

Internship Research Report

Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

Refugee and Asylum Seeker Rights

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The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS) at the University of Sydney has been involved in numerous research projects and initiatives that are directly related to its academic curriculum. There have been projects on West Papua, Sri Lanka, Palestine-Israeli BDS and numerous other issues that involve questions of peace, justice, accountable journalism and post-conflict reconciliation. In 2011 CPACS Council began discussing increased involvement in asylum seeker and refugee rights given the wave of media attention surrounding this issue. With lingering questions on the constitutional validity of the Malaysia Agreement¹ and the airing of SBS' documentary *Go Back to Where You Came From*², CPACS Council felt that it was necessary to create a clear and concise statement articulating its stance on the reception and treatment of asylum seekers in Australia. As an intern for CPACS' director, Jake Lynch, my role constituted organising a meeting between the Council and various refugee advocacy groups in Sydney, as well as drafting a statement directly reflecting the collaboration that would take place in said meeting. During the course of fulfilling my role, several questions presented themselves involving both the process of producing a collaborative statement and the substance of the statement, including the methods available to maximise its effectiveness in inciting a change in refugee policies. This report will delve into the quandaries faced during my project and the theoretical frameworks that can be used to help resolve them. I will approach my analysis through the lens of new social movement theory and evaluate the role of CPACS in this context, asking: *How can CPACS successfully contribute to the existing web of collective action in pro-refugee advocacy?* Furthermore, as CPACS' struggle in re-shaping the politics and policies of the current government is a microcosm of the pro-refugee movement's struggle to re-shape contemporary notions of citizenship, I will shift from a micro-evaluation of CPACS to a macro-evaluation of the pro-refugee movement as a whole in successfully challenging the existing system of citizenship and model of civic engagement in Australia.

The Refugee Movement

The heterogeneous Australian pro-refugee movement is comprised of organisations that work within and without the existing political and institutional framework dedicated to refugee

¹ Joint Press Conference with Julia Gillard – Prime Minister of Australia and Chris Bowen MP – Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Brisbane available online at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/cb/2011/cb171279.htm>

² Cordell M. & Murray N. (2011) "Go back to where you came from" *Special Broadcasting Services Corporation (SBS)*, Cordell Jigsaw Productions.

issues. The Refugee Council of Australia and the Settlement Council of Australia are two organisations on the conservative end of the spectrum, meaning they work constructively in pre-defined and allocated spaces for their work. Both groups accept funding by the Australian government³, which while allowing them to fund their work also carries serious implications on their autonomy, flexibility, and legitimacy. By accepting grants and funding by the Australian government, their accountability is no longer just to the public and to their members, but also to the government, greatly restricting their freedom to criticise and openly assess government policies that are contrary to their values and mission.⁴ Conversely, there are groups on the opposite end of this spectrum, like the Refugee Action Coalition and the Refugee Action Collective, who have embraced more disruptive tactics such as protesting, petition-writing, and engaging the media to publicise the information that is not readily available to the public – often in direct opposition to the government. These groups work outside the existing channels of public discourse, carving their own space and remaining strictly accountable to their cause and to no one else. While their autonomy is intact, it often comes at the expense of funding, which limits the scope of their reach to the public and affects their overall efficacy. Many other groups fall somewhere in between these two polarities, where there is constant tension to maintain a balance between both extremes. All of these actors are engaged in the movement in diverse ways, with little to no coordination amongst them, yet they all vitally contribute to the inextricable web of pro-refugee collective action because there is a common ideological thread that connects them: the principle of upholding the rights of refugees and assuring their treatment is humane.⁵

This solidarity is enumerated by Melucci as one of the three (3) vital dimensions of collective action, where “collective phenomena [are not seen] as unified ‘subjects’ but as composite action systems in which widely differing meanings, goals, and forms of solidarity and organisation converge in a more or less stable manner.”⁶ While myriad efforts are currently being exerted by pro-refugee organisations, each group has distinct approaches and methods in

³ Refugee Council of Australia, Source of Income available online at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/who/income.html> and Settlement Council of Australia, Acknowledgments available online at http://www.scoa.org.au/_webapp_767764/Acknowledgements

⁴ Richmond, T. & Shields, J. (2004) “NGO restructuring: Constraints and consequences” in *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, Volume 53, pg. 53

⁵ Melucci, A. (2000) “Social movements in complex societies: a European perspective” in *Arena Journal*, Volume 15, pg 81

⁶ Melucci, A. “Social movements in complex societies” pg 82

achieving their objectives and they work in different institutional and extra-institutional levels to accomplish them. This plurality of organisations and approaches is vital to the movement and contributes to the innovation and exchange of ideas. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for competition to replace cooperation as each group attempts to differentiate itself from the next, vying for funds from a limited pool of donors.⁷ Indeed, this dynamic was reflected in CPACS' attempt to organise the refugee collaboration meeting. With the assumption that organisations fighting for the same cause would be supportive of CPACS' efforts and animated to work in partnership, it rapidly became clear that the reality involved a cacophonous fractionalisation amongst the diverse pro-refugee groups. Some of the organisations were subtle in their rejection to work with CPACS citing busy schedules and other projects as the source of their unavailability. Some, however, were much more direct: they were uninterested in collaborating because they didn't believe our project was worth their time. Given that CPACS is associated with the University of Sydney, a well established and highly regarded academic institution, their reluctance, and in one instance even contempt, to work with our Centre was not anticipated. It became apparent that CPACS was working on the false assumption that the inherent nature of NGOs and not-for-profit organisations excluded them from operating like for-profit firms. Johnson and Prakash highlight this common misconception through NGO scholarship and deconstruct the myth that value orientations and "good" intentions of NGOs directly lead to cooperation with other similarly motivated organisations:

