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The children overboard event: Constructing the family and nation through representations of the other

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Constructing the family and nation through representations of the Other.

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a selection of representations of the Children Overboard event of October 7, 2001, sourced from the Australian government and print news media. Employing an interpretative and critical discourse approach, I explore how the event could be seen to define the physical and cultural boundaries of the Australian nation. In particular I explore how a threat to nation is articulated. From my analysis of the representations, I identify a rhetoric of the 'Other' set within the discursive spaces of family and nation. These discourses circulated within the Children Overboard event are pursued in this thesis in terms of agenda setting, post-colonial theory and political liberalism. Specifically, I suggest that the family, as space for moral education and as a symbol for 'good' citizenship, has political value in order to maintain national borders. This maintenance is articulated in terms of the discourse of exclusion and inclusion.

The Children Overboard event demarcates national identities and spaces through the construction and representation of 'good' Australian citizens and 'bad' asylum seeker Others. This demarcation is seen to have a long history in Australia, where the nation has relied on a continual representation of the Other in order to define its 'self'. I argue that as a media event and political tool, the Children Overboard event was mobilised to promote a continuing threat to the nation in order to gain support for government policy and legitimise national security. This thesis aims to discover that in order to sanction these representations and policy actions, the event constructed an ideal of family and nation through the representation of an 'asylum seeker' Other.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i)   Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher eduction;

(ii)   Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii)   Contain any defamatory material.

Signed.

Date. 19.02.03 .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents,

Jack and Audrey Slattery,

Whose wisdom and love kept me in awe.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The last year has been an awakening time for the people, communities, and governments of the global village. Escalating problems in the Middle East, global economic instability, and an increase in asylum seekers, refugees, and migration worldwide, have re-ignited tensions involving boundaries and borders - both geographical and cognitive. In response, academic discussions have emerged focussed on the issues which these tensions highlight. In its first issue, the *Borderlands* on-line e-journal, produced by the University of Adelaide, centres on what its publisher Anthony Burke terms "borderphobias", that is, the "insecurity politics which has emerged to dominate Western states" in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks (2002, [online]). Burke argues that these events have brought about large levels of organised, military violence, as well as "normalized", non-military patterns of defence in the form of "domestic security, surveillance, and the 'deterrence' of asylum seekers" ([online]). He suggests that to legitimise these methods of national security, governments cite "the virtues of reason, stability, and order" as crucial for the protection of the national public ([on-line]). Further, in his earlier text *In Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety* (2001), Burke argues that the shoring up of defence against the threat of an Other has been integral to the way in which an Australian identity has been formed through Australia's modern history. Following on from Burke, I explore the Children Overboard event as a contemporary example of how the Australian nation seeks to define itself in terms of a 'threatening' Other. Specifically, I will argue that the representation of 'threatening' asylum seeker Others invoke discourses of family and nation which appeal to the "virtues of reason, stability, and order" referred to by Burke.

The connection between family and security is a theme explored by Greg Noble in his recent *Continuum* article 'Comfortable and Relaxed: Furnishing the Home and Nation'. Noble views the tactics of the Howard government around the 2001 Federal election as reflective of its "understanding of the link between home and national belonging", and the relationship of this link in forming a sense of security (2002, p.65). He argues that during the election campaign, there was an attempt to create a public anxiety, set in the context of September 11, that would make the government's pitch to "the strength and certainty of family justified" (p.65). The Australian public were continually reminded of "the threat of refugees during the campaign" (p.65). Similarly, Fiona Allon, in her paper 'Home as

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Cultural Translation', considers that in John Howard's speeches and policy documents, the home and family were invoked as being in crisis and under threat, "insecure and uncertain in a hostile and rapidly changing world" (1997, p.12). It is my intention to consider how the political role of national security was connected to the discourse of family in the Children Overboard event, which continues an historical narrative of exclusion, where an Australian identity has been formed through the notion of threat from Others. I approach this by using a semiotic and discourse analysis of Australian newspaper coverage of the Children Overboard event to identify the discourses of nation and family that circulated within the public and political spheres. These discourses are then explained in the context of agenda-setting, post-colonial theory, and political liberalism. In doing so, I discuss how the Children Overboard event served a political agenda, how this agenda was articulated, and why. My aim is to discover that the event constructed imagined ideals of the Australian family and nation through the representation of a refugee 'Other', in order to legitimise policy actions in the name of national security.

I begin in chapter one by addressing the nature and purpose of media and political agenda setting, by arguing that the way in which identities and cultures are represented reflects the wider cultural and political values of those representing them. By placing the Children Overboard event in the context of agenda-setting theory, the event is considered as a way of representing certain cultural and political values in the Australian public sphere, and highlights how the public, political and media agendas interact. That is, how and why Children Overboard became a media and election issue. I explore the media and government's roles in shaping news and information in the public sphere to show how and why certain social and political agendas are represented. Specifically referring to Children Overboard as an 'event', [1] I seek to highlight the constructed and representational nature of Children Overboard as a media story and political tool.

Chapter two presents an interpretative discourse analysis of selected news media texts and political dialogue associated with the Children Overboard event. Due to the limits of this thesis I have restricted my analysis to the Australian print news media and the political

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[1] Where previously in the media it has been referred to as an 'affair' or an 'incident', neither of these terms seem adequate as the former connotes a relationship and the latter almost dismisses it as a minor occurrence.

comments of government officials involved in reporting the event to the public. I consider the Children Overboard event to have been a 'national' event, because its dialogue permeated discourses involving the national community. For this reason, I specifically analyse a sample survey of news reports in two national broadsheets: *The Australian*, and the *Australian Financial Times*; and seven state newspaper editions including: *The Age; The Advertiser; The Canberra Times; The Courier-Mail; The Mercury; Sydney Morning Herald;* and *The West Australian.* The survey follows the newspaper coverage from Monday 8th October to Saturday 13th October 2001. This coverage includes the front-page reports breaking the story, subsequent reports over the following days, and letters to the editor. As much of the political comment on the event was quoted in these newspaper articles, I have included these in the sample, as well as comments extracted from media releases obtained from government and parliamentary websites. Additionally, I have included examples of print news coverage from the same state and national texts from 7th November, when the veracity of the story was questioned, until 10th November, the day of the federal election.

It must be remembered that this analysis is not a *content* analysis of newspapers. Rather, by incorporating letters to the editor and political comment about the event, I am more interested in conducting a *discourse* analysis of the event, placing importance on *what* statements were made, and thus what were not. Where a content analysis would be committed to analysing texts and the processes of their production and interpretation, a discourse analysis considers the *relationship* between texts, processes, and their social conditions. Hence, a discourse analysis views language as an activity embedded in social interaction (Schiffrin, 1994, p.415). Norman Fairclough suggests that these social interactions involve the exercise of power and control through consent whereby there are certain types of discourse which embody ideologies that legitimise, directly or indirectly, existing societal relations and hierarchies (1989, p.36).[2] Subsequently, I hope to reveal that the dominant discourses found within the Children Overboard event, particularly the discourse of family, serve dominant social interests, for they "are products of the history that has secured their domination" (Fiske, 1994, p.5).

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[2]Fairclough considers the news media to play a role in social control through discourse as it integrates people into apparatuses of control which they consider themselves to be a part of (a democracy for example). He suggests that the daily flow of news received by the public accounts for a large proportion of a person's "average daily involvement in discourse" (1989, p.37).

Chapter three then gives an historical account of socio-political exclusion and border protection in Australia, firstly by drawing on theories of the nation-state and national consciousness from Benedict Anderson (1983) and Ernest Gellner (1984). Anderson highlights the role of the mass media in creating an imagined community and a public consciousness, which he considers "crucial to the very existence and continuance of the idea of nation and national identity" (1983, p.39). A community may imagine itself as a nation, or define its national identity through the protection of certain geographical territories and cultural values. This idea is promulgated via national security campaigns involving border control and immigration. The nation-state's role in providing security to the imagined community is thus considered, and as a consequence I argue that narratives of fear and insecurity are essential for the nation-state to remain legitimate trustee of power. Here, I draw upon Anthony Burke's text *In Fear of Security* (2001) and Edward Said's post-colonial theory of *Orientalism* (1995), to show how Australia's history can be viewed as an exclusionary narrative, where the nation has continually defined itself against an imagined and constructed 'Other'[3]. The Children Overboard event is explored as a contemporary example of this.

In the final chapter, I employ a reading of political liberalism to address how representations and defence against the Other is legitimised. In my discussion I propose that the threat of an asylum seeker Other in the Children Overboard event is articulated by the metaphor of family. To explore the role of family in providing security and identity in society I incorporate readings of Deborah Chambers' text *Representing the Family* (2001), and Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995). This will serve to show some of the ways in which discourses and representations of the family in Western Anglo nations, as an ideal and as a norm, are both reproduced and challenged in the Children Overboard event. Through an understanding of John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (1996) and *A Theory of Justice* (1986), I argue that the value and sanctity of family is used to define the 'good' in a liberal society, and as such these values are imposed on the national structure. Thus, family

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[3] Some Australian commentators, such as Professor Andrew Markus at Monash University, see the current concern with the protection of Australia's borders as a recent occurrence in Australian politics, see his text *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia* (1998). Others however, such as Professor David Walker at Deakin University, consider that border protection in Australia has a history with a particular reference to Asia, see his text *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia* (1999). He argues then that for Australia, border protection has cultural, historical and psychological meaning.

and nation are highlighted as spaces of exclusion: spaces which translate into exclusionary practice. While several issues could be identified from an analysis of Children Overboard, I am limiting my focus to representations of the Other in terms of family. Family can be seen as an important space for the articulation of self and identity, both individual and collective, and for providing what Anthony Giddens terms "ontological security", that is, the confidence we have in the continuity of [our] self-identity and in the constancy of our surrounding environments (Giddens, 1998, p.46). Whether it is in terms of national home or a familial home, security is often found in a strong, whole, and authentic identity. This is dangerous however, for inherent in this need is an intolerance of difference, a fear of the 'Other',[4] which "is at the heart of racism and xenophobia" (Morley & Robins, 1995, p.103). What motivates this thesis then, is the implication of the Children Overboard event, its representations and discourses, on the *lived* social experience of Australian citizens and peoples seeking refuge in Australia. Consequently, this thesis can be located within recent academic dialogue about "borderphobias", and contributes further to that dialogue.

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[4] It must be kept in mind that I am writing from a Western point of view, being that of an Anglo-Australian citizen. This is important, for while I may speak of *representations* of the Other, I do not suppose to speak *for* the Other.

CHAPTER 1

AGENDA SETTING: GOVERNMENT, MEDIA, PUBLIC

The Children Overboard event highlighted the complex politics of representation. The way in which the refugees involved were represented, through various dialogue, language, and stereotyping reflects the wider cultural and political values of the dominant Australian culture. The print and broadcast news media, in their capacities as conductors of mass communications, are implicated in this process. Furthermore, as the news media often take cues for stories from government sources and officials, the government also plays a major role in determining representation. Therefore, what follows is a discussion of media and political agenda setting. This will show *how* representations of media events such as Children Overboard are involved in wider social and political discourses and motivations, and *why* these agendas are articulated in a certain way. I will argue that the threat communicated to the Australian voting public through representations of a refugee 'Other' in Children Overboard, not only served a political agenda, but also has had the effect of shaping and reinforcing exclusionary boundaries of nation and family.

Firstly, to put agenda setting into context, I will briefly discuss the interconnection of the news media, the government, and the national public. Michael Billig (2001) suggests that in many small ways, "the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations" (p.8). These reminders are found in the structure of print news, where daily newspapers are sectioned into local, national, and global affairs. Other newspaper features which 'flag the nation' include sports articles reporting friendly rivalries between nations, and weather reports which indicate geographical and environmental characteristics. Put in an Australian context, Graeme Turner (1994) emphasizes "the structural importance of the Australian print and electronic news media in the process of 'making it national'" (p.144). He considers that the media are among the institutions (including education, family, and health) through which the nation-state exerts power, and through which the discourses of nation are deployed and disseminated (p.146). I propose that news events such as Children Overboard may also serve to remind the Australian media consuming public of 'their national place'. This is done through an articulated threat to national borders and identities, and *specifically* through the representations of Others who may pose this kind of threat.

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The news media then, are considered to have a role in the expression of national values; in the way they present issues, identities, and events. In this way the abstract entity of 'nation', or 'Australia', is mobilised as a site for political and public dialogue concerning national issues. In other words, the boundaries and identities of 'nation' are key sites for contestation as political and media actors vie for the "authority to speak in the national/public interest" (Tebbutt, 1995, p.203). Moreover, as I will argue, specific techniques such as news-framing and terminology, play a role in forming definitions of individuals, citizens, and the nation.

The news media response to social and political issues in Australia may often be linked to the government's involvement in shaping those issues. Andrew Jakubowicz (et al) suggests that the government has a long history of engagement with the media and "attempts to direct their activities"(1994, p.44). This interconnection between media and politics is reflected in the government's varying roles in the media industry, particularly in news production, as legislator, regulator, fiscal manager, director of foreign policy, and primary media news source. Edward Herman considers that particularly in foreign policy, the government's unique position as a source and "its ability to rely on media loyalty in the face of conflict", give it a large amount of manipulative powers (1986, p.176). Although Herman refers to propaganda, a more extreme form of information control, he offers an interesting theory which suggests that in some cases the mass media serve as "instruments in campaigns of ideological mobilization" (p.175). Herman assumes that the concentrated and co-optive power of government and media to manage the public will be used; that the mass media will be periodically mobilized to serve the 'national interest' when this is needed and/or when national or international events present useful opportunities (p.176). Using the United States as an example, he suggests that the national elite and government are able to "successfully institutionalize a suitable perception of reality independently of its truth or falsehood" (p.194). Thus the collective power of the government and a co-operative mass media can be quite influential. Not only do they play a role in both the formation of national discourses and their distribution to local and overseas audiences, but they also have the capacity to "virtually suppress inconvenient facts, and to orchestrate the dissemination of more serviceable new ones" (p.176).

