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REPRESENTING THE REFUGEE:

RHETORIC, DISCOURSE AND THE PUBLIC AGENDA

This Masters by Research (English Literature) was written by John Martin Cartner for the School of Arts and Sciences of the University of Notre Dame (Fremantle) and submitted in the year 2009.

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ABSTRACT

The central concern of this dissertation is to examine representation and self-representation as they pertain to this nation's response to asylum seekers between the Tampa affair in August 2001 and the defeat of the Coalition government in the 2007 federal election. The first half of the dissertation examines the representation of refugees in two of the nation's prominent newspapers, *The West Australian* and *The Australian*. Drawing upon the work of Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Michel Foucault and others it is contended that in the Australian government and media's representation of asylum seekers Manichean-based ideologies can be traced, which serve to propagate the Orientalist's project. Furthermore, a close analysis of *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in Australia's Detention Centres* and *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, shows that it is only through self-representation that the damaging effects of Orientalism can be challenged. As such the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin are central to this analysis of refugees' self-representations. In the final chapter the work of Emmanuel Levinas is also used, of particular interest is his concept of 'face'. Combined with some of the ideas of the aforementioned theorists this demonstrates the centrality of oral discourse and self-representation as sites of life, death and most crucially, hope for those refugees seeking to be accepted into the Australian community.

The analysis of *The West Australian* and *The Australian* conducted in the first two chapters of this dissertation should be read in this context. While there are many factors that contribute to newspaper production such as audience, editorial influences and advertising demands to name but a few, these are not treated by this dissertation. My approach is entirely focussed on the politics of language in terms of its conception, use and effect. Similarly, in my analysis of refugees' self-representations, conducted in the final two chapters of the dissertation, these same concerns are fore-grounded. Furthermore, as the representations and self-representations surrounding refugees considered in this dissertation were produced within specific historical and social conditions these also play an important role in informing my analysis.

I, John Martin Cartner, certify that this dissertation is entirely my own work and contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

John Cartner

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My late Dad, John, whose artistry with words I have at least in part inherited and whose spirit continues to inspire me in all I do. My beautiful family, who instilled in me the desire to strive for excellence and an appreciation of the most precious gift of all: life.

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REPRESENTING THE REFUGEE: RHETORIC, DISCOURSE AND THE PUBLIC AGENDA

INTRODUCTION

> In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality…discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire—it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.[1]

These observations made by renowned philosopher and literary theorist Michel Foucault lie at the heart of this dissertation, which aims to consider the battle over discourse and representation within the context of Australia's immigration policies and practices under the Howard Government (1996-2007) as they pertained to refugees and asylum seekers. The former are those who for fear of persecution find themselves stateless, while the latter may be defined as those who having fled their homeland due to fear of persecution seek refuge in another country. The particular scope of the investigation lies between what many consider the turning point in Australia's approach towards asylum seekers, the Tampa affair in August 2001, and the defeat of the Howard Government in the 2007 federal election.

The first two chapters explore the nature of those discourses and representations of asylum seekers and refugees disseminated by some of the leading politicians of the day, as well as those promoted by sections of the Australian media. For the purposes of this dissertation the primary focus is limited to two of our nation's newspapers: *The West Australian* and *The Australian*. As the state's sole daily newspaper, *The West Australian* is the main source of print news for the majority of West Australians; as such, its influence as an agent for dictating and influencing public

[1] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.210.

opinion in Western Australia is significant. *The Australian* on the other hand, necessarily aims for a more diverse readership: it claims its 'editorial values focus on leading and shaping public opinions on the issues that affect Australia'.[2] Nevertheless, it is arguably a conservative newspaper, although it will become clear that compared to *The West Australian*, it appears liberal in its editorial views. For this reason, it was chosen as the second print media source to be analysed. It should be noted that the analysis of these two newspapers focuses on the politics of language and representation in the context of historical and social circumstances. This same methodology is employed in the treatment of refugees' self-representations conducted in the second half of the dissertation.

To effectively demonstrate the battle being waged over the representation of refugees and asylum seekers, a comparative methodology is employed. Drawing upon the work of Stuart Hall, among others, the signifying practices operating within chosen texts will be examined: those that cultivate and those that resist dominant representations. At the heart of this methodology is Hall's assertion that signifying practices are central to representation. While in and of themselves images can convey an array of potential meanings, through signifying practices some meanings are privileged over others; the results of such privileging are often highly political and, as Foucault observes, designed 'to ward off' the powers and dangers of discourse and 'to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality'.[3] In terms of the Australian government's response to refugees, there is considerable evidence that determined efforts were made to control the discourse of refugees. It will become apparent that in the media's reporting of refugees the three manifestations of the prohibition identified by Foucault, 'the taboo on the object of speech, and the ritual of the circumstances of speech, and the privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject'[4]are operating.