From the perspective of individual NGOs, membership and foundation dollars acquire the characteristic of rival goods – if I have them, you don't. While the salience is likely to vary across NGOs, external funders provide a significant percentage of resources for NGO activities. The resource scarce environment creates conditions for NGOs not merely to compete with one another but also to prioritize resource acquisition over their real objectives, including faithfully working towards principals' (members') goals.⁸

This evaluation puts an emphasis on the environmental factors contributing to NGO functionality and illuminates the challenges new and existing actors may face within this milieu. Thus, CPACS' venture into the realm of pro-refugee advocacy should be informed by an understanding of these elements while stressing the importance of maintaining its integrity and accountability in an increasingly competitive setting.

⁷ Aldashev, G. & Verdier, T. (2010) "Goodwill bazaar: NGO competition and giving to development" in *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 91, No. 1, pg. 50

⁸ Johnson, E. & Prakash, A. (2007) "NGO research program: a collective action perspective" in *Policy Sciences*, Volume 40, No. 3, pg 231-232

CPACS as *Peace-builder*

Where does CPACS fit within this composition? As an academic institution, CPACS has the unique advantage of being at the cusp of research and implementation, where the knowledge produced at the Centre informs and instructs the action that takes place beyond the academic context. In this instance, CPACS' development of a refugee and asylum seeker statement has a two-pronged intent: to establish CPACS' pro-refugee, anti-detention stance *and* to hold MPs and local representatives accountable for their policies, which consistently diverge from these values. Therefore, in order to avoid the Council's statement from drowning into an overpopulated sea of statements, reports, and papers (by both academic and non-academic institutions) CPACS needs to demonstrate ingenuity, novelty, and creativity in its approach. This can be achieved through framing techniques, political techniques, and activism. Furthermore, CPACS's core mission rests on its founding principle: *peacebuilding*. While Australia is a relatively peaceful nation, there are serious elements of structural violence that are particularly evident in the government's current policies regarding asylum-seekers. As Jeong explains:

[Structural violence] is typically built into the very structure of society and cultural institutions. Inegalitarian and discriminatory practices can be imposed on individuals or groups in systematic and organised ways by political institutions [and] is apparent in social systems maintained by exploitative means.⁹

These practices are embodied in the detention of all asylum-seekers that arrive to Australia by boat, even children and infants, for indefinite periods of time, despite abounding evidence this process is psychologically harmful for those detained and counter-productive for eventual integration into Australian society.¹⁰ In order to maintain its discriminatory refugee policies – discriminatory because they only apply to refugees arriving by boat – the government relies on the public's lack of awareness. There is deliberate secrecy and an intentionally limited flow of information from the detention facilities and case processing centres.¹¹ By monopolising the flow of information to the media, only one reality – one *frame* – is expressed to the public, distorting

⁹ Jeong, H-W. (2000) "Concepts of Peace and Violence" in *Peace and Conflict Studies: An Introduction*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, pg 20-21

¹⁰ Haggis, J. & Shech, S. (2010) "Refugees, settlement processes and citizenship making: An Australian case study" in *National Identities*, Routledge, Volume 12, No. 4, pg 367

¹¹ Hintjens, H. & Jarman, A. (2003) "Acting for Asylum: The Nexus of Pro-rRefugee Activism in Melbourne" in Leah, Michael, Mansouri, & Fetthi (eds) *Critical Perspectives on Refugee Policy in Australia*, Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University, Melbourne, 2003, pg. 66-68

the truth and implicitly perpetuating systematic structural violence. Lederarch notes in his framework for peacebuilding:

Increased awareness of issues, needs, and interests leads to demands for changing the situation. Such demands are rarely attained immediately and, more likely, are not even heard nor taken seriously by those benefitting from the situation, who prefer to keep things as they are. Hence, the entry of advocates, who work with and support those pursuing change. Their work pushes for a balancing of powers, that is, a recognition of mutual dependence increasing the voice of the less powerful and a legitimization of their concerns. [...] Negotiation becomes possible when the needs and interests of all those involved and affected by the conflict are legitimated and articulated.¹²

Those benefitting from this situation are the members of government that capitalise on the public's fear and lack of awareness to get elected into office, as well as the privately contracted companies that build and manage the detention facilities and are earning as much as \$113,000 per refugee held in their custody, and therefore financially interested in delaying the processing of asylum seekers.¹³ As Hintjens and Jarman note, "whilst lining the pockets of ACS, the government denies its financial obligations to genuine refugees who are released from detention centres and denied entitlements to assistance, welfare, English-language support, housing, or employment training."¹⁴ These stakeholders are deeply invested in the existing system, hence the large amount of money, time, and will that is devoted to upholding this structure and delegitimising any attempt to reform it. CPACS' position thus becomes that of advocate and negotiator, in an attempt to bridge the interdependence gap and build vertical relationships between those affected by this structure (refugees), those who inadvertently perpetuate it (public/voters), and those who have the means of ending it (government).¹⁵

The Climate of Refugee Discourse

The framing of issues is ubiquitous in politics and the media. As Benford and Snow explain, "frames help to render events and occurrences meaningful and thereby function to

¹² Lederarch, J.P. (1995) "A Framework for Building Peace" *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, pg 12-14