In the Children Overboard event, the suppression of the correct information about the photographic evidence of the event reveals a government strategy to "control the message",[5] that is: "[we] do not want in Australia people who would throw their own children into the sea" (*Four Corners*, 2002). According to John Downing, the suppression of information is commonplace in nations such as the United States and Britain. He suggests that the public is faced with persistent attempts to reduce the free flow of information and to support government and corporate secrecy "in the interests of business rights and supposed national security" (1986, p.170). It could be contended then, that the Australian government also saw the Children Overboard event as "well timed to provide ideological mobilization" (Herman, 1986, p.177). By releasing mis-information about the actions of the refugees involved, the event became a political tool for enrolling support in the name of national security.

While many people depend on the news media for information about current affairs, access to news about contemporary events and issues is restricted by a screening and filtering process (Lowe, 1995, p.79). News media producers utilise information they consider relevant and newsworthy, and disregard information they consider superfluous, controversial, or unexciting (p.80). This process can be understood in terms of agenda setting: the screening and filtering of information at the macro level of issues (p.81). The agenda-setting role of journalism has received close attention in the last twenty years with research focussing on the ability of newspapers, television, and news magazines to focus public attention on a few public issues to the "virtual exclusion of all others" (McCombs et al, 1995, p.282).

While the agenda-setting process in its entirety is complex and includes a variety of components, James Dearing and Everett Rogers in their text *Agenda Setting* (1996), consider that the process can be viewed as an interrelationship between the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda (p.6). Research on this macro or socio-political level focuses on what the media agenda is, who sets it and why, and how media and public

[5] According to Hugh Smith, the attempt to 'control the message' was continued in the Senate Inquiry in to the event. He suggests that during the Inquiry, government senators sought answers from defence personnel that would bring out a "pattern of behaviour" of asylum seekers, that included threatening children, use of violence, acts of self-harm and sabotage of vessels (2002, [on-line]). See his conference paper 'A Certain Maritime Incident and Uncertain Political Military Relations' (2002).

agendas affect decisions on public policy. However, this begs the question of who is setting the news media's agenda. David Croteau and William Hoynes (2000) suggest that a number of influences are involved including economic demands from media owners, the role of sources and public relations agencies, and the "gate-keeping and professional norms of journalism" (p.241). Additionally, the role of the government as a primary source for news media implicates it, to a certain degree, in determining the media agenda. Graeme Turner, in *Making it National* (1994), cites a review by the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission in Queensland which analysed the relationship between the media and government by studying how government media releases were used by the media. The review found that the media's independence is compromised by an institutional alignment with government which discourages the critical treatment of government information. Because of this, the public's ability to make informed decisions and judgments on such 'cultivated' media issues is also compromised (Turner, 1994, p.148). This was of major concern in the Children Overboard event. Indeed, the recent report by the Senate Inquiry into Children Overboard concluded that the significance of the event points to "an even deeper issue, to the very heart of our democracy – the right of voters to know the truth before they vote" (Australian Parliamentary Hansard, 2002, [on-line]).

The information that a democratic public receives about issues affects how the public agenda is formed. An agenda-setting approach attempts to identify who sets the public agenda and Croteau and Hoynes suggest that evidence "points convincingly to the news media" (2000, p.241). The potentially conflictual nature of an issue helps make it newsworthy as supporters and opponents of the issue battle it out in the shared 'public arena' of the mass media (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p.2). Therefore, social problems such as immigration, asylum-seekers, and national security require coverage in the mass media before they can be considered 'public' issues (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p.2). However, on some issues, public concern may be largely *preceded* by media coverage. Croteau and Hoynes suggest that agenda setting may be most pronounced when individuals have no direct contact with an issue and thus are dependent on the media for information (2000, p.240).

An example of this is the Tampa incident (2001), which preceded the Children Overboard event by two months. In Ian Ward's analysis of the incident he cites Mike Seccombe of the

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Sydney Morning Herald, who noted that long before Tampa, "the government had begun working up a sense of alarm in the community through the clever manipulation of the media" (in Ward, 2002, p.27). Ward agrees with Seccombe and suggests that the Howard government's media office "constructed a debate about queue jumpers and illegal immigrants who posed a threat to the integrity of Australia's borders; a threat requiring border protection", hence making refugees "appear a threat, rather than a tragedy" (2002, p.27.28).[6] In some case then, agenda setting can be an emotional reaction to certain trigger events which, like Tampa and Children Overboard, have value because they can be used to political advantage (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p.91).[7] From Ward's analysis of the Tampa incident, it was evident that the media representation of similar news issues could have influence on public opinion. Hence, the government saw the value of framing such an incident in a certain way, repeating the practice in the shaping of the Children Overboard narrative.

I have argued so far that the issues and identities presented in the news are not simply a reflection of reality. Instead it refers to a process of identification and selection of stories (agenda-setting) in which some events receive large amounts of media attention, while others do not. The events that are noticed tend to be presented in a particular manner, which puts forward the agenda of certain authorities, institutions, or individuals. In doing so, they remind societies to renew their commitments to established values, offices, or persons, which may reinforce an existing social and moral order (Dayan & Katz, 1994, p.147). Media events then, can be seen as agenda-setting tools and I consider the Children Overboard event to play a similar role.

Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz in their text *Media Events: the live broadcasting of history*, coined the term 'media event' to describe televised news or historic occasions, mostly occasions of state, including large contests of politics and sports, "charismatic missions,

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[6] Ward also argues that the lesson from the Tampa incident is that those covering politics need a good understanding of wedge politics and "the full arsenal of political marketing methods that now shapes Australian political combat" (2002, p.21). He suggests that the mainstream news media coverage of the Tampa story failed to recognize at the time how the events were part of a carefully calculated Liberal Party strategy to revive its flagging electoral stocks ahead of a federal election (Ward, 2002, p.22).

[7] While 'unlawful' immigrants such as asylum-seekers are portrayed as threats by governments, the greatest numbers of unlawful non-citizens at 31 December 1998 were from the United Kingdom (10.8%) and the United States (8.7%), see the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissions 2001 publication 'Face the Facts'.

and the rite of passage of the great" (Dayan & Katz, 1994, p.1). The organisers of these events are typically public bodies with whom the media cooperate, such as governments, political parties, and international bodies (p.6). Whilst the authors generally refer to *televised* and *celebratory* media events, citing examples of Olympic Games and Royal Weddings, the same theories could be applied to the Children Overboard event. As agenda-setting tools media events can focus public opinion, enroll support, and activate debate on a given issue (p.199). As such, the language and discourses of media events in democratic societies are instructive, as they are often "persuasive occasions", attempting to enlist mass support and loyalty to the society or its government, and its legitimate authority (p.9). Media events then, socialise citizens to the political structure of society and they may affect public opinion by encouraging or inhibiting the expression of preferences, values or beliefs. Furthermore, as cultural performances, media events may symbolically omit social elements that stand outside the consensus (p.199). The way in which the information and representation of the Children Overboard event was disseminated via the media and sanctioned by the Australian government, suggested that there was a specific political outcome in mind. Hence it became a media event. As instructive political tools, the discourses of the event gave insight into the cultural and moral values that the Australian media and political actors considered the nation to embody.

John Fiske (1994) also considers that all media events are 'discourse events' by questioning whether it is possible to "separate media events from non-media events" (Fiske, p.1). He suggests that the term 'media event' indicates that in a post-modern world we can no longer rely on "a clear distinction between a 'real' event and its mediated representation" (p.7). A media event, then, is not a mere representation of what happened, but it has its own reality, which Fiske argues is articulated via socially rooted discourse (p.7). Discourse provides a social group with ways of thinking and talking about areas of social experience that are central in its life. The struggle over what discourse or discourse event should be recognised within a society "is part of the reality of the politics of everyday life" (p.7). Therefore in considering events such as Children Overboard it is useful to analyse what statements were made, what were not, who made them and who did not. This can be done by studying the role of the media in which these statements were circulated (p.3). Fiske suggests that the

continuity between event and discourse produce a 'discourse event' or 'media event', not a discourse about an event.[8]

If all media events are discourse events, then how a news issue such as asylum seekers is represented by the media or the government can reveal the discourses involved in those issues. In turn, this reflects the values or agendas held by the producers of such images. One technique of representation and agenda setting used in news media and politics is framing. Involving the use of specific language, symbols, and stereotypes, the selection of a frame, or a theme for the story, creates a perspective for thinking about particular issues (McCombs, 1995, p.295). In his text *Media Mythologies*, Barry Lowe considers that the stereotypes chosen by the media for their representations of social categories can be "amplified onto the public in such volume and quantity as to create a consistent and plausible image that becomes almost a standard for that type" (1995, p.144). Further, he suggests that the prominence of stereotypical constructions in the media is "a reflection of the prominence of stereotyping in social discourse" (p.145). If this is so, then the potential impact that negative representations in the national news media may have on minority or excluded groups in society is evident (p.85). As such, the news media can play an important role in setting the boundaries of public opinion on key issues and constructing and reinforcing stereotypes when portraying the Other.

In their study 'Framing of Asylum Seekers in Dutch Regional Newspapers' (2001), Leen D'Haenans and Marielle De Lange consider specifically how migrant groups are presented in news coverage, and whether or not this is a 'distortion of reality'. The concept of agenda setting occupies a central position in their study. They cite several analyses and surveys in the Netherlands region, which conclude that in regard to minority groups news coverage focuses on conspicuous incidents and sensational conflicts, thereby creating a generally negative image of those groups. Additionally, irrelevant references to nationality, skin colour, and religion, were coupled with the use of generalizations, to problematise and

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[8] While I acknowledge that the Children Overboard event involved 'real' people, my primary concern is how the material event can be viewed as a media/discourse event. Just in the same way that discourse can translate in to material practice, so too can a tangible 'real' event such as Children Overboard, involving real people, translate into a discourse/media event – a representation. Thus, I consider that the Children Overboard event, as a 'real' event, translated into an event articulating the interaction between the discourses of family, national security, and the Other.

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dramatise the presence of migrant groups (D'Haenans & De Lange, 2001, p.849). The authors suggest that framing is one of a number of techniques the media have employed to influence the public, public opinion, and with it, the public agenda (p.849). Each type of frame serves a different function, either by defining a problem, diagnosing the causes, making moral judgments, or putting forward solutions (p.850). Subsequently the authors recognise five frames which are frequently used: the conflict frame; the human-interest frame;[9] economic consequence frame; morality frame; and responsibility frame (p.850).

D'Haenans and De Lange suggest that the morality frame adds a religious or moral charge to an event or issue either by making a reference to morality or religious tenets, or by offering specific social prescriptions about how to behave (2001, p.850). Emphasis is often placed on the personal, emotional side of the event, issue, or problem. In the representations of the Children Overboard event, it is the morality frame which is the most obvious. For example, the refugees involved in the event are portrayed as inhuman, uncivilised, and immoral. Furthermore, the Australian public's fear is personalized by references to national security and family responsibility in terms of good/moral citizenship, which I expand on in chapter four. While foregrounding the moral value of family and of 'good' citizenship in Australia, representations of the Children Overboard refugees invoked a sense of violence and threat to these values. In comparison to this Australian 'morality' and 'goodness', the perceived cultural practices of the people throwing children into the ocean were seen as offensive and undeserving of compassion. Thus, the Children Overboard event emphasised the refugees' perceived difference from and incompatibility with mainstream Australian values (Lowe, 1995, p.149). Using the Australian Muslim community as an example of minority group representation, Lowe argues that their social formations are portrayed as "extremist and intolerant" and their cultural practices as "barbaric and cruel" (Lowe, 1995, p.150). This was also reflected in comments such as 'savage' and 'uncivilised' in the Children Overboard dialogue (explored further in the next chapter).[10] In this way, Children Overboard simultaneously 'framed' a 'good' Australian citizen and a 'bad' refugee Other.

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[9] Reporting news in a human-interest frame is a way to personalize, dramatise and emotionalise news (D'Haenans & De Lange, 2001, p.850).
[10] See also Anna Haebich's (2000) work *Broken Circles: Fragmenting indigenous families 1800-2000*, which traces the history of Aboriginal child removal by successive Australian governments. She considers the ways

I claim that the language used to articulate the Children Overboard event had a major role in framing the people involved and shaping public attitude towards the issues which the event highlighted. Language and symbols are very important in communicating values and ideologies and certainly an important element in any political campaign. Mungo MacCallum, in his essay 'Girt by Sea', suggests that the specific terminology used to describe allies and enemies and their ideas, can have "an important bearing on whether arguments are accepted or rejected" (2002, p.40). He refers to the Howard government's "deliberate recasting" of the asylum seekers from "pitiful victims of circumstances beyond their control, to cynical and calculating invaders", as an example of shifting terminology (p.41). This 're-casting' was done through a careful manipulation of language. As will be shown in the following analysis chapter, the government considered the actions of the Children Overboard refugees as "clearly planned and premeditated" (*Four Corners*, 2002). For the Prime Minister specifically, there was something "incompatible between somebody who claims to be a refugee and somebody who would throw their own child into the sea" (*Four Corners*, 2002). MacCallum suggests that the government has an aversion to the term 'refugee' (2002, p.4). While the term is generally used to describe people forced to flee from their homelands as a result of war or disaster and seek refuge in other countries, it also has a more precise legal meaning. MacCallum insists that "this of course is the narrow definition" used by the Howard government - until a refugee's case is proven through the tribunals, those seeking refuge are not 'genuine' refugees (p.41). Another term, 'boatpeople',[11] used frequently in the newspaper coverage of Children Overboard, describes the manner of arrival of the refugees. However, from the perspective of government this term had a disadvantage in that it "included the word people, thus admitting the common humanity of the refugees" (p.42). Again, as the Howard government perceives it: "it is a matter of common humanity...Genuine refugees don't throw their children overboard" (Radio interview, 2UE, October 2001).

Peter Mares in his conference paper "Reporting Australia's asylum seeker "crisis"" argues that the failure to distinguish between asylum seekers, refugees, and boatpeople means that

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as "profoundly primitive and irredeemably barbaric" (p.132) and as the "key boundary maker in Australian citizenship" (p.163).