As a procedure of exclusion the work of representation is not complete with the assignment of meaning to a single image. Rather the power in representation is found

[2] 'The Australian', News Limited, www.theaustralian.news.com.au, [22 Jul. 07]
[3] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.210.
[4] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.211.

in its cumulative nature. Representation occurs when the same meaning is fixed to an accumulation of various images and texts. When a particular meaning is applied intertextually a regime of representation is created. The representation of refugees therefore, occurs when meanings are fixed to them across a variety of texts and/or images, which suggests the existence of a correlation between representation and power. Since the effectiveness of representation lies in the breadth of its coverage its success is contingent upon access to the tools of its dissemination. Those, such as newspaper editors and politicians, who have the means to create and disseminate representations widely, will determine how not only they but also others are represented. This is why the media and governments are such powerful conductors of representation. It is also why minorities tend to struggle to combat these representations; it is not the case that their self-representations have less power in and of themselves—in fact the opposite is often true—but that they have less access to mainstream society. Indeed, it is this reality that largely informs the comparative methodology employed for this dissertation. By comparing the representations of two newspapers, the similarities, differences and representational possibilities become evident, as do the editorial choices and values that influenced these representations. These representations are further challenged through the examination of refugees' self-representations. Furthermore, while the thesis examines the procedures of exclusion applied to the refugee minority in Australia, this is done within the broader context of white-black relations and Australia's treatment of its Other throughout its history as a colonised country. Richard Dyer's *White*, Henry Louis Gates Jr's, *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, Edward Said's *Orientalism* and *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon will inform this aspect of the analysis.

It is further contested that the representational and discursive procedures of exclusion employed by the Australian government and sections of the Australian media against refugees have comprised part of the Orientalist's project: the propagation of the 'ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority'.[5] The relevance of Said's work to this thesis lies in the largely Oriental origins of the majority of current asylum seekers in Australia and the corresponding historically constituted fear of these people entrenched in the Australian psyche and many

[5] Edward Said, Orientalism, Penguin Books, London, p.42.

policies. An important footnote to this analysis is that the author, while acknowledging the work Said's *Orientalism* does in showing how the Oriental has been eroticised by the West, will focus largely on the marginalising effects of Orientalism upon the Orient and its inhabitants.

The second half of this dissertation focuses on self-representation. Despite the obstacles, largely through advocates refugees have begun to represent themselves to the wider Australian community using the written word. Examples of such texts are to be found in Heather Tyler's *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire* and *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in Australia's Detention Centres*, a Lonely Planet publication. The significance of such texts is revealed not only through the efforts of those who would repress them, but also through the form and content of the narratives. The key term here is narrative, for as Said notes, the power of narrative lies in its ability to introduce 'an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision'[6] to that promoted by stereotypes and binaries. To this end, many of the stories emerging from adult detainees rely upon recollections of past traumas and reminders to the reader of their humanity; detained children on the other hand employ more imaginative and anthropomorphic techniques in their narratives to convey their suffering and fears. A detailed examination of such devices comprises much of chapters three and four. Drawing upon the work of Edward Said and Mikhail Bakhtin, refugee self-representations will be shown to challenge the 'permanence of vision' upon which many representations of refugees rely. Indeed the main work of these chapters is to discuss how refugee self-representations achieve this by applying Bakhtinian principles to a close reading of a selection of the narratives found in the two aforementioned texts.

Thereafter, the work of Emmanuel Levinas is applied to a discussion of the ethics surrounding representations and self-representations of the refugee Other. His ontological philosophies inform the discussion found in the latter parts of the final chapter. Furthermore, from an examination of these same philosophies, several questions pertaining to the nature and importance of oral literatures emerge. It is within this context that one of Levinas' key insights, namely the encounter with the face, will be explored. Drawing upon some of his ideas, I will suggest that it is in the

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, p.240.

omission of the face in representations of refugees and its subsequent inclusion in refugee self-representations that the power of both lies.