¹³ Bernard, K. (2011) "Cost of detention? \$113,000 per asylum seeker" in Crikey, August 17, available online at <http://www.crikey.com.au/2011/08/17/detention-centre-cost-of-asylum-seekers>

¹⁴ Hintjens, H. & Jarman, A. "Acting for Asylum: The Nexus of Pro-Refugee Activism in Melbourne" pg 69

¹⁵ Lederarch, J.P. (1995) "Just Peace" in European Centre for Conflict Prevention, *People Building Peace*, Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, pg 30

organize experience and guide action.”¹⁶ Political parties employ framing techniques to give significance to their actions and to justify their policies. Anti-refugee sentiment is echoed by prominent political figures¹⁷ and policies, such as the implementation of mandatory detention, forced deportation, and offshore processing, are rationalised as reasonable responses to unreasonable demands by asylum seekers in search of refuge in Australia. Burton explains this form of cultural violence:

[Governments] legitimise their aggressive policies by reference to philosophies and ideologies that are nothing more than post hoc rationalisations. Ideologies are the product of circumstances, not deliberate planning. Ideologies do not address the sources of problems. They seek to justify pragmatic responses to desperate situations.¹⁸

The ‘desperate’ situations Burton refers to can be real or, as in the case of the refugee debate, constructed, as only 1,675 refugees actually arrived to Australia by boat in 2011, hardly the numbers to warrant a ‘desperate’ situation.¹⁹ Refugees are depicted as a problem to Australia, they are dehumanised and their plight is disregarded. Rather than accepting these human beings as individuals who have overcome extreme tribulations, strategies to deter asylum seekers are labelled ‘solutions’ and become the priority in an overt disregard for international obligation and human decency. This dehumanisation of the ‘other’ has been utilised since the beginning of conscious warfare to allow men to kill their enemy without concerning themselves with questions of ethics and morality. Analogously, it is employed in the asylum seeker context to allow politicians and ordinary citizens to metaphorically ‘kill’ asylum seekers by locking them in detention facilities for an indefinite period of time, often resulting in self-mutilation, severe psychological damage, and even suicide.²⁰

To further drive the message to the public that asylum seekers are a ‘problem’, politicians and the media use terms such as “threat”, “terrorist”, “illegal”, “burden”, “other”, “opportunistic”, “invader”, “non-genuine”, and “queue jumper” indistinctly with the terms

¹⁶ Benford, R. & Snow, A. (2000) “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment” in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume pg 614

¹⁷ Dunn, K. & Klocker, N. (2003) “Who’s driving the asylum debate? Newspaper and government representations of asylum seekers” in *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Society*, No. 109, pg 71

¹⁸ Burton, J. (1990) “Human Needs Theory” in *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*, London: Macmillan, pg 45

¹⁹ Phillips, J. & Spinks, H. (2011) “Boat Arrivals in Australia since 1976” Parliament of Australia, July 15, accessed on October 31, 2011, available online at <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/bn/sp/boatarrivals.htm>

²⁰ Dingle, S. (2011) “Friend says ‘depressed’ detainee committed suicide” in *The World Today*, October 26, available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2011/s3348385.htm>

‘asylum seeker’ or ‘refugee’.²¹ Particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 when enemies were perceived to be everywhere, the link between asylum seekers and terrorists was galvanized. Asylum seekers seemed to offer an identifiable enemy, prompting a growing trend of criminalising the refugee. In fact, Klocker and Dunn performed a content analysis of media releases from August 2001 to January 2002 and exposed the government’s overwhelmingly negative rhetoric in relation to asylum seekers. They explain:

Latent content analysis of government documents revealed that 91 per cent were negative in their overall tenor towards asylum seekers [...] Only two documents were neutral, and there were only three official statements during the study period that could be coded as positive towards asylum seekers. The federal government’s negativity was unrelenting and fluctuated only minimally in relation to some critical events.²²

Additionally, they write:

Analysis of newspaper reporting during the same period indicates that the media largely adopted the negativity and specific references of the government. The media dependence upon government statements and spokespersons in part explains this relation. The findings generally support the ‘propaganda model’ that holds a pessimistic view of the news media’s critical abilities.²³

These techniques have established a master frame that is centred on an invasion mentality, underscoring the idea of cultural incompatibility and drawing on the public’s fear that refugees are both a real threat to their safety and a notional threat to their national and cultural identity.

Prescriptive definitions of national identity have played an important role in the management of asylum-seeker discourse in Australia, contributing to the categorisation of an ‘other’ that by virtue of its existence defines the characteristics of the ‘in-group’. The tripod of affect-cognition-morals is the basis for Tajfel and Turner’s *Social Identity Theory*, which conceptualizes a ‘group’ as being an assembly of individuals who recognise themselves as belonging to the same social category (*cognition*) by “shar[ing] some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves (*affect*), and achiev[ing] some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it (*morals*).”²⁴ Accordingly, the construction of the group self-concept becomes a comparative process, demarcating the ‘other’ as an antagonistic category. As Post remarks, “to maintain the sense of group- and self-cohesion we must differentiate ourselves from strangers. They are necessary for our process of self-