[11] The term 'asylum seekers' has largely superseded 'boatpeople' which is both specific and accurate, but also implies both dependence and subservience (MacCallum, 2002, p.42).

"all are brushed with the same tar of distrust and illegitimacy" (Mares, 2002, p.7). Mares proposes that political leaders must shoulder considerable responsibility for this generalisation (p.7). He suggests that when a politician refers to asylum seekers as "illegals" or as "queue jumpers" who are "stealing places" from the "most vulnerable" refugees, then this language is dispersed through the media and "swiftly becomes common currency" (p.8). Furthermore, the use of this language means that people involved are "transformed from passive objects of compassion, into untrustworthy actors who provoke a sense of fear" which needed to be defended against (p.1). Seen in terms of Children Overboard, the refugees involved were portrayed as a threat to the culture, democracy, and security of Australia.

The representation of Others may also be influenced by the isolated manner in which media events such as Children Overboard are reported in news and current affairs. Audiences may interpret the reported incident without sufficient background information to understand the full context in which it occurred, and as such, this may reinforce existing social misconceptions (Jakubowicz et al, p.160). With a lack of information an issue may quickly go beyond hard news, to opinion and speculation. This is what is often heard in talk-back radio, and seen in editorials, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor. In these media spaces the rules of evidence are suspended. What results is the publication of letters to editors with titles such as "We don't need them" and "Terrorism at sea". I discuss these letters at greater length in the following chapter. Here the "moral indignation is great in describing the depths to which the enemy or the Other has descended" (Herman, 1986, p.177). This was seen in responses to the media reportage of unsubstantiated claims of adults throwing their own children into the sea - "[they] ought to be condemned".

The initial stories of the Children Overboard event provided little background information or supporting evidence. As such, assumptions and stereotypes were quickly made. However, both the Tampa and the Children Overboard stories would have been difficult to report because of their geographical remoteness and because the government, especially when the Minister of Defence, Peter Reith, exercised tight control over information.[12]

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[12] Graeme Dobell considers that a form of censorship was imposed by the refusal to allow reporters onto Navy vessels and the channeling of all information through the Defence Ministers' office: "Disinformation

Journalists were prevented from talking to departmental officials, defence personnel, and asylum seekers (Ward, 2002, p.22). Public servants, both military and civilian, were threatened with penalties for divulging information, which had no "conceivable bearing on national security", but may have been "politically troublesome" in the lead-up to the federal election (MacCallum, 2002, p.59).

By considering agenda setting theory, it is apparent that media reporting and political dialogue can shape public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers and also has the potential to influence policy. Journalists who cover federal politics face a powerful army of media advisers whose rationale is to "control the political message" (Ward, 2001, p.35). Thus, when reporting on events such as Children Overboard, journalists need to remain aware of the responsibility which they assume when they report on vulnerable people (Mares, 2002, p.12). The techniques of representation, the verbal and visual imagery used, must be considered carefully as the incorrect use of words or insensitive use of terminology can have an effect on the way people are perceived and treated in the community (Mares, 2002, p.15). By representing the cultural identities and values of minorities as real and potential agents of social disharmony, the government and news media may be seen to promote intolerance towards minority groups and affect their acceptance into society. In this way, an Australian political and social culture of exclusion is created and reinforced.

It is my contention that the Children Overboard event, as a media or discourse event, focused on articulating difference, which has the effect of assuming and reinforcing exclusionary boundaries, both geographical and cultural. Further, the event could be seen to justify a particular understanding of the world in terms of insecurity, fear, and a threatening 'Other'. The following chapter presents a selected account of news media representations of the Children Overboard event which explicate this rhetoric of fear. This language reveals discourses which dominate this event, and which this thesis argues are predominantly exclusive, serve dominant social interest, and are "products of the history that has secured their domination" (Fiske, 1994, p.5).

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used for political propaganda was passed and the public's right to know suffered". See his conference paper, 'Ministers, the Media and the Military: Tampa to Children Overboard' (2002).

CHAPTER 2

THE CHILDREN OVERBOARD EVENT: REPRESENTATIONS AND READINGS

Several significant events occurred in the months before the November 10, 2001 Australian Federal election, including the Tampa incident in August, the terrorist attacks in the United States in September, and the Children Overboard event in October. These events highlighted anxieties about border control and national security in nations throughout the world and intense scrutiny was placed on the treatment and deterrence of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. As a result of the Tampa event, the Australian government passed the Border Protection Bill 2001. This gave Australian authorities the power to redirect (by reasonable means or force) any vessel within Australia's territorial sea considered as "prejudicial to the peace, good order or security" of Australia to outside of these designated borders (*Border Protection Bill*, 2001, [on-line]). Thus, not only did these events influence Government legislation, but they also helped to set the tone for public and political debate during the election campaign. I have chosen to look at the Children Overboard event specifically for three reasons. Firstly, like the others I have mentioned, the event highlighted anxieties about border control and national security. Secondly, I consider it to have also revealed a rhetoric of fear and exclusion set within the discourse of family. Thirdly, the event is highlighted as a case of strategic mis-handling of information by the government for political campaign purposes as I outlined in the previous chapter. Here, I present a sample of representations in the Australian print news media of the Children Overboard event. In doing so, I identify the representations which were deployed as part of a government agenda to construct the refugees as threats to Australian borders, identities, and values. These representations point to the broader discourses of family and nation which I believe are articulated through the event.

As I have previously suggested, the news media are in a position to influence people's understanding of the meanings and issues of 'nation'. Specifically referring to the print media, Benedict Anderson argues that "nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness and the idea of 'nation' is "now nestled firmly in virtually all print-languages" (1983, p.123). Anderson considers the role of mass media in the construction of an imagined community and as a vehicle for public consciousness, which is crucial to the

very existence and continuance of the idea of nation.[13] He specifically refers to the print media and its role in connecting an individual to a community when he says:

> The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing creates an extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction. This ceremony is performed in silent privacy yet at the same time, the reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his neighbours and colleagues, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life (p.39).

My sample analysis of the representation and dialogue of the Children Overboard event has focussed on the print media reportage and political comment of the event during the periods of 8th – 13th October, and 7th –10th November 2001. The survey covers both national and state newspapers. I am interested in the types of *discourse* and rhetoric that manifested in the Children Overboard event. Therefore I include print news articles, letters to the editor, and political comment published in the sample newspapers to gain a notion of what discourses were circulating in the public, media, and political spheres about the event. From my analysis, discourses of family and nation are identified, specifically, the use of the family as a metaphor to promote the myth of national identity and security. It is my belief that the metaphor allowed for a moral tone to be attached to the story, where the morality of the refugees involved is questioned, condemned, and constructed as a threat to the imagined values of the Australian nation. The use of this metaphor set an emotional and threatening tone to the story, placing the political issue of national security into the discursive space of home and family. Although some of the initial newspaper reports identified a link between the event and political campaigning, there were no reports during the period I analysed which explored the politics behind the government's labelling of the asylum seekers as 'uncivilised' and 'weak of mind', and therefore as lacking 'moral strength'.

George Lakoff, in his text *Metaphor, Morality, and Politics* (1999), suggests that much of our social and political reasoning makes use of a system of metaphorical concepts and he recognises 'moral strength' as one of the main metaphors used by political parties (p.140).

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[13] However, it is not just the print media which has this effect. Radio and television are also crucial for the insertion of the 'imagined community' into a simultaneous mode of address. Television specifically has been described as a instrument for connecting the family or domestic domain with the national or global village and for "sustaining both the image and the reality of the national family" '(Morley and Silverstone in Turner, 1994, p.146).

The metaphor of 'moral strength' views the world in terms of a war of good against evil and thus "imposes a strict us/them dichotomy" (p.140). It is the model of the family that groups together the metaphors for morality. Lakoff suggests that conservatives share an ideal model of what a family should be, which he refers to as the "strict-father model" where life is seen as fundamentally difficult and the world as fundamentally dangerous (p.145). According to this model it is the father's duty to support the family and protect it from evils, both external and internal (p.146). The father is said to embody the values needed to make ones way in the world and to support a family; he is "morally strong, self-disciplined, frugal, temperate, and restrained" and it is his job to protect and support his family, believing that safety comes out of strength (p.146). What links this family-based morality to politics is a common metaphor, what Lakoff terms as the "nation-as-family" in which the nation is seen as family, the government as a parent, and the citizens as children (p.148). I explore this metaphor further in chapter four, but for now the following analysis identifies this 'value of family' in a selection of news texts and political dialogue from the Children Overboard event.

The Children Overboard event of 7 October, 2001 occurred two days after the Federal election was called and at the start of U.S military retaliation against Afghanistan. Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock, and Defence Minister Peter Reith reported to the media that the Australian navy had intercepted an Indonesian boat carrying refugees north of Christmas Island. In their public addresses to the media, they accused the refugees of throwing their 'children overboard' into the ocean in what the Ministers perceived to be an attempt to pressure the crew of an Australian naval ship to pick them up and take them to Australia.

The Immigration Minister's public address on October 7, set a moral tone to the event when he announced that, "more disturbingly, a number of children have been thrown overboard, again, with the intention of putting us under duress. I regard this as one of the most disturbing practices I've come across. It was clearly planned and premeditated" (*Four Corners*, 2002). Further, when asked how old the children involved were, the minister replied, "I don't have that detail. But I imagine the sorts of children who would be thrown would be those who could be readily lifted and tossed without any objection from them" (*Four Corners*, 2002). Following not far behind on the airwaves was Prime Minister John

Howard. At a press conference 2UE reporter Phillip Clarke asked the Prime Minister for his reaction to the refugee issue. Clarke put the question to the Prime Minister in the context of family and parental responsibility: "Can we turn to the refugee issue? I mean I was horrified...I think every parent would have been...about the image you had at the weekend of boat people throwing their children overboard" (Radio interview, 2UE, October, 2001). John Howard's response suggested a binary of good and bad citizenship within a family context, when he said:

> Well, my reaction was I don't want in Australia people who would throw their own children into the sea, I don't think any Australian does...There's something, to me, incompatible between somebody who claims to be a refugee and somebody who would throw their own child into the sea. It offends the natural instinct of protection and delivering security and safety to your children (Radio interview, 2UE, October 2001).

This quote was then circulated in several news media reports. Howard's statement aligns the alleged practice of the refugees with 'bad' and 'unnatural' parenting, and as a consequence they are regarded as incompatible with the government's ideal of Australian 'goodness' and family. Further, by describing the refugees actions as 'offensive' to natural instinct of security, Howard signals a threat to the value of family, and hence, to Australia.

Most morning newspapers on Monday 8th October ran front-page stories about the Children Overboard event (see appendix 1), with much information quoted directly from government sources and officials from the previous day's press conferences. Only two out of the nine newspapers surveyed recognised any link between the incident and political electioneering. These included the front-page report of the national newspaper *The Australian*, with their piece "Boat children overboard: Howard hard line becomes poll focus" (Henderson, 2001, p.1). This report suggested that the asylum seekers "became pawns in the election campaign", stating that John Howard "deplored the boatpeople's actions and stood behind the Coalition's hardline determination to keep out illegal refugees – one of the Government's chief claims to national leadership and the campaign's main preoccupation" (Henderson, 2001). The *Australian Financial Times* story "Refugees overshadow ALP" reported that the Government's handling of the Tampa incident in August "has won it strong public backing and seen it storm to election favouritism. This latest refugee incident

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[Children Overboard] has undermined Labor's attempts to swing the election back onto domestic issues" (Lewis, 2001).

Most other national papers ran sensational headlines, including the *Courier-Mail's* "Children hurled into sea: Asylum seekers sabotage vessel". This article quoted an unidentified government source describing the nature of the refugees as "very aggressive and not happy at all...It was a tense situation...they were quite desperate to come to Australia" (Ludlow, 2001). In their front-page story "Children Overboard: New tactic by desperate boat people", Tasmania's *Mercury* labeled the incident as a "dramatic twist in the asylum seekers crisis" and that the navy was "forced to fire shots above the vessel" (Ludlow, 2001). *The Canberra Times'* front-page coverage titled "Children on boat thrown into sea", labelled the alleged actions of the refugees as specifically a "protest against Australia's tough stance against allowing boat people to land" (Peake, 2001). Many articles quoted John Howard's statement that "we are a humane nation, but we are not a nation that's going to be intimidated by this kind of behaviour" (Henderson, 2001), and three out of the nine made reference to the asylum seekers' alleged country of origin. The references to the 'intimidation' and 'new tactics' of the asylum seekers construct an 'aggressive' image of the asylum seekers. Their 'protest' is represented as a threat to the Australian nation and in opposition to the laws and tolerance which Australia is considered to embody. Hence, a line is drawn between a humane Australia, and a barbaric Other.

While the Monday newspapers ran these stories and government officials continued to make unsubstantiated comments about the event, the refugee vessel involved begun to take on water due to mechanical sabotage and was sinking rapidly.[14] Around two hundred men, women, and children ended up in the ocean and were rescued by the HMAS *Adelaide*. The following day, Tuesday 9th October, a few national newspapers ran the story of the ocean sabotage and rescue, including *The West Australian*, whose front page story headlined "Boat Dilemma: Navy rescues Iraqi asylum seekers from sinking boat" (Gregory, 2001). Similarly, the *Canberra Times* ran a report on page three, entitled "Navy saves Iraqis twice: Refugees rescued as their boat sinks", and used a dramatic quote by Christmas Island's harbourmaster who described the actions of the Iraqis as callous: "They have got women

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[14] "The steering and engines were disabled at various times". See Commander Banks' evidence to the Senate Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident (2001, p.5, [on-line]).

and children on board and it's right on the open seas, how callous is that, for God's sake...What's going to be the tactic in the future, to come charging in and ram the ship on a reef?" ("Navy saves Iraqis twice", 2001). In these reports, where the refugees are portrayed as bullies, the bravery of the Australian navy in rescuing these 'callous' people is highlighted. This again reiterates the 'tolerance' and 'goodness' of the Australian nation, where the perceived barbarism of the refugees is predicated on Australia's 'decency'.

