> <p>[In response to the MOUs with Afghanistan about the return of rejected asylum seekers to that country RAC says] 'this agreement is not worth the paper it is written on. There is no way that such an agreement can guarantee the safety of any asylum seekers returned to Kabul. It is an agreement with an illegitimate and corrupt government propped up by the Australian and NATO forces' (RAC 2011m).</p>

7. Australia treats its neighbours with arrogance.	'the arrogance of the document [Regional Assessment Centre government document] is astonishing and is certain to result in even more opposition in East Timor and Australia' (RAC 2011f).
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**Table 6.5**

**Rhetorical vision 5:** The RAC believes that asylum seekers should be welcomed and that the Australian government should support asylum seekers here and abroad.

Fantasy theme	Examples
1. Australia should welcome refugees.	'What is needed is a welcome refugee policy' (RAC 2009e).
2. The government should provide leadership and challenge the anti-refugee rhetoric.	'But further damage will be inflicted on asylum seekers and the social fabric of Australia if the government does nothing to take a lead to stem the anti-refugee histrionics. Indonesia should not let itself be blackmailed' (RAC 2009b).
3. Australia's treatment of asylum seekers is a statement to the countries from which they are fleeing.	'The Australian government should be sending a strong message to the Sri Lankan government by bringing the Tamil asylum seekers at Merak and those on the Oceanic Viking to Australia' (RAC 2009f).
4. Australia should protect the rights of asylum seekers here and overseas.	'The Australian government should be insisting that the UNHCR be allowed access to the asylum seekers [on the boats at Merak] and begin to process their claims' (RAC 2009f).  'The Australian government should be securing human rights for asylum seekers, not undermining them, in Afghanistan or Australia' (RAC 2011m).
5. Asylum seekers should be processed on mainland Australia and protected from their persecutors.	'Close Christmas Island' (RAC 2009e).  'It is time for Kevin Rudd to face up to his responsibilities. They [the asylum seekers at Merak] should be brought to Australia and the refugee claims processed here. It is quite obvious that Indonesia cannot guarantee their safety.'" (RAC 2009a).  'Offshore processing is discriminatory and unfair. It should be scrapped' (RAC 2011c).
6. Asylum seekers should have their claims processed promptly.	'Justice delayed really is justice denied in these cases' (RAC 2011k).

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