²¹ Dunn, K. & Klocker, N. “Who’s driving the asylum debate?” pg. 77

²² Dunn, K. & Klocker, N. “Who’s driving the asylum debate?” pg 75

²³ Dunn, K. & Klocker, N. “Who’s driving the asylum debate?” pg 71

²⁴ Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. (2004) “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict” in Hatch, M.J. & Schultz, M. (eds) *Organizational Identity: A Reader*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pg 40 (parentheses are my addition)

definition.”²⁵ Therefore cognitions, such as symbols and stereotypes, allow for the categorisation of groups, and morals are used to justify behaviour disguised as the defence of values, which both feed into the visceral emotions of hatred and perpetuate the concept of the self as the opposite of that which is hated; a self that is loved, superior, and morally justified.²⁶ Moreover, as Kofman remarks:

Widening the gap between citizens and “disruptive” outsiders can be a means of proclaiming the protective capacity of the state, and a paternalist securitisation assuaging fears of an external threat in exchange for accepting decreased protection and rights for outsiders, whether they be “terrorists” or asylum seekers. The border protection affirms the difference between citizen and alien outsider.²⁷

These psychological processes are crucial in the pro-refugee/anti-refugee debate as they are omnipresent and affect many facets of political decision-making and voters’ approval. Hopkins and Reicher elaborate the societal significance of this process:

Identity construction, wherever and whenever it may be observed, is not a neutral affair abstracted from the practical business of everyday life. Social identities are projects central to the making and re-making of the social world, and group making practice and argument is to be observed across cultures over the globe. Wherever we look we find the definition of social identities at the heart of social and political life. Such talk is not incidental but is integral to the construction of people’s interests and hence their mobilisation.²⁸

This mobilisation, however, is not exclusive to the government and the anti-refugee movement. The social construction of identity can be used positively to garner support for the rights of refugees by mobilising people through a sense of shared collective identity, one that re-emphasises empathy and human relations.²⁹ Drawing from psychological theories used in post-conflict reconciliation – particularly relevant in this case as the hostility towards refugees can be interpreted as the manifestation of a protracted racial conflict in Australia – CPACS should pay particular attention to the process of re-humanisation and “return[ing] their humanity to those

²⁵ Post, J.M. (1999) “The Psychopolitics of Hatred: Commentary on Ervin Staub’s Article” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 5, Iss 4, pg 340

²⁶ Ahmed, S. (2001) “The Organisation of Hate” in *Law and Critique*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Vol. 12, No.3, pg 353

²⁷ Kofman, E. (2005) “Citizenship, Migration and the Reassertion of National Identity” in *Citizenship Studies*, Volume 9, No. 5, pg 459

²⁸ Hopkins, N. & Reicher, S. (2011) “Identity, Culture and Contestation: Social Identity as Cross-Cultural Theory” in *Psychological Studies*, National Academy of Psychology, Volume 56, No.1, pg 42

²⁹ Hopkins, N. & Reicher, S. “Identity, Culture, and Contestations” pg. 42

where categorization has removed all individual attributes.”³⁰ Indeed, in drawing up a statement, CPACS can utilise the notion of a common national identity, but re-shape it to create an alternate meaning; a meaning that is not exclusivist or divisive.

This tactic, however, is not novel and, while it has been employed frequently, has proven difficult to perfect. Many pro-refugee organisations attempt to counter the master frame by using rational, logical, and reasonable substantiations against the government’s fear driven campaigns, which are saturated in inaccurate and unverifiable accusations.³¹ The difficulty in countering these claims stems from the government’s use of fear as a tool of manipulation, making the unreasonable appear reasonable and the illogical logical. As Olsson and Phelps explain in their study of the social learning of fear:

Humans possess the unique ability to obtain emotional information through language. Whereas fear learning through observation involves visual representation of emotional properties of a stimulus, language is arbitrarily related to, and thus detached from, its referent in the world. Language forces the receiver to rely on similar past experiences and internally generated imagery to establish an emotional memory.³²

This emotional memory can be a purely constructed one, however fabrication and reality unavoidably enmesh in the psyche, creating a perceived reality – a ‘justifiable threat’ – that is difficult to dissolve. Thus, all other frames, all other realities that are being presented by the wide array of pro-refugee advocates, are unfamiliar and consequently impermanent. These counter-frames often don’t possess staying power and are easily relegated to the back of one’s awareness once another ‘shock’ or fear-inducing statement is presented and perpetuated by the media. Therefore the question surfaces: how can CPACS permeate this structure and successfully foster a change in public sentiment and government policy? I will evaluate this question on two levels: the content of the statement and the methods of getting politicians on board with our message.

Target 1: Public Sentiment

Public sentiment is an important factor in CPACS’ ability to mobilise people in supporting the values encompassed within the statement. In a recent report commissioned by the Australian

³⁰ Halpern, J. & Weinstein, H.M. (2004) “Empathy and rehumanisation after mass violence” in Stover, & Weinstein (eds) *My Neighbour; My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pg 306

³¹ Mediawatch, available online at www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s3157336.htm

³² Olsson, A. & Phelps, E. (2007) “Social Learning of Fear” in *Nature Neuroscience*, Volume 10, No.9, pg 1099

Parliament analysing national public opinion polls, the dichotomy in public opinion is obvious.