By now, some sections of the media and opposition parties were asking for proof of the initial event from October 7. Defence Minister Peter Reith's media advisor, in need of evidence to back up the comments of the Prime Minister and Immigration Minister, ordered that the Defence Force release the photos rumoured to be available. The Defence Force had reported to Reith's media office that the October 7 allegations of children being thrown in the water were incorrect, and that the available images were from the boat sinking on October 8. Despite this, the dates were erased from the photos and the government then publicly released a photo (see appendix 2) with the information that it was from the event of October 7, when children were allegedly being thrown overboard in "an attempt to blackmail the Australian navy" (*Four Corners*, 2002). Peter Reith announced on ABC Radio that he had photographic evidence to back up the government claims as well as video evidence: "I have not seen it myself and apparently the quality of it is not very good and its infra-red or something. But I am told that someone has looked at it and it is an absolute fact – children were thrown into the water" (*Four Corners*, 2002). Instead, as it was revealed in *The Australian's* November 9 report, and later in the 2002 Senate Estimates Committee inquiry into the incident,[15] the photographic images offered were of adults and children fleeing their sinking vessel on October 8, "in an attempt to save their own lives" (Saunders, 2001).

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[15] Public hearings of the Senate Estimates Committee Inquiry commenced in March 2002. Its role was to: "report on the so-called 'children overboard' incident...and issues directly associated with that incident including". This included the role of Commonwealth agencies and personnel in the incident; the flow of information about the incident to the Federal Government; Federal Government control of, and use of, information about the incident, including written and oral reports, photographs, videotapes; the role of Federal Government departments and agencies in reporting the incident, including the Navy, the Defence Organisation, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affiars, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. See the Australian Parliamentary Hansard available URL: www.aph.gov.au.

The question of why the government chose not to disclose this information to the public and media before the election suggests that another agenda was in place. I argue that the statements made about the Children Overboard event and the representations of the refugees involved, sought to support government policies as part of an election campaign. Based on the sample survey of newspaper articles and political comment so far, it could be concluded that reports about the Children Overboard event invoked a sense of threat to the Australian nation and its citizens. This was evident in the citing of the asylum seekers' origin and in the choice of words which describe their behaviour and practices as 'callous', 'aggressive', and 'disturbing'. Thus, the government's agenda appeared to be to enrol support for the government's immigration and border control policies which sought to protect against these apparent threats. It is my argument that by framing the Children Overboard refugees in such a way, the government and media sought to invoke a link between national security and the value of family. This link suggests an inherent responsibility to the larger idea of 'good' citizenship.

Rhetoric of the 'good' was also reflected in the letters to editor[16] section of several newspapers, which showed signs of support for the Government's actions and comments as well as some criticism.[17] For example, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on October 9, this letter was published: "How many people do you know who would sacrifice their children and throw them overboard from a boat? Is this the kind of person you want for a neighbour? Do we really need this type of savage in Australia? No way!" (George Freuden, October 9, p.11). Additionally, there was this statement: "Whatever the reason, anyone who endangers a child's mental or physical safety ought to be condemned" (Kate Orman, October 9, p.11). The following day on October 10, *The West Australian* published several letters from readers expressing their views on the Children Overboard event. One letter was titled "Terrorism at sea" and stated:

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[16] The way in which editors chose letters to publish reflects another role of the agenda-setting process in the media. Editing these letters may be seen to construct public opinion, by presenting strong and conflicting views to produce debate about an issue. For further discussion of the role of letters to the editor see Karin Wahl-Jorgensen's work (2002) 'The construction of the public in letters to the editor'.

[17] For example, this letter in *The Australian*: "So this latest bunch of terrified refugees threw their children into the water. So would I if a naval ship fired warning shots...When will the propaganda and demonising of refugees from the local media stop, and both sides of the story be printed and explained" (Dominic Sculling, October 12, 2001).

It appears that we are a sitting duck for another form of terrorism, incorrectly called people smuggling. Anyone who values their family would not throw their own flesh and blood overboard in the middle of the ocean. These individuals are displaying the fanaticism and suicidal martyrdom that has rocked us recently. The Oxford dictionary definition of terrorism is "the use of violence and intimidation to achieve a political purpose". Throwing children into the sea in front of our navy certainly fits this description (Marloo Quar, October 10, p.17).

In these letters the need for protection and the value of family is highlighted. The letter writers are clearly offended by the endangerment of childrens' lives. The act of throwing children overboard in 'sacrifice' is seen as violent and 'savage', and thus, so are the refugees. However, it is interesting that in Quar's letter, he describes the refugee's act as one aimed to violently 'achieve a political purpose'. Rather, I would argue, that the *government's* act of *alleging* that children were thrown overboard, is one of 'intimidation' to achieve a political purpose. By intimidation I mean the representation of the refugees as a threatening Other for 'good' Australian citizens to fear, and for the government to provide protection against.

Letters entitled "We don't need them", and "Boat People", reflect ideas about citizenship in terms of who should be let into Australia:

> Are these illegal immigrants who threw their children into shark-infested waters when they were informed they would not be allowed to enter Australia the type of people we want in this country? We need refugees who are the cream of the crop, not the bottom of the barrel (Mark Tomkinson, October 10, p.17).

> If these so-called refugees are capable of throwing overboard and endangering the lives of their own children, what are they capable of doing to other human beings? They are not the kind of people we need in this country, regardless of their circumstances (Steve Majewski, October 10, p.17).

The letter entitled "Boat People" specifically infers that if the refugees are capable of endangering their own children, then they must be capable of threatening Australian children, and other legal 'citizens'. Therefore, people of this kind are unwelcome to Australia.

The weekend papers contained additional letters on the topic of refugees. On Saturday October 13, *The Age* published the following: "Affluent; resourceful; experienced in

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negotiating international contracts; open to risk and new opportunities. Is this your CV? Or are you a queue jumping refugee?" (David Rowe, October 13, p.6). There was also a letter from the Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock entitled "Refugee pictures put people at risk". He states:

> ...The photos already published on the incident at hand clearly show at least two young children in the water. To my mind, one child in the water is too many to be put at risk by parents attempting to pressure the Australian navy to do their bidding. I make no apology for criticising people who would use children in this way (Phillip Ruddock, October 13, p.6).

Ruddock's letter along with another from *The Australian* reflected the idea that the alleged acts of the refugees were an abuse of the Australian Defence forces:

> Those who choose to be illegal entrants, abuse our ADF personnel and on RAN ships and sabotage the vessel's equipment. Any person who adopts this belligerent and abusive attitude should never be allowed to be a resident or citizen of this nation...We are under no obligation as individuals or as a nation to accept anything that is considered against our national interests. That is the law and is embodied in the UN Charter (Bob Buick, October 13, p.18).

Here Buick defines Australian citizenship in terms of having a particular 'attitude' and reiterates the idea of the refugees as being violent, and 'abusive' savages. As a consequence they are seen as unworthy of the humanity and decency of the Australian nation and its citizens. The protection of nation and its morality are cited as being of 'national interest', therefore by condemning the refugees, defensive action and policy is legitimised.

A week after the Children Overboard event, political comment had subdued and so too it seems, had media coverage and public debate. Coverage of the event did not surface again until a few days before the election when *The Australian* broke its November 7, front-page story "Overboard incident 'never happened'". It cited reports by Christmas Islanders that naval officers told them claims that asylum-seekers had thrown their children overboard were untrue. Investigations by *The Australian* found that "on two separate occasions, naval officers told different residents that they should not believe what was being reported about the incident" (O'Brien, 2001). Other newspapers did not follow suit with this story, but the next day along with *The Australian* they reported the Prime Minister's linking of asylum

seekers with terrorists. *The Australian's* front page reported "PM plays last boat fear card", claiming that John Howard had moved to "restore the boatpeople issue to the centre of the election campaign amid Liberal fear that there was a late drift of voters back to the ALP after yesterday's Children Overboard claim" (Henderson, 2001). The paper quoted John Howard as saying "there is a possibility some people having links with organisations that we don't want in this country might use the path of an asylum seeker in order to get here." *The West Australian* also published Howard's views in their page four piece "Asylum terrorist 'link'", citing the government's warning if their border protection policy was not supported:

> There was no way of knowing if would be refugees coming to Australia were linked to terrorist groups without the Government's tough screening process, Prime Minister John Howard said yesterday. He warned that if the coalition's policy on illegal immigration was abandoned, Australia would become a magnet to thousands of asylum seekers. "If you abandon this policy now you're just going to send a signal. It will be a magnet for more people to come. You're not dealing with a few hundred then. You could be dealing with several thousand, many thousands" (Capp, 2001).

Howard's warning that abandonment of policy would lead to waves of potential terrorists disguised as refugees, points to the government's belief that only they can 'hold back the hordes' and protect Australia against an influx of threatening asylum seekers. As the 'parent' of the Australian national 'family', the government saw their role as providing security to their children/citizens. Further, this protection is considered as the government's most important role. In *The Sydney Morning Herald's* page six piece "Howard links terrorism to boat people", the Prime Minister compared ᐧ current asylum seeker situation with the refugee influx after World War II: "Quite properly people got concerns when they thought war criminals in the rush after World War II were allowed in" (Allard, 2001). Howard's comments reveal what I later consider in chapter three, that border protection in Australian has a long history, where the threat of an Other is always imminent; for the government's policies to remain legitimate and effective, there must be an ever-present threat. This was exemplified in the 2001 Liberal-Coalition border protection campaign which relied upon the representation of an uncivilised and savage Other.

On November 9, the eve of the election, *The Australian* strengthened their challenge to the initial Children Overboard story, running the front-page report "Navy scuttle PM's story". It reported, "Just hours after the Coalition caved into pressure to release grainy video of the alleged incident on October 7, Vice-Admiral Shackleton said the navy had not advised the government that asylum-seekers threw children overboard" (Garran, 2001). This was followed up on page four with their inquiry "How the facts went overboard" and an additional piece on the same page stated "Children swam for their lives: witness" (Saunders, 2001). This piece explained that children videoed in rough seas off Christmas Island were "swimming for their lives to life-rafts because their boat was sinking, and not because their parents had thrown them overboard", and this was confirmed by a navy petty officer.[18] *The Age* also headlined the issue with "Doubt cast on Howard government's boat story" (Dodson, 2001). Alongside these allegations of government deception, the Howard government ran full-page advertisements in many national and state newspapers announcing that a vote for the Liberals would "protect our borders". Invoking an us/them dichotomy, the advertisements quoted from John Howard's campaign launch stated that "we decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come" ("We decide", 2001, p.8). This statement declares the government's ideas about control, not only of borders, but also of citizenship, including national identity and values.

Election day on 10 November, 2001 saw the end of an election campaign in which the border protection and immigration policies of both major parties dominated public debate. In some cases these policies were condemned as "xenophobic and inhumane" ("Howard, Beazley lashed over race", 2001). Despite this, the Howard government was returned to power, and Australia was kept "in safe hands" ("Keep Australia", 2001, p.10). It wasn't until mid-February 2002 that the government released a Senate Estimates Committee report revealing that children were never thrown overboard and a full set of photographs showing the refugee boat sinking was released to the media (see Appendix 3).

My sample analysis of the media and political dialogue reveals an attempt by the government to represent the refugees involved in Children Overboard as a threatening

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[18] He explained that the child seen to be held up on the navy video was being displayed to show that children were on the boat. "They were holding them up to show 'we have small children on board'. They were not holding them over the sides of their boat". (*The Australian*, 2001, p.4).

Other. As a result, this threat manifested in the public sphere as a rhetoric or discourse of family and nation. The government is seen, in its perceived duty as parent/protector to its children/citizens, to offer strength and security via immigration and border protection policy. Thus, the Children Overboard event highlighted the use of family discourse within the political and social articulation of borders. It is my argument that the use of this discourse has a social and political history in Australia and the implications of such a discourse illustrates the contradiction in the imagined state of nation and the lived experience of its citizens in terms of exclusion, fear, and restriction. In the following chapter I will explore border protection and exclusion in Australia and the history which has created and motivated this practice. In the final chapter I discuss the role of the family metaphor in articulating and legitimising this exclusion.

CHAPTER 3

BORDER PROTECTION: A HISTORY OF EXCLUSION IN AUSTRALIA

It has been suggested that the Children Overboard event revealed recent anxieties (both political and public) regarding Australia's border control and security of its citizens. Indeed many current immigration issues in Australia and around the world reflect a desire to protect geographical borders and in turn, cultural ones. A reading of the Children Overboard event suggests that asylum seekers were not only represented to be violating territorial borders, but their desire to live within Australian society also posed the threat of cultural violation. A main theme then, which I have identified from the Children Overboard event, is the security and defence of borders and values. However, I argue that the current media and political preoccupation with border protection issues such as illegal immigration and defence policy, is not a new concern. Rather, it is seen as part of Australia's continuing preoccupation with security and a fear of the Other. Anthony Burke (2001) identifies this preoccupation by linking the discourses of national identity, of security and of the 'Other' to expose a narrative of exclusion. In this chapter, I will consider border protection, exclusion, and its socio-political practices in Australia via a reading of Burke's text, Edward Said's post-colonial theory of the Other, and issues of national security. This reading will reveal how the Children Overboard event, which is articulated in terms of family, can be viewed as another event in a continuing Australian history, narrated in terms of an ever present and threatening Other.

A useful ideological framework to understand 'border protection' and its social and political meanings in Australia is via a reading of the role of the nation-state. Over the past twenty years this topic has been well covered in discourse on national identity with intellectuals such as Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson (1984), Anthony Smith (1994), and Eric Hobsbawm (1995), all offering varying hypotheses on the origins and evolution of the nation-state and national consciousness. Where the term 'state' refers to the legal, financial or bureaucratic aspects of an administrative unit, the term 'nation' refers to the experience of the people within the state as unified by a common language, culture, and tradition (Stratton & Ang, 1998, p.139). In particular, Anderson offers a theory of 'imagined communities', where nation is seen as an imagined collective being or political

community (1983, p.15). This theory works well in the context of Children Overboard, as in much the same way that a community or nation imagines itself as unified; it may also imagine its fears and possible threats.