During the course of this dissertation, a critical change occurred in the Australian political landscape. After a decade in power, the Howard Government lost office to the Labor Party, led by Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. Within the first year of the Rudd Government taking power in 2007 a raft of changes was introduced which markedly altered the nation's approach to immigration, refugees and detainees. Temporary Protection Visas were abolished, and with them, so too was the sense of uncertainty they promoted amongst detainees. In addition the Rudd government placed a moratorium on indefinite mandatory detention insisting that asylum seekers be processed as quickly as possible upon their arrival.[7] The Pacific Solution, which saw refugees processed on Christmas Island and Nauru has been abolished, and a more humanitarian approach towards asylum seekers adopted. Such was the extent of the changes to Australia's policies towards refugees, that in his address to the Refugee Council of Australia, Senator Chris Evans, the new Minister for Immigration and Citizenship announced that 'At this year's meeting of the Executive Committee of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees the High Commissioner, Antonio Guterres, described Australia as a model asylum country'.[8] Considering Australia under the Howard government was a constant target of the United Nations for its immigration policies, the statement by its High Commissioner marks a significant turnaround in both the nation's treatment of refugees and the way it is perceived by the global community.

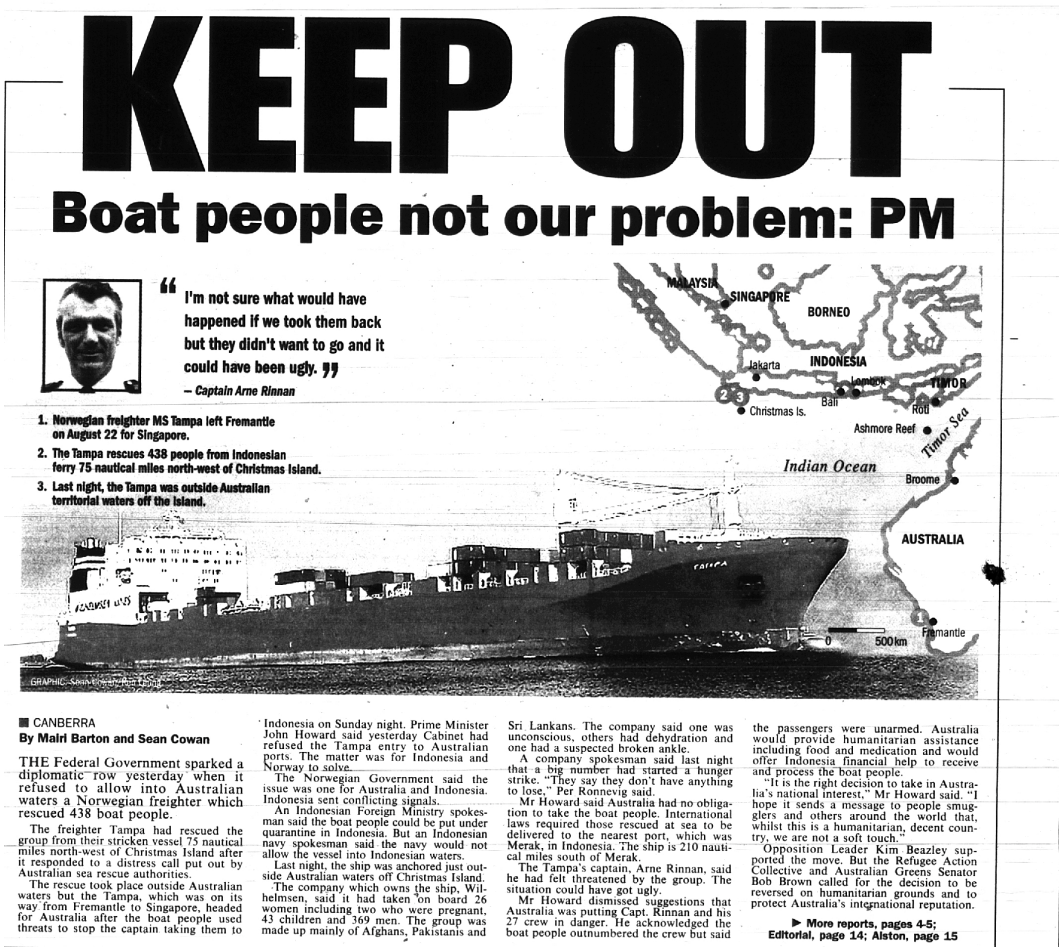
A detailed consideration of the impact of these changes in policy upon detainees' stories is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Based, however, on the findings revealed through the following chapters it is safe to assume that the degree of despair characteristic of many of the narratives written by detainees during the Howard years may have lessened. While such news would be welcomed by refugee advocates and those who adhere to humanitarian principles, it remains to be seen whether Australians have become less susceptible to the fear-based politics that drove the

[7] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Refugee Policy Under The Rudd Government—The First Year', Senator Chris Evans, 21 November 2008, www.minister.immi.gov.au /media/speeches/2008/ce081117.htm, [22 December 2008].
[8] *ibid*

Pacific Solution and other ethnocentric policies that have marked our nation's history. What, however, is certain is the role the stories of detainees have played in rewriting Australia's history. Just as *The Diary of Anne Frank* stands as a warning from history and testament to the excesses of Nazi Germany, so too will the narratives of detainees join those of Indigenous Australians in writing another chapter into the annuls of our own nation's history of prejudice. This connection between narrative and history and the role stories play in re-imagining and rewriting history will be the subject of thorough discussion in the second half of this dissertation.