It states:

While support for immigration has declined, opposition to asylum seekers—and disquiet about the government’s handling of the problem—has increased; and there is widespread support for the boats that bring them to be turned back to sea. The principle of taking asylum seekers, the data suggest, is one Australians do not widely endorse. In polls conducted by Morgan in March and July 2010, barely half the respondents (50 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively) said they supported ‘asylum seeker immigration’; roughly two-in-five (41 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively) said they opposed it. While this hardly suggests that ‘refugee has become a dirty word’, as some have claimed, it is hardly a ringing endorsement. The answers may have been different had the question been about ‘refugees’ not ‘asylum seekers’ and more sympathetically written. Certainly, when the Scanlon survey, in June 2010, asked respondents whether they felt ‘positive, negative or neutral about refugees who have been assessed overseas and found to be victims of persecution and in need of help coming to live in Australia as a permanent or long-term resident’, two-thirds (67 per cent) said they felt ‘somewhat positive’ (35 per cent) or ‘very positive’ (31 per cent); only 14 per cent said they felt ‘somewhat negative’ (eight per cent) or ‘very negative’ (six per cent).³³

While the trend is negative, the figures are not discouraging as over half the population *do* support refugees and/or asylum seekers’ rights to live in Australia and when given a wider context, over two-thirds feel *positive* about their repatriation to the country. Indeed, the researchers themselves point out a very important detail regarding the manner in which public opinion poll questions are framed, which bears direct consequences on the tone and severity of the respondent’s answers. Upon further investigation, the report was consistently found to contain ambiguous distinctions between asylum-seekers and ‘illegal immigrants’, or no distinction at all, which highlights the success of the government’s master frame in linking refugees with erroneous notions of ‘illegality’. The government’s continuous rhetoric of fear has created a distorted reality, where genuine refugees are being overshadowed by a fabricated amalgam of terrorist, illegal migrants, and criminals. Accordingly, the report continues:

In a survey conducted in November 2010 for Amnesty, only 40 per cent of respondents thought most were ‘genuine refugees’. Asked in June, on behalf of Scanlon, what they thought was ‘the main reason asylum seekers try to reach Australia by boat’, less than a third of respondents thought they were ‘facing persecution’ (12 per cent), were ‘desperate’ (11 per cent) or were ‘in fear of their lives’ (seven per cent). In the 2001 AES, the proportion agreeing that ‘most of those people seeking asylum in

³³ Goot, M. & Watson, I. (2011) “Population, immigration and asylum seekers: patterns in Australian public opinion” in *Parliamentary Library Pre-Election Policy Unit*, Department of Parliamentary Services, Australian Parliament, pg 29-30

Australia are political refugees fleeing persecution in their homeland' was little greater than a third (35 per cent, including the nine per cent that agreed 'strongly').³⁴

There is clearly a gap in understanding the plight of refugees that arrive to Australia and the overarching geo-political troubles that are causing 'push' factors for these refugees to make the dangerous journey by sea; hence a greater need for education and global awareness in the general Australian populace.

CPACS' Approach

Given this data, CPACS' statement needs to address the misrepresentations and misconceptions of asylum-seekers, while offering concrete solutions that the general public can understand and accept as viable, responsible and adequate responses to the influx of refugees. After several meetings within CPACS, three (3) contentious policies were chosen for change: (1) an end to indefinite mandatory detention, (2) an end to offshore processing, and (3) an end to forced deportation. It was agreed that the approach should be a combination of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing techniques that would deal with both presenting an alternate perspective and achieving 'action mobilisation' which could produce concrete changes in government policy.³⁵

Diagnostic framing is identifying the problem(s) that needs to be addressed and the sources from which it stems. Benford and Snow explain the significance of diagnostic framing to mobilise action, stating "since social movements seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation or issue, it follows that directed action is contingent on identification of the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents."³⁶ In our case, we chose three government policies that have been continually challenged by pro-refugee advocates and independent examination bodies, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the Australian Human Rights Commissioner (AHRC), as inhumane, ineffective, and in direct violation of the Refugee Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.³⁷ While these policies are directly dictated and implemented by the government, just pointing the finger at a political party and inciting a political change will not address the underlying structural issues that are in play. By

³⁴ Goot, M. & Watson, I. "Population, immigration and asylum seekers: patterns in Australian public opinion" pg 30

³⁵ Benford, R. & Snow, A. "Framing Processes and Social Movements" pg 615

³⁶ Benford, R. & Snow, A. "Framing Processes and Social Movements" pg 616

³⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission (2006) "Australia's Human Rights Record Reviewed by the UN Human Rights Committee", March 2, accessed October 31, 2011 available at:

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/un_committee/index.html

targeting problems that are deeply rooted in the system of refugee processing, we can offer a solution that dismantles this system in favour of a more humane, efficient, and productive one. In fact, our prognostic framing must include a viable alternative to the current structure that stresses a meticulous management of the boat arrivals and a focus on refugee integration into the community, highlighting the superfluity of the severe procedures currently in place. As Kofman explains, “increased immigration would only be tolerated if the populace [sees] that migration is being controlled and managed, that it is beneficial economically and that they are assured that migrants have a sense of belonging and identity.”³⁸ These are the points that CPACS must emphasise in framing the statement to reassure the public that a more humane approach doesn’t come in sacrifice of an organised and managed procedure.

Nevertheless, simply offering a viable alternative to the current process is not enough to garner the vocal support needed. In order to motivate people to mobilise and act in support of our statement they need to care about refugees, and they will only care about refugees when the dehumanisation process is reversed. Turning to social psychology literature we can find methods in achieving re-humanisation. As Stephan explains, “It may be possible to modify the associations between out-groups and negative affect by providing group members with positive experiences and information about out-groups. Contact settings are the most likely type of situation for these positive associations to be fostered.”³⁹ This is precisely what SBS’ documentary, *Go Back To Where You Came From*, tried to achieve. For CPACS, this principle can be applied in the form of a service-learning curriculum through CPACS’ Youth Outreach Programme, specifically focused on increasing the awareness of high school students on the global and personal issues that affect the trajectory of refugees from their home countries to Australia. While this would be a long-term goal for CPACS, it is not completely divorced from the intents of the statement, as the changes CPACS is fighting for cannot be achieved without political support from the public, nor will it take place over-night. Thus, an investment needs to be made in the fabric of society, so that future generations of voters are much more aware and understanding of the complexities of refugee issues.