The collective imagination of threat by a national community invokes an imagined need for security. In his text *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Ernest Gellner considers the nation-state's role as this agency of social control. He cites Max Weber's definition of state as the agency within society which possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence: "Among the various sanctions of the maintenance of order, the ultimate one – force – may be applied only by one special, clearly identified, and well centralised, disciplined agency within society. That agency or group of agencies is the state" (cited in Gellner, 1983, p.3). Thus, the provision of security is central to the state's reason for being, however that security is defined. This homogenous nation-state, crucial to the maintenance of order, is culturally exclusive as Gellner suggests, giving preference to a 'high' culture, its values and ideologies, over the myriad of subcultures which may exist within that state:

> In general, each such state presides over, maintains, and is identified with, one kind of culture, one style of communication, which prevails within its borders and is dependent for its perpetuation on a centralised educational system supervised by and often actually run by the state in question, which monopolises legitimate culture almost as much as it does legitimate violence, or perhaps more so (p.140).

To a certain extent then, the nation-state is a functional political unit which is able to develop and maintain national ideologies and loyalties, by providing the systems of social security, education and training needed to "develop mass loyalties and to socialise the working population" (Castles et al, 1990, p.141). Therefore, providing security and stability is of major concern to the nation-state.

Michael Dillon (1996) argues that the security provided by the state has generally been conceived as "the security of the 'self' against the 'other'" (cited in McDonald, 2002), a theme which Anthony Burke extensively explores in an Australian context and which I will elaborate on later in this chapter. The nature of this relationship between identity, security and fear is, as Matt McDonald sees it, "central to the Howard government's politics of representing asylum seekers" (2002, [on-line]). McDonald suggests that governments must seek to create conditions in which this feeling of security is engendered in order to retain

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legitimacy ([on-line]). This fear creates a basis for perceptions that the government is providing security. Hence, the Howard government's rhetoric of fear in the Children Overboard event. Once an imagined community becomes concerned by threats posed by Others, that community becomes almost necessarily supportive of governments or parties viewed as capable of addressing that threat. Therefore the creation of threat is a useful tool for governments to maintain legitimacy. It legitimises exclusionary practices and policy in the name of "sovereignty and protection of a nation's integrity" (Burke, 2001, p.324)[19]. Burke suggests that this sanctioning is implied through discourses of identity by an emotional appeal to subjectivity which links "the support of such policies to larger obligations and forms of belonging", such as 'good' citizenship and protection of family (2001, p.xxxvii). As was explicated in chapter two, government statements and media reports represented the Children Overboard refugees as immoral and indecent. As such, they are perceived as a threat to the Australian nation and family which is seen to embody the values of morality and decency. Thus, the discourse of family is called upon in the Children Overboard event to promote the myth of national identity and security. In this sense, security is a useful political tool in creating a sense of stability and identity (however imagined) in the face of a constant possibility of threat. This may give some explanation as to why Australian voters re-elected the Howard government.

If security is a necessary tool for governments to justify themselves and their actions, it is interesting to note that two of the most important functions of providing security remain within the nation-states' control – citizenship and immigration. Indeed, as Micheal Billig suggests, there is a "banal discourse of borders and migration...the world over, governments, faced with migrants or refugees, strengthen legislations, whilst citing the value of their own (threatened) national essence" (2001, p.142). As Anderson explains, these two functions serve to maintain sovereignty:

> In the modern conception, state sovereignty is fully operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory. But in the older imagining, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another (1983, p.26).

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[19] This is similar to Gellner's view that nationalism is a theory of "political legitimacy" (1983, p.1), which is used to gain public support for policy and action in the name of national protection.

While I agree with Anderson, it could also be argued that in the *current* global context, porous and indistinct borders also exist. These borders are not so much geographical, as much of the world territorial borders are well marked and vigorously defended as such. However, it is the borders of imagination and consciousness that have been expanded by communication technologies, allowing people from different states/nations around the world to exchange and transfer ideas and products. As a consequence, people create allegiances and imagined communities which are not just tied to one state, but incorporate members from varying parts of the globe. As an island nation, Australia's geographical borders are less obvious as they are not shared by a neighbouring country, nor marked by walls, fences, or state lines. Rather, they exist in the national waters as permeable exclusion zones (see Appendix 4). Being less tangible and 'out of sight', it could be said that Australia's national borders are, like its national identity, 'imagined', and the degree to which they are imagined, and thus defended, is dependent upon the representation of presence and threat of an Other. Interestingly, it was the Australian waters – those malleable and out of sight territorial markers of the Australian nation - which served as a backdrop for the Children Overboard event and its representation of Others. As David Campbell wrote of the United States: "the boundaries of the state's identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy" (cited in Burke, 2001, p.xxxvii). Through the portrayal of danger, nations, peoples and races are formed in historic opposition to the identities and peoples that nation-states imagine as Other. Therefore, as well as creating a sense of stability, security also creates a sense of borders and Australia's relationship between boundaries and security could be considered in this way.

To realise the construction and role of the Other in Australian history, I will firstly explore the usefulness of postcolonial theory. Leela Ghandi's text *Postcolonial Theory* (1998) identifies the Other in the work of philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard. These writers consider the Western concept of identity as "premised upon an ethically unsustainable omission of the Other" (Ghandi, 1998, p.39). Ghandi suggests that while Heidegger finds the quality of alterity in the natural and non-human world, Foucault extends the idea of Otherness to encompass criminality, madness, disease, foreigners, and sexuality (p.40). However, she points out that Edward Said's text *Orientalism* (1995) is generally considered a principal catalyst and reference point for postcolonial theory and recognising the Other's role in the West's

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construction of history. Said's thesis is that the struggle over historical and social meaning plays an equally important role in human history as the battle for territorial control, and that both struggles, despite their differences, are interlinked (p.331). Said's way of connecting territorial struggle with ideological struggle is by showing that the construction and maintenance of every culture requires the "existence of another different and competing alter ego" (p.331). He notes that such a construction involves establishing polarities and Others whose existence is always subject to "the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'" (p.332).[20]

Postcolonial theory, therefore, recognises that colonial discourse generally rationalises itself, through rigid polarities such as us/them, good/bad, "civilisation/barbarism", and "progressive/primitive" (Ghandi, 1998, p.32). Similarly, Ziadduin Sardar (1998) argues that colonialism employed representation to construct a particular image of the Other, one which was based on a "knowledgeable ignorance" of the Other's reality (p.31). For the West, such an image reflected its own fears as well as providing a rationale for domination. The construction of a distorted image of the Other "reflected the internal insecurity of the west which forced it to see everything in terms of duality" (p.30). This self/Other dichotomy was evident in the Children Overboard event. The strategic mis-handling of information by the government, produced a distorted image of the refugees as a 'type' of people that 'sacrifice' their children. Here, the refugee Other is considered 'savage', as opposed to a 'humane' Australian 'self'.

In an Australian context, Said's theory of colonial discourse is useful, because Australia is a settler society and a product of British colonialism. Modern settler societies represent a very special case of imagined communities, as the construction of a distinctive 'nation' is complicated by the fact that the settlers who have colonised the new territory migrated from another place. Thus, the experience of the colonial settler society involves the transference, through migration, of a particular nation culture, generally that of the coloniser (Stratton &

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[20] For example, the American cold war discourse depended largely on the myth of orientalism, which was assumed to characterise Russian culture. David Sibley suggests that the 'free world' was safely distanced from the Soviet Union by invoking an essential difference between the West, guided by humanist principle, and an Oriental Other. Any totalitarian or barbaric episodes in the West had to be explained away in order to sustain this division of 'the world' into good and bad. For those in the West with an interest in continuing the cold war, this was a necessary purification of global space, one which required an Other. (Sibley, 1995, p.111).

Ang, 1998, p.140). Moreover, what accompanies this is the practice of exclusion brought about by colonialism's presumptuous qualities of alterity and Western superiority. David Sibley, in his text *Geographies of Exclusion* (1995, p.3) proposes that "who is felt to belong and not to belong contributes in an important way to the shaping of social space" such as nation or home. Subsequently, the positioning of the national self involves a construction of boundaries between Australia and its Other which is formed through a series of cultural representations of people and things (p.10). In this sense the Children Overboard event can be seen to represent the boundaries between an Australian identity or 'self' and a constructed 'Other'. The refugees involved in the event were highlighted as a threat to the national 'self' against which the Howard government made Australia's boundaries explicit by offering immediate defence and future policies of border protection.

Having discussed how Australia's contemporary notion of borders can be placed within a postcolonial context I will now consider how the Other has changed over the course of the nation's history. In the case of the 2001 Federal election, it was 'boatpeople', 'asylum seekers', or 'queue jumpers' who were represented as a threat to Australia's national geographical, economic, and cultural security. However, as Burke suggests, an Australian subject has formed slowly along with its Other. This began with the development of an Australian consciousness during the 19th century because of feelings of hostility towards Aboriginal tribes and the racial and strategic threat from Asia (Burke, 2001, p.xxxvii).

In 1826 the British Crown extended claim to the whole of Australia (then New Holland and Van Diemens land), effectively erasing the claims of any other European power to the continent. Burke suggests that a new familiar image of the Other was appearing, "raising both physical and psychological challenges to the sense of 'self'" being cultivated by the new colonies (Burke, 2001, p.9). This was marked by the conflict between the colonial settlers and local Aboriginal tribes which had broken out soon after the initial settlement in 1788. Thus, the colonies' first serious threat to security came from the struggle to assert strategic control of national space and resources.

With the continuing violence of colonisation, concern about the colonies' control extended from the territorial to the ideological, with a perceived threat of moral corruption to the Australian 'self'. An early catalyst for this moral anxiety was the presence of Chinese

immigrants who had come to the New South Wales and Victoria goldfields since the 1840s and later by the presence of Japanese immigrants from the Pacific Islands. David Walker considers this in his text *Anxious Nation* (1999). He suggests that during this time the notion that Australia was vulnerable to invasion by a "shadowy" Oriental power was a strategy commonly used to catch public attention (p.229). Australians were advised that, with Asia watching, they might need to lift their performance as a people, that is, improve their 'moral strength'. In 1888, spurred by fears of weakness, decline and moral pollution along with anxieties over the decay of patriotism, all colonies had enacted laws to prevent further Chinese immigration (p.101).

From the beginnings of the Commonwealth in 1901, concern about Australia's performance as a nation was linked to the belief that Asia might emerge as a possible claimant to the "vast and allegedly 'empty' continent positioned so invitingly on its doorstep" (Walker, 1999, p.230). Further strategies to deter such a takeover were developed, the most notable being the White Australia policy, sanctioned by the passing of the Immigration Restriction Bill in 1901. This bill prohibited the immigration into Australia of non-Europeans or 'the coloured races'. Jon Stratton and Ien Ang suggest that the introduction of this Bill as one of the first major legislative issues dealt with by the new parliament highlighted "the perceived importance of 'racial purity' as the symbolic cement for the imagined Australian community" (1998, p.148). From this point on the discourse of race was "used to mark the limits of the Australian imagined community, not distinctions within it" (Stratton & Ang, 1998, p.148). The Children Overboard event reflected these notions of cultural exclusion where the act of sacrificing children was seen to be a cultural practice of the refugees. [21] The very act of throwing children overboard was seen to mark out what cultures (and hence, races), were acceptable to Australian 'national interests'. In effect, this announces that 'we decide' who is included and who is excluded.

Australia's fear of Japan continued to create widespread parliamentary and public concern and resulted in the establishment of the National Defence League and the Immigration League in 1905 (Burke, 2001, p.28). Australia's ensuing participation in the Great War

[21] See Joseph Pugliese's article 'Penal Asylum: Refugees, Ethics, and Hospitality', where he considers the act of 'lip-sewing' by refugees in Australian asylum centers. He argues that the government represented these acts as barbaric cultural practices, which "confirms the savagery" of the refugees, "justifies our fears", and "legitimize the laws we deploy against you" (2002, [on-line]).

further served to solidify the notion of a unified Australian subject. Burke considers that this was achieved by the narration of the war's historical importance via the establishment of the Anzac memoriam (p.30). He cites historian and founder of the Australian War Memorial C.E.W Bean, who recognized the connection between security, sovereignty and identity. Bean states: "If the cause that led Australians to enlist can be reduced to a single principle, it is the principle of protecting their homes and their freedom by sustaining a system of law and order between nations" (in Burke, 2001, p.35). Burke considered these words to be a form of blackmail, which invoked a potent emotional appeal because of the linking of domestic security and individual power to the "immense clashes of geopolitics" (p.35). Of particular interest here is that the tones of these words were echoed in the campaign literature of the Howard government in 2001: "we rely on the family to instil the essential virtues that sustain us as a free and responsible democratic nation" (Australian Liberal Party, 2001, p.31). For the government, the asylum seekers involved in the Children Overboard event lacked these 'essential virtues' by displaying *irresponsibility* towards their children and family.

The Second World War created new enemies and confirmed old ones. Yet as a settler society, Australia depended on sustained immigration for its economic development and national security. This meant a liberalization of the White Australia policy. As there was a limited supply of immigrants from Britain (the policy's favoured country of origin), 'New Australians' were recruited first in Northern Europe (Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany) and later in Southern Europe (Italy, Greece, Croatia). The press expressed concern about the threat these immigrants represented to Australian workers, so by 1947 when the first peoples began to arrive from the camps in Europe, the government, through its joint Ministry of Information and Immigration, sought positive press coverage. The first boats carrying refugees were selected on the basis of their physical attributes, similar to the ideal image Australians had of themselves – "tall, lithe, blonde, the men handsome and the women beautiful" (Jakubowicz et al, 1994, p.36). The idea behind this was for the New Australians to 'blend' into Australian society. This assimilation program aimed at the preservation the Australian culture, the 'Australian way of life', by "excluding all other cultures which were considered incompatible and incapable of assimilation" (Stratton & Ang, 1998, p.152). However, Stratton and Ang suggest that this Australian way of life was a vague construct which lacked historical and cultural density, "often boiling down to not

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much more than the suburban myth of 'the car, the family, the garden and a uniformly middle-class lifestyle'" (1998, p.153). It should be kept in mind that while this assimilation of new Australians was taking place, the original inhabitants, Indigenous Australians, were being excluded from this utopian Australia. Their children were still being removed from their homes in the hope that they could be assimilated, and their links with kin and land severed (Burke, 2001, p.126).[22]

The aftermath of World War II left Australia still fearing an invasion from Asia and imagining a national identity based upon the threat of the Other. As the political and economic landscape of the Pacific region changed, old assumptions were challenged and more difficult and more morally profound problems for policy were emerging. For some, these concerns were linked with issues of social morality, which seemed to indicate that Australia was a nation deficient in the moral fibre necessary to face up to the challenges of the future. On Remembrance Day of 1951 a statement entitled "Call to the People of Australia" was broadcast across the nation. Signed by the Australian leaders of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches, and the Chief Justices of each state, the statement warned of the dangers facing the nation:

> Australia is in danger. We are in danger from abroad. We are in danger at home. We are in danger from moral and intellectual apathy, from the mortal enemies of mankind which saps the will and weaken the understanding and breed evil dissension. Unless these are withstood, we shall lack moral strength and moral unity sufficient to save our country and our liberties. Our present dangers are a challenge to us, but meeting the challenges of history peoples grow in greatness. The dangers demand of all good Australians community of thought and purpose. They demand a restoration of the moral order from which alone true social order can derive (in Hogan, 1987, p.1).

Michael Hogan suggests that this language about the dependence of the social order on traditional moral order has been the "language of social conservatism throughout Australian history". The same language continues as such to this day (1987, p.2). As I exemplify with the Children Overboard event, and expand on in the next chapter, this moral order and call to 'good' citizenship is often linked to the discourses of family and home. As such there is a resonance of historical panic in the contemporary crises such as Children Overboard, and

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[22] For further discussion of the removal of Indigenous children see the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (1997).

this demonstrates the nation's continuing need to define the borders of normality and to exclude difference (Sibley, 1995, p.40).

The late 1960s saw the end of the White Australia policy and multiculturalism surfaced as a new government policy in 1973 under the Whitlam Labour Government (Stratton & Ang, 1998, p.154). It was presented amidst a climate in which longstanding forms of policy, belief, and identity were under challenge. The public incitement of fear, characterised in the post-WWII era, was giving way to the long-term objective of managing 'stability' (Burke, 2001, p.136). The Whitlam government promised to reconcile security and justice at home and abroad which involved a dramatic re-imagination of the national identity (Burke, 2001, p.137). However, Whitlam's re-imagination suggested a break in history, a collective forgetting of past mistakes, effectively introducing an "instability into the dominant structures of Australian identity, truth and community which still exists" (Burke, 2001, p.137). Stratton and Ang consider this move towards multiculturalism not just as a solution to the perceived failure of assimilation, but also as an attempt to reconstruct the definition of Australian national identity; a national identity which, in the face of cultural diversity created by post-World War II immigration, could no longer rely upon the myth of a British cultural origin (1998, p.155).

From 1976 the new Other in the Australian history became the 'boatpeople'. Initially, these were people who arrived illegally in small boats along Australia's northern coast, claiming refugee status after fleeing East Asian countries as a result of the Vietnam War (Davidson, 1997, p.165). In 1999 there was a sharp increase in the number of boatpeople arrivals and a shift from Asian source countries to the Middle East (Betts, 2001, p.45). In her article 'Boatpeople and public opinion in Australia', Katharine Betts studies how public opinion towards boatpeople has formed over the past 25 years, and how support for border protection policy has been building throughout Australian history. She suggests that this policy has been popular with a majority of Australians and reflects a public perception of the importance of border protection in order to maintain a strong sense of national community (2001, p.34). However, as Burke suggests, the apparent lack of concern by the Australian community about the many Europeans (including British citizens) who overstay their visas (and thus are illegal immigrants), could reveal that the perception of threat posed by boatpeople lies in their difference, either in terms of race, culture, or religion. It is "in

their status as an inassimilable excess that the pure being of the Australian subject cannot abide" (Burke, 2001, p.327). According to Robert Manne, the *moral* turning point with regard to refugees began in October 1999 when boatpeople fleeing from "two of the most vicious tyrannies on earth – Iraq under Saddam Hussein; Afghanistan under the Taliban" – began to arrive in large numbers on Australia's northern shores (cited in Betts, 2001, p.44). Manne suggests "this was the moment where the idea of the refugee began to be transformed in Australian public consciousness from a human being worthy of compassion into a human being deserving only our contempt" (cited in Betts, 2001, p.44). In Children Overboard, where the refugees were alleged to have behaved in inhuman and incomprehensively violent ways, what is implied is the possibility of terrorism. They are represented as the 'type' of people who would go to any lengths to achieve their goal – much like the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks (Perera, 2002, [on-line]). Thus, in this sense, the refugees are considered "beyond redemption", and undeserving of Australian compassion (Pugliese, 2002, [on-line]).

As I have illustrated, Australia has seen attempts to define nation in terms of exclusion and belonging, through immigration policy and citizenship laws. Contemporary notions of Australian national identity are often linked to attempts at trying to reconcile multiculturalism with its settler/postcolonial roots. According to Turner, it is in this respect that as a nation, Australia faces many problems in "articulating a common national identity across competing forms of ethnicity and against a history of occupation and dispossession of the original inhabitants" (1994, p.123). Similarly Castles (et al) suggests that that Australia's self-image has always been problematic:

> It has been racist, justifying genocide and exclusionism, and denying the role of non-British migrants. It has been sexist, ignoring the role of women in national development, and justifying their subordinate position. It has idealised the role of the 'common man' in a situation of growing inequality and increasingly rigid class divisions. It has been misleading in its attempts to create a British/Australian ethnicity while ignoring the divisions within the British nation-state, and its Australian off-shoot (1990, p.9).

Problematic or not, national identities nonetheless have an economic, political, and social value especially in times of crisis. What I argue in this thesis is that certain ideals of Australian national identity, of family, and of 'good' citizenship, have economic, political, and social value. It is for this reason that the Other (as an asylum seeker) was constructed

via the Children Overboard event: specifically, to define the territorial and ideological boundaries of nation and family and articulate a threat to the values within those boundaries. These definitions seem to lay dormant for certain periods of time, yet in times of crises they tend to sharpen. As Graeme Turner has realized, "an individual who defines him or herself as an 'Australian'…may never think about nationality for days at a time, yet if that self-definition did not exist as a latent identity, it could hardly become salient in relevant settings" (cited in Billig, 2001, p.69). In this way, national identities and national values are a routine way of talking and listening; it is a form of life, which "habitually closes the front door, and seals the borders" (Billig, 2001, p.109). The creation of a moral distance between the refugees and the Australian citizen in Children Overboard, enabled a space for the government to 'seal the borders' of the Australian nation, and 'close the door' to those who Australia does not want.

The way in which a nation's history is narrated reflects the characterisitics and the values it considers itself to have and expects of its citizens. This narration not only includes the representation of those values, but also the representation of the nation's fears and insecurities, which are most often reflected in the constructed images of its Other (as invasion narratives).[23] Such narratives often rely on stereotyping. Often this involves the portrayal of a 'good' self, and an 'evil' and threatening Other. Obviously, negative stereotypes are of the greatest concern in understanding instances of social and spatial exclusion (Sibley, 1995, p.18). Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), argues that the negative Orientalist stereotype is an unstable category which marks the conceptual limit of colonial presence and identity, and involves the "setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices" (p.46). Our understanding of how we should conceptualise social difference, is formed partly by stereotypes repeated and reinforced by the politicians of the day, and an uncritical media coverage of events, such as Children Overboard. Negative stereotypes such as 'savage' and 'uncivilised' Others promote the 'goodness' of the Australian self. In the face of apparent threats to cultural and moral values, these negative representations serve to maintain and legitimise "the existing social order" (Jakubowicz et al, 1994, p.3).

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[23] David Walker suggests that as a universal practice invasion narratives seek to condition ways in which international conflict and patriotic disciplines were understood and validated. Thus, Australian invasion narratives form part of the much broader discourse of the relationship between national strength, military capacity and the patriotic spirit, which "seeks to direct attention to external threats, while highlighting the costs of disunity" (Walker, 1999, p.98).

Said suggests that every society creates its Others through a "much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process" that takes place as a struggle involving various individuals and institutions (1995, p.332). He urges that these processes are not just imagined exercises but social contests involving concrete political action such as the creation of immigration laws, the legislation of personal conduct, the legitimisation of violence, the character and content of education, and the direction of foreign policy (p.332). In short, these imaginings of the Other translate into practice. The kinds of representations condoned by some politicians and media practitioners often confirm stereotypes of people and place and inform attitudes to others (Sibley, 1995, p.68). In this way, the representation of the Children Overboard asylum seekers by the Australian government as 'unnatural' and 'immoral' reinforced existing stereotypes of the threatening Other. This imagining of Other in political rhetoric is translated into practice when citizens cast votes in support of immigration and defence policies which perpetuate an existing Australian narrative of exclusion. Hence, as Burke suggests we have only to listen to the Howard government's ministers speaking of the need to protect Australia's 'sovereignty', its 'territorial integrity' and 'national interests' to realise they are invoking yet again the image of an insecure, vulnerable Australian subject under perpetual threat from the contagion and disorder of the Other (2001, p.324). We have only to look at the government policy of 'deterrence' towards asylum seekers, which is formulated as if "they were a weapon pointed menacingly at the heart of the Australian way of life" (p.324). Further, in John Howard's words, abandonment of this policy would "send a signal" for "many thousands" more Others to come (Capp, 2001).

These representations of an imagined Other, circulated in the news media can be viewed as a way in which an ideal of Australian national identity is reaffirmed and redefined. Further, as Billig suggests, the modern practices of defining the nation have become so subtle they are embedded in everyday life and "exercised almost unknowingly by citizens by simple acts" such as reading a newspaper and watching the television (2001, p.32).[24] Despite arguments from Hobsbawm that the power of nationalism and the nation-state is waning in the face of globalism,[25] the issue of immigration shows that the nation-state has not

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[24]Displaying national identity and values in traditional nationalism has relied on the more extreme displays of ceremony and pageantry (Billig, 2000, p.32).
[25]Hobsbawm suggests that instead of a global state:

withered away in the age of late capitalism. As I have argued, the nation-state retains control over the important functions of immigration and defining citizenship. How a nation defines and enforces its citizenship and immigration policy can say a lot about national identity and culture which it seeks to protect. Consequently, concern about immigration is today "almost invariably expressed within nationalist ways of talking, as speakers wonder what is happening to 'our' country, 'our' homeland" (Billig, 2001, p.142). Thus, the discourses of nation and nationhood continue to pervade the political and social imagination. Governments in particular rely on this discourse and its apparent influence for the purpose of maintaining power and exerting control. The maintenance of power relies on the promise and deliverance of national security which, at its extreme, translates into the "direct physical power" of a nations amassed weaponry, "sufficient to destroy the globe" (Billig, 2001, p.176). This mass of power and potential violence needs to be kept in mind when observing the banal symbols of nationhood such as the media representations of Children Overboard (Billig, 2001, p.176).

This chapter has examined how, over the course of Australian history, there has been a continual articulation of an Other posing some kind of territorial, economic, or cultural threat to the nation's citizens. Whether the threat has been identified as an Other living amongst the Australian citizenry (Aboriginals, Chinese immigrants, communists), or beyond Australian shores, there has been a practice of exclusion in order to keep that Other at bay, out of sight, or in disguise (assimilated). Furthermore, it is a premise of post-colonial theory that for this threatening Other to exist, a collective imagining of fear by a nation's imagined community must already be in place. On some occasions this fear may be in response to representations of the Other articulated in terms of identity, security, and sovereignty, the symbols of which can be identified in the rhetoric used by various governments and medias. Through this rhetoric, repeated in the Children Overboard event, the Australian citizenry were again being asked to pledge their loyalty to a national identity "secured by the insecurity and suffering of the Other" (Burke, 2001, p.325). Hence, events like Children Overboard can act as vehicles for the extension of this narrative of exclusion

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The world history of the late 20th and early 21st century will inevitably have to be written as the history of a world which can no longer be contained within the limits of 'nations' and 'nation-states'...either politically, or economically, or culturally, or even linguistically. It will be largely supranational and infra-national...It will see 'nation-states' and 'nations' or ethnic/linguistic groups primarily as retreating before, resisting, adapting to, being absorbed or dislocated by the new supranational restructuring of the globe (Hobsbawm, 1995, p.191).

which is embedded in Australian political and social history. The question is how does a government gain *public* support for use of such defence? The answer I have put forward is it is through the rhetoric of fear and insecurity. Here the metaphors of family and home come into play as they epitomise stability and security which is embedded in the Australian psyche. One letter to the editor reiterates this metaphor when he or she says: "anyone who values their family [as we do in Australia] would not throw their children overboard". It is the construction of family as a national value which I consider in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE VALUE OF FAMILY: METAPHORS OF 'GOOD' CITIZENSHIP
IN THE CHILDREN OVERBOARD EVENT

I have identified the discourse of family as a main theme espoused in the political and media rhetoric surrounding the Children Overboard event. Indeed, the use of the headline 'Children Overboard' by several media outlets covering the story charged the event with an emotional appeal to what John Howard called "the natural instinct of delivering protection and security to loved ones". I argue that such a plea articulated national security in relation to the private family. Effectively this linked the sense of stability and loyalty that many people may find in the familial spheres with the security of the nation. Therefore, I consider the value of family to be one of the ways in which the boundaries of nation are defined. This chapter will consider the ideological role of family and home in shoring up an Australian national identity which was symbolised by the Children Overboard event. Moreover, it will focus on the political role of family in terms of the Howard government's liberal ideals of 'good' citizenship as being crucial for national stability and security. By reading Deborah Chambers work, *Representing the Family* (2001), I will attempt to construct a bridge between discourse of family in the Children Overboard representations and the hierarchical discourses of nation. These representations and narratives about nation and national security permeate Western social orders, such as Australia.