Jennifer Rossi, an assistant professor at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, employed this concept in the development of her course, “American Social Justice: Service

³⁸ Kofman, E. “Citizenship, Migration and the Reassertion of National Identity” pg. 459

³⁹ Stephan, W. (2008) “The Road to Reconciliation” in Nadler, Malloy & Fisher (eds) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pg383

Learning” in an attempt to combat her student’s apparent lack of empathy for the suffering of others - a lack of empathy that is also prevalent in Australia within the same context. She explains her aims:

As a teacher troubled by the dehumanisation of immigrants in the media, their depiction as a faceless mass of people, the lack of attention to international causes of displacement and the use of vilifying terms like “illegals” rather than “undocumented workers,” I was facing “compassion fatigue” in my own students. I wanted students to question their attitudes by encouraging civic participation as an essential component of citizenship, and by combating the “culture of fear” resulting from the dehumanizing effects of globalisation. I therefore developed the course “American Social Justice: Service Learning” to educate students about one sub-group of immigrants – refugees – and to simultaneously develop citizenship practices through interaction with individual immigrants in the community.⁴⁰

Rossi’s course encountered some legitimate concerns, as questions of “self-centred conservatism” arose, probing whether the service learning actually helped the community as much as it helped the students.⁴¹ Furthermore, it is important to question whether this type of activity “further emphasizes students’ privilege and further ingrains the cycle of oppression.”⁴² Nevertheless, by establishing an explicit understanding that these types of service-learning projects are meant to *build relationships* rather than be ‘charity work’, some of these problematic implications can be curtailed. Ultimately for Rossi, she concluded that her students had walked away from their experience with a much more nuanced understanding of the global economic and political systems that created conditions for refugees to flee their homes, that they developed sustained, meaningful and empathic relationships with refugees and their families, and that they “developed a sense of citizenship by cultivating compassion and raising their political awareness.”⁴³ This type of community activism should not be overlooked by CPACS, especially as it is emblematic of CPACS’ dual role of being both an institution for academia and activism – learning *and* service.

Target 2: Government Policy

The political apathy in making concrete changes to refugee and asylum seeker policy is a large obstacle for the pro-refugee movement. The current Labor government, under the

⁴⁰ Rossi, J. (2010) “I didn’t know there were refugees in Rochester: Developing Citizenship Through Service Learning with Refugee Communities” in *Transformations*, Volume 20, No. 2 pg77

⁴¹ Rossi, J. “I didn’t know there were refugees in Rochester” pg 84

⁴² Rossi, J. “I didn’t know there were refugees in Rochester” pg 84

⁴³ Rossi, J. “I didn’t know there were refugees in Rochester” pg 86

leadership of Gillard, has diverged significantly from its values, attempting to enable even more conservative legislation that will be detrimental to the treatment and wellbeing of asylum seekers. In fact, Labor's current refugee policies have deviated so far from the party's original principles that an opposition within the party has been established known as *Labor for Refugees*.⁴⁴ While conventional political wisdom would explain this departure as a response to public sentiment, as I mentioned earlier, over fifty per cent of voters believe that Australia should help and accept refugees.⁴⁵ Based on these numbers, which were conducted specifically for the Parliamentary Library, Gillard's policies – a continuation of Howard's policies of deterrence – are catering to a minority. Why is this so? According to Jacobs and Shapiro, politicians don't pander; they use public opinion to manipulate the voters.⁴⁶ Mayhew supports this argument and explains:

[P]oliticians once in office try to advance their own policy ideas. To this end they use opinion surveys a great deal, but they do that to figure out how to sell their own policies to the public. Politicians need to make such pitches while they are holding office, not just during election campaigns. Policies need to be successfully merchandised in this way if they are to be enacted. The public is not a blank slate on most matters, but it can be influenced. Therefore, elected officials draw on opinion surveys to help determine how to educate or manipulate the public, to frame or "prime" issues, to justify their own views, or to counter or plant doubts about opposition views.⁴⁷

This manipulation has a self-fulfilling tendency, because the frames and justifications used to sell stringent asylum-seeker policies to voters fuel negative sentiments and consequently change constituents' opinions, which feed back into polls where public sentiment appears to support and even demand those very policies. Furthermore, the manipulation takes place on multiple levels. In an effort to distract the voters from other issues, such as the budget and economy – issues where there is more potential for dissent and disapproval – politicians, hand in hand with the media, create a political spectacle of asylum seekers.