In their text *The Anti-Social Family* (1991), Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh suggest that we live in a society where "the 'average family' is continually evoked" (p.33), much like the single, homogenous entity of 'nation' referred to in discourses of national identity. It could be said that this 'average' or 'nuclear' family exists as a mythical one: as a symbol, a discourse, or a powerful ideal within the collective imagination, again, much like that of 'nation'. Anne McClintock in her text *Imperial Leather* (1995) suggests that nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. She points towards a family/nation language where we refer to nations as "motherlands and fatherlands", and where "foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native homes and are naturalised into the national 'family'" (p.357). Like 'nation', the family ideal is seen as a regulatory force affecting the ways in which public and personal lives are structured and

dictating modes of behaviour. Further, the 'nation-as-family' metaphor, mentioned in chapter two, imposes a family-based morality on politics (Lakoff, 1999, p.148). Any reference to the value and 'natural instinct' of family by the government and the media involves a certain degree of power and regulation, because it places an emphasis on the particular values and forms of behaviour, which are considered as 'good' by the dominant culture. Considering the familial references used in Children Overboard, it seems curious that the Australian voting public was addressed in this way, as a collective of families, rather than as individual taxpaying citizens. Barrett and McIntosh suggest that this is because the family "is a so much more resonant image" (1991, p.33): we are shocked by this 'represented' invasion of the sanctity of hearth and home.

On a social level, the home and family provide for most people the central space where they can work at gaining what Anthony Giddens terms "a sense of ontological security", that is, a sense of confidence in the stability of their identity, in others, and in the world around them (1990, p.47). Home is considered a haven from external threat, a space for self-development and autonomy, and the place for cultivating relationships and communality (Noble, 2002, p.57). It is a source of financial and emotional security as well as of adult independence and freedom from control of others (Cheal, 1991, p.84). Yet family and home also have an ideological role. In her text *Representing the Family* Deborah Chambers focuses on three key themes that she considers to represent core arguments surrounding family values in Western-Anglo nations: firstly, "the continued privileging of white ethnicity"; secondly "the regulation of heterosexuality"; and lastly, "patriarchy through family values" (2001, p.3). She examines the ways in which the family is represented, and how family ideology is appropriated and circulated within the political rhetoric of Western nations such as Australia, United States and Britain. In these nations family is imagined as stable, culturally homogeneous, and historically unchanging, and as such, is taken to represent the nation in nationalistic discourse. In other words, "the family supplies the building blocks from which the national community is constructed". However, this family is one of colonial discourse, excluding "alien others" (Sibley, 1995, p.108). In the Children Overboard event, the Australian national community is symbolised by an ideal family which exudes 'decency' and 'humanity', unlike the 'alien' refugee Others.

During the nineteenth century the family was transformed and fixed into a symbol of colonisation, and Chambers suggests that according to postcolonial theory the Anglo family has been constructed "as a 'natural' site of racial privilege and gender hierarchy" by colonial structures and meanings (2001, p.35). In other words, these racialised familial ideals served as mechanisms of cultural control and were used in British colonised territories to establish Anglo-centric national cultures. This is a theme extensively covered by McClintock (1995), where she chronicles the gendering of nationalism by imperial powers. McClintock traces how as a metaphoric image, the family took on an increasingly imperial shape. The family was projected onto the imperial nation and colonial bureaucracies as their natural, legitimising shape (p.45). She suggests that because the subordination of woman to man and child to adult were "deemed as natural facts", the family offered a useful figure for "sanctioning social hierarchy", as well as a trope for narrating history (p.45). Further, she argues that the family became "indispensable for legitimising exclusion and hierarchy within non-familial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism, and imperialism" (p.45). By the mid-nineteenth century in Britain, the family ideal was perceived as nuclear, patriarchal, and hierarchical. Women were seen as existing, like colonised peoples, in a permanently suspended time within the nation, while white, middle-class men were seen to embody the forward-thrusting agency of national progress (p.360). Discrete family units, headed by a male breadwinner, became the hallmark of both civilised society and stability, any deviation from this model was regarded as savagery. This model of the family assumed a normative role in mid-nineteenth century British society and, by extension, within colonies such as Australia (Chambers, 2001, p.37).

In Australia, governments, churches, and other institutions identified the family as the most important kind of social cement, and as a haven from the instabilities and dangers from the world 'outside'. Factors such as low rates of marriage and high rates of illegitimacy were seen as serious threats to family formation, good citizenship and the moral and social progress of the nation (Chambers, 2001, p.37). According to Mark Peel, in the 1860s the family was praised as a "pure citadel against an impure world" and, following the Depression of the 1890s, politicians and reformers vowed that the family should never again suffer such hardship (1998, p.7). Attempts to dictate Australian family responsibilities were renewed around Federation, which coincided with dramatically

decreasing birth rates, throwing the relationship between family responsibility and national imperatives into much sharper relief. As a result, the new nation's leaders insisted that avoiding motherhood was the same as shirking any other duty of citizenship (p.8). In a new nation alternately confident and fearful of its future prospects, the family lay at the centre of Australian political language as a symbol of the future and it was obvious that "the family must do its work of raising citizens very carefully" (p.7). The trend of family regulation continued, and Australia has seen programs such as Family Action in the 1950s, Family Policy and Family Services in the 1980s, and in 2001 the Howard government's Stronger Families and Communities initiative (*Putting Australia'a Interests First*, 2001, [on-line]). As well as border protection, family support was at the top of the Liberal-Coalition 2001 campaign hit list. They pledged to "ensure security and stability for all Austrailan families" (*The Age*, 2001, p.10) and to "to support the family as the prime source of children's values" (*Putting Australia's Interests First*, 2001, pp.22).

Attempts to create 'stronger families and communities' are often carried out by measures which seek to reduce its economic insecurity, welfare dependency, and vulnerability to outside threats. It could be said that many Australian families may have gained much from health care, education and pension programs, yet as Peel suggests, "stressing responsibilities and guarding a particular kind of family against its supposed enemies" has been a more frequent form of policy (1998, p.7). This was evident in the Howard government's 2001 campaign pledge *Putting Australia's Interests First*; the pledge displayed this defensive tone by proclaiming that "we are united as a people, though some seek to create division and sow dissent among us" (2001, p.7). Further, Chambers suggests that rhetoric about family values is carefully reconstructed by each new generation of politicians in Western Anglophone nations in the belief that threat to family will be a vote catcher. This belief underpinned the Liberal government's pledge which criticised its opposition by suggesting "one of the great frustrations of the Australian community during the Labor years was the drift away from traditional Australian values" (Liberal Party of Australia, 2001). Therefore, although political leaders have offered families support and protection through programs such as health care and education, they also appear to believe that people need to be encouraged to live in 'proper families' (Peel, 1998, p.7). Hence, family is considered as a space for moral education. Such a belief continued in the Howard government's campaign pledge, insisting, "the basic goodness of our society springs from

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our best family values, and they will persist". As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the statement linked the responsibility and 'essential virtues' of family with the fate of national success, and freedom (2001, p.31).

The use of this nation-family rhetoric in political debate and campaigning on policy issues such as immigration means that definitions of family values are regularly contested on a very public stage. More importantly, it ensures that debates about family are, as Chambers sees it, "firmly anchored in and invested with meanings about nation, nationhood, nationality and race" (2001, p.5), which in turn affect how people are treated inside and outside of the 'national' family and territory. Often, contemporary political leaders and other public figures use culturally available meanings of family to account for their own practices and mobilise support for their actions. What invariably occurs is a scape-goating of a specific, minority groups in society (Chambers, 2001, p.6). This was made explicit by the Children Overboard event where an association was made between family values and national security. In an attempt to legitimise border control policy and justify defense tactics ordered by the government and employed by the Australian navy, the asylum seekers were portrayed as uncivilised, un-family like, and ultimately unwelcome into the country. As such, family values and family space, which appeared to be threatened by alien cultures, were assimilated into national space (Sibley, 1995, p.42). The Howard government's attempts to promote a set of moral values about family life and situate them within a discourse of nationhood, suggested that the government believed Australians could insulate themselves from immoral and threatening Others through rigid immigration and border protection policies.

These protectionist measures against the immoral are what Sibley considers as "moral barricades" or "moral panics", manned on behalf of the family (1995, p.42). As the central site of consumption, the family is considered to be of fundamental importance to the economy, and as the site of moral work of sexuality and child rearing. These 'panics' articulate beliefs about belonging and not belonging, about the sanctity of territory and the fear of invasion. The stability of spaces such as 'family', 'community' and 'nation' depends upon the belief in core values or morals, which are reinforced by the manufacture of certain ideal and non-ideal types, based on a conception of what is 'good' for a society. Consequently, protectionist measures created and acted out by the government are carried

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out for the 'good' of a nation. However, this kind of justification is based upon a certain notion of what is 'good' and what is not.

I will now turn to a discussion of liberalism to provide an understanding of the political role of the family and the way in which identities are constructed through liberal societies such as Australia. Liberal societies rely on notions of public and private good, public reason, and pluralism. However, such values of the private good must be left out of the political arena. As the government itself has said, "it is not the role of government to define the family or to prescribe its functions" (Australian Liberal Party, 2001, p.31). This reiterates liberalism as outlined by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (1986), that politics and morality should be kept in separate spheres. In liberal-democratic societies such as Australia, citizens must define for themselves the notion of the good in the private sphere. As such, they need to display elements of "being responsible" and of having "a form of moral sensibility" (Rawls, 1996, p.81). However, as I have discussed in the previous chapters, the public (nation) and the private (family) spheres are intrinsically linked, relying on each other to reinforce the roles of the nation and family in a liberal society. For example, in Rawls' text *Political Liberalism* he considers that for the government to regard each of us as free and equal, political decisions must "leave all of us equally free to pursue our own visions of the good life" in the private sphere (1996, p.34). In doing so however, citizens must recognize a shared "public culture" and "affirm a notion of reciprocity appropriate to their conception of themselves and be able to recognise that they share public purpose and common allegiance" (p.322). Drawing on the work of Rawls in her dissertation "Identity' and 'Experience': Theories of Representation and Justice in Selected Narrative Forms', Debbie Rodan suggests that while individuals act according to their own vision of the good life they have a public duty to "recognise a shared public good", and to show "mutual respect and act in a reasonable manner" (2000, p.42). Herein lies the tension between the public and the private and the paradox of liberalism: that while it espouses the public values of the family and 'the good', these values must be imagined privately. Hence, despite the principles of liberalism, the private value of good can never be separate from the political or public sphere.

For Rawls, people who are considered to be unreasonable, without a sense of justice (of what is good) lack "certain fundamental attitudes and capacities included under the notion

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of humanity" (1986, p.488). Therefore, people who do not have a sense of the good are constructed as unreasonable and irrational: the way in which the refugees in the Children Overboard event were also constructed. As a consequence, the refugees are seen as an anathema to a liberal-democratic society such as Australia. This was reflected in the Prime Minister's comments about the asylum seekers involved in the Children Overboard event. He labelled the alleged actions of throwing children overboard as 'incompatible' and 'offensive' to 'the natural instinct' of protection and delivering security and safety to your children" (*Four Corners*, 2002). The alleged actions of the refugees are represented as in opposition to the tenets of a liberal democratic society, where 'reasonableness' and 'goodness' are seen as natural qual·ies. As Rawls suggests, moral sentiments, "attitudes that appeal to sound principles of right an· ·ustice", are a "normal part of human life", or · of our humanity" (1986, p.489). These principles "regulate moral education and the expression of moral approval and disapproval" (p.490). An example of this was found in an interview on 2UE radio on October 8, 2001, where Alan Jones questioned John Howard about Children Overboard and the force used to deter boat smugglers. Jones set the tone of the discussion by referring to the people smugglers as 'savage', however, Howard constructed another negative stereotype, through his disapproval of the asylum seekers' apparent lack of humanity:

> It is a very difficult issue because you are dealing with highly emotional behaviour, you're dealing with people, I don't know their backgrounds but I do know this, it's a matter of common humanity. Genuine refugees don't throw their children overboard into the sea (Radio Interview, 2UE, 2001)

By referring to the asylum seekers' alleged actions as going against a *common* humanity, his comments de-humanise the asylum seekers. To dehumanise in such a fashion is one way of legitimating exploitation and exclusion from civilised liberal societies, and as Sibley suggests "it is unsurprising that it is primarily minorities, indigenous and colonised peoples, who have been described in these terms" (1995, p.27). [26] Debbie Rodan argues those groups who have a different conception of the 'good' are represented as a minority, and "antagonistic to the idea of a pluralistic society" (2000, p.37). It is argued by the dominant culture that these minority groups should be excluded from society because their values

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[26] Similarly, Hoh points out how racialising violence, exclusion, the legitimation of colonialism and imperialism, the control and subjugation of others has historically coexisted with liberalism (Hoh, 2002, [online]).

differ and do not conform to the idea of pluralism (p.37). Hence, the Children Overboard refugees are excluded because their values are seen to differ from Australian liberal values. Moreover, any critical comment towards the government's treatment of the refugees is viewed, in terms of liberalism, as anti-family, and therefore anti-nation.

Rawls suggests that government must make available political conceptions such as liberty and equality together with an assurance of sufficient means (primary goods) "for citizens to make intelligent and effective use of their freedoms" (1996, p.xli). Therefore in a liberal western democracy, family members define the 'good life' for themselves by drawing on personal desires rather than public goals. They are free to implement these desires to the limits of their resources. This freedom is guaranteed by the fact that access to the home and family by outsiders is controlled by the family members themselves (Cheal, 1991, p.83/84). The only way a state can legitimately exert authoritative force over its citizens is by appealing to public reason, that is, based upon premises and facts accessible to all (Raboy & Dagenais, 1992, p.48). In Children Overboard, the representation of the asylum seekers as a threat in need of defence, was an appeal to public reason based upon public anxieties and public ideas of morality. However, 'the facts accessible to all' were strategically misrepresented. The family that the Howard government appealed to is one that must define itself (its 'goodness') with reference to shared public goals such as immigration. The asylum seekers were represented as irrational and unreasonable, and their alleged mistreatment of children, translated into a broader mistreatment of family. In the government's eyes, this alleged behaviour was an attempt to "morally blackmail Australia" (Radio Interview, 2GB, 2001). By appealing to the family (and its inherent reason and responsibility as a political unit) the government mobilised its political doctrine into the discourse of family to dictate 'good' citizenship. [27] This political link between ideal images of family, and the broader image of the nation reveals a belief that the successful political and economic order very much depends on the capacities of individual subjects, in particular their economic, social, and familial behaviour. As Burke sees it, a successful national order is based upon the "innermost thoughts and desires" of the nation's citizens (2001, p.xxxviii/xxxix). Therefore, ideals of nation and family are based on a definition of

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[27] Peter Mares cites several binary oppositions that dominate the media reporting of the asylum seekers, including the terms of 'good' and 'bad' refugees, or citizen and non-citizen (Mares, 2002, p.10). He suggests that these terms highlight the way in which the moral panic directed at refugees on talk-back radio and in letters to the editor is "driven by notions of entitlement" (Mares, 2002, p.10).

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good. Specifically in the case of family, it means that a "distinctive, narrow version of the family unit is mythically evoked" and performed through policy and representation (Chambers, 2001, p.5).

Having considered the role of family in social and political discourse in Australia, I argue that the political connotations constructed by the government of the day of the Children Overboard event drew upon Western liberal notions of family. The suggestion that adults were throwing their children into the water as a gesture of threat or blackmail to the Australian authorities, rubbed against the ideal of the protection of the family, not only in our own 'private homes', but also the 'national family'. This was explicated in an interview on 2GB radio a few days after the public was made aware that 'children were thrown overboard' when John Howard made the following comment that highlighted the notion of family threat:

> Well, my reaction [to the Children Overboard incident] was I don't want in Australia people who would throw their own children into the sea. There's something, to me, incompatible between somebody who claims to be a refugee and somebody who would throw their own child in to the sea. It offends the natural instinct of protection and delivering of security and safety to your children (Radio interview, 2GB, 2001).

Here, the emphasis on the 'protection and deliverance of security and safety to children' has metaphorical importance. In this statement as the national leader, Mr Howard associates his role as Prime Minister to that of being the parental representative of the nation, and through his government policy he strives to protect and provide security and safety to his children (the national public). This parent/child role was also reflected in the Liberal party's campaign literature. The literature stated that "many parents fear for the safety of their children and the world in which our children are growing up seems less safe. We know, for example that drug pushers and other predators actively target our children" (*Putting Australia's Interests First*, 2001, p.22). These comments exemplify how a government's response to the key events of its nation may reflect that government's own ideological preconceptions of what is considered good, bad, or reasonable.

Obviously, security of home, family and nation is of importance to the Howard government, and as we have seen it is also important to the security of votes. Cultural theorist Fiona Allon suggests that the struggle over meanings and conceptions of home,

family, and nation in Australian social and political history "have found a significant juncture in the politics and policies of John Howard in the 1990s" (2001, p.2).[28] The Children Overboard dialogue is set in the context of what the government sees as a time of crisis. They warn that "we are entering a time of uncertainty" and that a "sense of uneasiness has settled upon the world" (p.7). Further, the traditional home and nuclear family, a haven from this instability, is depicted as under threat: as being "disenfranchised by privileged interest groups, minority fundamentalism and political correctness" (p.12). Again this perception was reiterated in the government's campaign rhetoric:

> People loudly demanded rights without acknowledging their responsibilities. Self-reliance, as a hallmark of the Australian character, was discarded in favour of dependency. Civic pride and community involvement were labelled by some as old-fashioned concepts (2001, p.22).

These 'old-fashioned concepts' of family and home are "politically mobilised constructions of 'mainstream' Australia" (Allon, 1997, p.12). They are predicated, like definitions of home and family, on exceptionally narrow, conservative and socially exclusive terms – white, middle-class, and Christian models. Such models often do not reflect the diversity of public opinion and the lived social experience of individuals, but rather reveal what Allon considers the "pragmatic political interests forced to exploit highly charged political symbols in a new era of mediated 'image politics'" (p.12). Thus the emergence of the home and family theme in events such as Children Overboard highlights the electoral role of emotive imagery and "the manipulation of social and national identities" (p.13). With Children Overboard, it was clear that in the Howard government's mind security and identity were synonymous. A certain 'type' of Australian national identity was invoked, one which was good, 'decent', and 'humane'. The Australian public, the 'national family, was to be united in its imaginings and fears, and this was inspired by the spectacle of the 'threatening other'.

The national/familial language of Children Overboard reflects the notion that the national space is often imagined as homely space, cosy within its borders and secure against the

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[28] Allon considers that Howard's ideal of home and family is based very much upon "the Menzian concept of home" (2001, p.11). Presiding over the moral order in the 1950s was the Liberal Party led by Menzies who sought to preserve Christian moral values, subscribing to the importance of Christianity as supporting the social order. Menzies' political ideology emphasised the value of home, of moral values and of individual thrift (Thompson, 1994, p.100).

dangerous outside world (Billig, 2001, p.109). This imagining is precisely why the link between domestic comfort and national identification and political allegiance is often successful. As I have discussed, the government appealed to the public's loyal and emotional attachment to family. The intention was to create the experience of fear and threat to that space, its identity and values. Greg Noble sees this as a 'politics of comfort' where it is important to remember that "our enmeshment with the world is never fully comfortable or relaxed, and constantly poses a problem for political leaders" (2002, p.63). Noble suggests that the ontological security necessary to the stability of personal identities and relations and to national identification is "under threat" (p.64). The government's representations of the Children Overboard event, its appeal to the value of family, was aided by this apparent increased sense of threat and anxiety, which was promoted in the Liberal's campaign material. It was the Liberal's view that they offered the best protection available to its citizens, that "under a Howard government there will be no hesitation or changing of priorities – only a single minded determination to defend this nation against whatever threats may emerge" (2001, p.7). Therefore, they emphasise a unity in family, in nation, and in national identity.

In this chapter I have considered how home and family are emotionally loaded terms that are frequently and intentionally connected to the world of politics and economics, as actively "shaped and defined by the public sphere" (Burke, 2001, p.187). Anxieties about the family as a moral domain have a history of being played out within Western politics and media through the interconnection of official discourses and popular media representations of family values and public morality. Further, such representations often embody a particular set of assumptions about the lived social reality and give favour to particular social arrangements over others, usually the white, middle-class, Christian, nuclear family (Allon, 1997, p.12). It seems that when the moral 'good' of a nation is perceived to be at threat, the defence of institutions like the family and spaces like the home becomes more urgent. I have argued that the Howard government understood the link between home, family responsibility and national belonging, and the relationship of this connection is evident in the formation of a sense of ontological security. The government understood that the comfort found in these spaces is most meaningful when people are anxious. Thus there was a real attempt to produce the anxiety. This was certainly successful, considering the Howard government's election win. In the context of Tampa, global economic

uncertainty and the terrorist attacks of September 11, Children Overboard served as a reminder to the Australian voting public of the threat of refugees, asylum-seekers, and boatpeople (Noble, 2002, p.65). In doing so, the home, the family, and the nation are all highlighted as potential spaces of exclusion, spaces that translate into exclusionary practices such as immigration policy.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented a discursive analysis of the Children Overboard event by reading a sample of the media and political representations of the event that circulated within the Australian public sphere. Specifically, discussion has focused on the representations of an Australian 'self' and an asylum seeker Other, as they appeared in the texts of the news media and government. I have argued that, as a media or discourse event, Children Overboard revealed an articulation of difference through the use of a language of binary oppositions, framing, stereotyping, imagery, and narratives. The implications of these narratives are that their exclusionary language can often translate into practice. This is seen on several levels in attempts by nations, communities, families, and individuals to insulate themselves from the perceived threats of Others. By representing the cultural identities and values of minority groups such as asylum seekers, the government and news media can be seen to promote intolerance towards these groups and affect their acceptance into Australian society.

I have considered nation and family as ideological constructs which divide people into collectivities or communities, defined by their values, beliefs, culture, or 'way of life'. These constructions involve exclusionary and inclusionary boundaries which form the collectivity, dividing the world into 'us' and 'them': one must either be born or invited into the nation or family to become a legitimate member of these units. Furthermore, the boundaries of such collectives tend to focus around a myth (or history), which involves the practice of certain ideals, morals, cultural, and civic practices. Thus, I have argued that the Children Overboard event can be seen as an example which highlights the 'real material practices' and discourses of exclusion in contemporary Australia. These include the government's enforcement of border protection through the deployment of its defence forces coupled with the electoral promotion of their immigration policy, which had the real effect of demonising the asylum seeker Other, by representing them as a threat.

My exploration of border protection has shown how the government's role of providing security to the public is a useful political tool in creating a sense of stability and maintaining public loyalty and support. This support is harnessed through myths of nation and family, which offer citizens the promise of security in an 'uncertain' world. Thus,

governments, playing upon this instability, offer security through policy actions, offering defence against perceived threats. These threats may be environmental, cultural, or military, but in many cases it involves the threat of people – Others. Refugees such as those involved in the Children Overboard event are then represented as Others and are used as totems of fear in order to legitimise the policies which the governments rely upon for election victory.

While liberal democracies espouse the right to, and protection of freedom in their societies, the representation of threats and fears for political purposes, articulated within the discourse of family, seem to contradict this freedom. Rather than living in tolerant and open communities, people retreat into exclusionary enclaves of homes armed with security screens, communities littered with surveillance cameras, and nations spending billions of dollars on border protection and 'homeland' defence programs. As Fiske suggests, the public places necessary for such free and relaxed citizenship are being eroded by fear (1994, p.247). The contraction of physical public space continues discursively in the contraction of the meaning of the word nation until it encompasses only 'those like us' (Fiske, 1994, p.248). The use of media events such as Children Overboard and its appeal to the 'value of family', also constructs fear. This fear turns the family that liberal democracies value into a citadel from which to fend off the values of the dangerous Other (Fiske, 1994, p.252).

My reading of the Children Overboard event has shown how the Australian government, via a largely uncritical media, were able to manipulate news representations of the asylum seekers and portray them as a threatening Other. I have argued that the government maintained these representations in the mass consciousness to gain support for its election campaign policies. The government saw the Children Overboard event as an opportunity to employ the discourse of family to promote and sanction border protection and national security. In this way the event has shown how vulnerable democracy is in the face of a drive for security (Burke, 2001, p.328). Furthermore, this produces an ideological politics of discomfort, of insecurity, and of fear in Australia. In a nation preoccupied with its 'borderphobias', the Children Overboard event can be seen to promote an imagined ideal of the 'good' Australian family 'self' and an 'immoral' asylum seeker Other which reinforce the exclusionary boundaries of nation and family. It is my belief that these ideals serve to

legitimise the use of fear by the government, and continues an Australian narrative of exclusion. Consequently, it may be that an alternative vision of family and nation in Australia is required if this blanket of fear is to be lifted. However, this would most likely mean an alternative vision of liberalism: one which offers a new *inclusionary* space of social dialogue and discourse; which rejects the political rhetoric of repression, fear, and security; and which instead embraces a responsibility to the freedom of others as well as ourselves; an alternative which, is beyond the means of this thesis, but may point towards an area of research for the future. Meanwhile, what Australian media consumers and citizens should be wary of is the government and news media's practice of inciting fear and insecurity amongst the community, via pleas to the 'good' of family, in order to legitimise defensive actions on behalf of the nation: that is, hidden in the promise of freedom and the protection of the Australian 'way of life' are also mechanisms of difference, control and exclusion.

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APPENDIX ONE

DATE	NEWSPAPER	HEADLINE
October 8, 2001	The Australian, page 1	"Boat children overboard: Howard hard line becomes poll focus".
	The Age, page 1	"Boat people 'threw children overboard'"
	The Advertiser, page 1	"Shots fired to stop boat: illegal immigrants throw children overboard".
	The Canberra Times, page 1	"Children on boat thrown into sea".
	The Courier-Mail, page 1	"Children hurled into sea: Asylum seekers sabotage vessel."
	Australian Financial Review, page 1	"Refugees overshadow ALP"
	The Mercury, page 1	"Children Overboard: new tactic by desperate boat people".
	Sydney Morning Herald, page 1	"Children Overboard, but boat in limbo on refugee frontline".
	The West Australian, page 4	"Howard firm as boat people dive branded a stunt".
October 9, 2001	Canberra Times, page 3	"Navy saves Iraqis twice: Refugees rescued as their boat sinks".
	Courier-Mail, page 9	"Frigate salvages human cargo".
	The West Australian, page 1	"Boat Dilemma: Navy rescue Iraqi asylum seekers from sinking boat".
November 7, 2001	The Australian, page 1	"Overboard incident 'never happened'".
November 8, 2001	The Australian, page 1	"P.M plays last boat fear card".
	The West Australia, page4	"Asylum terrorist 'link".
	Sydney Morning Herald, page 1 Page 6	"Howard, Beazley lashed over race" "Howard links terrorism to boat people".
November 9, 2001	The Australian, page 1 Page 4	"Navy scuttles PM's story". "How the facts went overboard"
	The Age, page 1 Page 2	"Doubt cast on Howard Government's boat story" "Murky waters: were the children thrown?
	The West Australian, page 8	"A vote for the Liberals protects our borders" (advertisement)
November 10, 2001	The Age, page10	"Keep Australia in safe hands" (advertisement)

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 3

Map projection: Bonne with 134°E longitude
and 30°S at projection centre

MP 02/343.20

MARITIME ZONES

Territorial Sea Baseline
Coastal Waters
Territorial Sea
Contiguous Zone
Exclusive Economic Zone