⁴⁴ Unknown, (2010) "Refugee Policy: The fight to shift Labor" October, available online at <http://www.solidarity.net.au/28/refugee-policy-the-fight-to-shift-labor>

⁴⁵ Goot, M. & Watson, I. "Population, immigration and asylum seekers: patterns in Australian public opinion" pg 29-30

⁴⁶ Mayhew D. (2002) "Review: Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness by Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro" in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 2, pg 343

⁴⁷ Mayhew, D "Review: Politicians Don't Pander" pg. 343-344

The control of information flow described earlier is one such example of how the government, with crucial participation by the media, manages to manipulate the public through political spectacle. As Anderson explains:

Even before the current age of think tanks, talk radio, Web sites, blogging, and Karl Rove, there were warnings that the media could potentially inhibit the free flow of information, which is crucial to a participatory democratic society. Edelman (1988) and others have cautioned that the flow of information is increasingly obscured through the creation of political spectacles, distorted versions of reality, in which the media play a central role.⁴⁸

Anderson engages in six (6) crucial elements, set forth by Edelman, involved in the creation of political spectacle: the importance of language as discourse, the definition of events as crises, a tendency to cover political interests with a discourse of rational policy analysis, the linguistic evocation of enemies and the displacement of targets, the public as political spectator, and the media as mediator of political spectacle.⁴⁹ While Edelman and Anderson's analyses are directed at education policies in the United States, these theories pointedly elucidate the politics of asylum seekers in Australia. All of the above referenced elements have been employed to create the government's master frame, particularly the use of 'crisis' which, as Edelman defines, is "a creation of the language used to depict [news developments]; the appearance of a crisis is a political act, not a recognition of a fact or a rare situation."⁵⁰ These techniques of political manipulation are deeply embedded in the refugee debate and will take more than just a CPACS statement to reverse their effects. However, there are still ways in which CPACS can attempt to influence the debate and utilise the statement as its own political tool to break the cycle of tacit participation in the spectacle.

CPACS' Approach

CPACS is in a position where it must consider how to most effectively use the statement to inform politicians that their manipulative techniques will no longer be accepted to maintain an inadequate system of refugee processing, and that they need to make changes if they want the voters to continue to support them. Hintjens and Jarman write:

The counterbalance to the tendency to undermine democratic rights in the name of self-defence or deterrence is citizen protest, based on the twin principles of solidarity and action. This is the only way

⁴⁸ Anderson, G. (2007) "Media's Impact on Educational Policies and Practices: Political Spectacle and Social Control" in *Peabody Journal of Education*, Volume 82, No.1, pg. 105

⁴⁹ Anderson, G. "Media's Impact on Educational Policies and Practices" pg. 109-110

⁵⁰ Anderson, G. "Media's Impact on Educational Policies and Practices" pg 109

that the rights of the weakest and least privileged can be defended and promoted, in the interests of all.⁵¹

This view resonates with CPACS as it has been an institution that, while legitimated by its association with the University of Sydney, has never shied away from using disruptive tactics such as protesting to show solidarity for a cause. Yet, in remaining in line with CPACS mission of striving for peace, the disruption must still be a non-violent one. As Johansen describes:

A frequent goal for non-violence protests is to communicate a message of opposition. It can be seen as a voice against the establishment when the formal political channels do not give them a say in decision making. The protests themselves are a visual means of communication [and] normally just one step in a chain of activities which leads to more communication between representatives from the opposition and delegates from those in positions of power.⁵²

While the protests themselves may not directly cause a change of policy, the physical manifestation of dissent will show the government, and other constituents, that these policies are being imposed with significant opposition. Demolishing the façade of uniform approval has the potential for a political awakening, as most politicians calculate their every move based on the desire for re-election.

Moreover, CPACS should not overlook the use of ‘soft politics’ and ‘political manoeuvres’ in influencing key politicians. The idea of a “political decapitation” technique arose in numerous CPACS meetings, based on the principle that individual representatives could be targeted and approached, with the message that if they do not support the aims of the statement, they will be blacklisted from CPACS’ various networks and political circles. By threatening the removal of a vote (or two, or more), the politician can no longer be disconnected from the direct effects of his or her party’s policies (or tacit support of another party’s policies), turning the issue from one that is distant and removed to one that is very close to home. Indeed, this type of method could be described as giving politicians ‘a taste of their own medicine’ by using political manipulation to counter political manipulation.

Nevertheless, as Benjamin explains:

In part the difficulty in formulating any opposition to current policy in relation to refugees – given that there is no opposition from the Opposition – is finding a language and conceptual framework within which to articulate another view. [...] What needs to occur is a fundamental shift in which the

⁵¹ Hintjens, H. & Jarman, A. “Acting for Asylum” pg 85

⁵² Johansen, J. (2007) “Nonviolence: More than the absence of violence” in Webel, C. & Galtung, J. (eds) *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, London: Routledge, pg 149

presence of the refugee is not viewed as an exception. The problem of the exception is that it generates a simple either/or. Either all refugees are excluded in the name of homogeneity. Or, the refugees that are admitted are allowed entry on the condition of assimilation. (Exceptional status is either maintained or overcome.)⁵³

While CPACS is aiming to get a particular message across to the Australian government and its constituents, that message will only be digested and accepted when there is a fundamental change in the current definition of nationhood and citizenship. The existence and meaning of refugees – a stateless group of people – cannot be fully articulated in the current space where state-sovereignty and national borders dominate the dialogue. Thus, a re-examination of the notion of citizenship needs to take place, so that refugees and asylum seekers are no longer a peripheral facet of this model, but included as an essential component.

From CPACS to Citizenship

While CPACS is currently working towards reforming a defunct system of processing asylum seekers and challenging the structure that has diluted human rights values; the asylum seekers themselves are challenging the very fabric of nationhood and the shifting paradigm of citizenship in an increasingly globalised world. Wark suggests the following:

Asylum seekers are a critique of the limits of sovereignty. [They] are in the paradoxical position of being a standing critique of the failings of a regime of sovereignty, and at the same time totally dependent on finding a state that will accept their claims to refugee status. [...] The Australian state takes a hard line against asylum seekers so as not to encourage others to test their borders. But it is the rule of the border in general that the refugee challenges. Every state seeks to secure itself at the expense of other states. While the Australian government deserves special condemnation for its callous disregard for suffering, it is not the only state that stands accused by refugees of a foreclosure of justice. It is the justice of national sovereignty in the abstract that the body of the asylum seeker refutes in particular. The asylum seeker is a force in revolt against the privileges sovereignty grants us. [...] The asylum seeker is a social force that challenges the form of the nation state. The asylum seeker is an objective challenge to sovereignty, a vectoral challenge. Nothing depends on the asylum seeker's identity, only on his or her disposition.⁵⁴

⁵³ Benjamin, A. (2002) “Refugees, Cosmopolitanism, and the Place of Citizenship” in *Architectural Theory Review*, Volume 7, No. 2, pg. 101

⁵⁴ Wark, McKenzie (2002) “Globalization from Below: Migration, Sovereignty, Communication” available online at http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors2/warktext3.html

The asylum seeker, and subsequently his or her reception by the developed world, exposes the contradictions of globalisation.⁵⁵ As technologies, markets and opportunities have facilitated the movement of millions of people for employment, education, tourism, sport, entertainment, and social exchanges, borders have become an antiquated demarcation of nation-states in an environment that is increasingly rejecting the limiting definition of national citizenship in favour of creating a global community.⁵⁶ Not only does the movement of people define this global community, but also the vast daily movement of capital, which enables the existence of large multi-national companies. As Head writes, “whilst capital is free to roam the world, states deny its victims that right.”⁵⁷ This injustice underscores the fact that there are two separate laws at work in the world, one for the wealthy and another for the poor.⁵⁸ Kofman further describes this discrepancy claiming, “states have constructed a vast edifice of civic stratification in which specific categories of migrants and asylum seekers have different rights of entry, residence, and access to citizenship.”⁵⁹ Indeed, this is what Ong describes as “zones of hypergrowth” and “zones of exclusion”, where specific spaces are allocated to both expand and restrict movement and wealth is directly correlated with privilege.⁶⁰ These double standards are no longer being tacitly accepted and several social movements have aligned in challenging the contradiction between nations claiming to uphold universal principles of human rights (principles that they also impose onto other countries) and the national interests and sovereignty that prevents them from actually fulfilling their obligations to refugees and humans beings under those same values. This paradox has recently prompted a re-examination of citizenship policies across the world and demanded a new conception of what it means to be a citizen.

The acknowledgment that the world is changing and bears distinct consequences on the notion of citizenship has also gained traction across the political spectrum. What is at debate isn't the fact that the citizenship model needs to be rearticulated; it is in how nations and their laws *should* adapt themselves to this mutating right. Some argue that there should be a greater emphasis on rights and responsibilities based on international and human rights law that do not impose the need for “national citizenship” on immigrants, as the concept of nationality is

⁵⁵ Head, M. (2002) “Refugees, global inequality and a new concept of global citizenship” in *Australian International Journal of Law* 2002, pg. 62

⁵⁶ Head, M. “Refugees, global inequality and a new concept of global citizenship” pg 62

⁵⁷ Head, M. “Refugees, global inequality and a new concept of global citizenship” pg 63

⁵⁸ Head, M. “Refugees, global inequality and a new concept of global citizenship” pg. 63

⁵⁹ Kofman, E. “Citizenship, Migration and the Reassertion of National Identity” pg 455

⁶⁰ Ong, A. (2005) “(Re)Articulations of Citizenship” in *PSOnline* October 2005, pg 698

becoming obsolete.⁶¹ Others argue the contrary stating, “Increasing ethnic and religious diversity within modern states requires a more active effort by the state to construct and sustain a sense of common national citizenship.”⁶² Hence, learning to live with diversity requires a “reevaluation of citizenship.”⁶³ While this debate is ongoing and each country will certainly develop its own adaptation model to best address the needs of its environment, we are at a crucial point in the reconfiguration of the system where any and all decisions made today will have lasting significance on the shape of the world tomorrow. Thus, the geo-political factors that displace individuals and cause the existence of refugees and asylum seekers – factors that are often a result of the permutations of capitalism and the gaps in global governance – need to be understood and included in this newly emerging paradigm.

Head encapsulates the magnitude of what is at stake in this very moment with the following passage:

The right to asylum is a basic democratic right, as important as the right to free speech or assembly. As history has often tragically demonstrated, not least in Nazi Germany, the denial of civil liberties to those deemed ‘alien’ or foreign is often followed by the removal of democratic rights enjoyed by ordinary people. [...] The realisation of a truly global perspective of liberating humanity from national straitjackets will require the reorganisation of economic, social and political life completely along genuine democratic, egalitarian and internationalist lines. This must become a common goal of the 21st century. Anything less will leave the vast majority of refugees and displaced persons with denied protection.⁶⁴

The denial of protection to one is the denial of protection to all who live within this structure. The re-configuration of citizenship is an opportunity to eliminate these inconsistencies and end the exclusionary policies that are detrimental for a peaceful and just society. To quote Martin Luther King Jr., “*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*” We must remember this and remind those who have forgotten.

⁶¹ Kymlicka, W. (2003) “Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links” in *The Political Quarterly*, Blackwell Publishing, Volume 74, No.1, pg. 195

⁶² Kymlicka, W. “Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism” pg. 195

⁶³ Kymlicka, W. “Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism” pg. 195

⁶⁴ Head, M. “Refugees, global inequality and a new concept of global citizenship” pg 79

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