CHAPTER ONE

On August 28 2001, with the front page headline, 'KEEP OUT Boat people not our problem: PM'[9] *The West Australian* announced that the Federal Government had denied permission for the Norwegian freighter, the Tampa, to enter Australian waters. It was carrying 438 asylum seekers. The newspaper provided a further two pages coverage and also dedicated its editorial to the issue. Over the subsequent three days the newspaper dedicated its front page and no less than an additional twenty reports and/or features to the issue including two further editorials. The extent of the coverage arguably reflected the importance of the issue to the Australian community and, as history shows, certainly assisted the federal government in its efforts to win a third term in power.



KEEP OUT

Boat people not our problem: PM

"I'm not sure what would have happened if we took them back but they didn't want to go and it could have been ugly."
– Captain Arne Rinnan

1. Norwegian freighter MS Tampa left Fremantle on August 22 for Singapore.
2. The Tampa rescues 438 people from Indonesian ferry 75 nautical miles north-west of Christmas Island.
3. Last night, the Tampa was outside Australian territorial waters off the island.

MALAYSIA
SINGAPORE
BORNEO
Jakarta
INDONESIA
Lombok
TIMOR
Bali
Rote
Christmas Is.
Ashmore Reef
Timor Sea
Indian Ocean
Broome
AUSTRALIA
Fremantle
0 500km

■ CANBERRA
By Mairi Barton and Sean Cowan

THE Federal Government sparked a diplomatic row yesterday when it refused to allow into Australian waters a Norwegian freighter which rescued 438 boat people.

The freighter Tampa had rescued the group from their stricken vessel 75 nautical miles north-west of Christmas Island after it responded to a distress call put out by Australian sea rescue authorities.

The rescue took place outside Australian waters but the Tampa, which was on its way from Fremantle to Singapore, headed for Australia after the boat people used threats to stop the captain taking them to Indonesia on Sunday night. Prime Minister John Howard said yesterday Cabinet had refused the Tampa entry to Australian ports. The matter was for Indonesia and Norway to solve.

The Norwegian Government said the issue was one for Australia and Indonesia. Indonesia sent conflicting signals.

An Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesman said the boat people could be put under quarantine in Indonesia. But an Indonesian navy spokesman said the navy would not allow the vessel into Indonesian waters.

Last night, the ship was anchored just outside Australian waters off Christmas Island.

The company which owns the ship, Wilhelmsen, said it had taken on board 26 women including two who were pregnant, 43 children and 369 men. The group was made up mainly of Afghans, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans. The company said one was unconscious, others had dehydration and one had a suspected broken ankle.

A company spokesman said last night that a big number had started a hunger strike. "They say they don't have anything to lose," Per Ronnevig said.

Mr Howard said Australia had no obligation to take the boat people. International laws required those rescued at sea to be delivered to the nearest port, which was Merak, in Indonesia. The ship is 210 nautical miles south of Merak.

The Tampa's captain, Arne Rinnan, said he had felt threatened by the group. The situation could have got ugly.

Mr Howard dismissed suggestions that Australia was putting Capt. Rinnan and his 27 crew in danger. He acknowledged the boat people outnumbered the crew but said the passengers were unarmed. Australia would provide humanitarian assistance including food and medication and would offer Indonesia financial help to receive and process the boat people.

"It is the right decision to take in Australia's national interest," Mr Howard said. "I hope it sends a message to people smugglers and others around the world that, whilst this is a humanitarian, decent country, we are not a soft touch."

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley supported the move. But the Refugee Action Collective and Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown called for the decision to be reversed on humanitarian grounds and to protect Australia's international reputation.

► More reports, pages 4-5; Editorial, page 14; Alston, page 15

Figure 1: Front page of *The West Australian*, August 28, 2001

[9] Mairi Barton & Sean Cowan, 'KEEP OUT Boat people not our problem: PM', *The West Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.1.

Analysis of *The West Australian*'s coverage of the Tampa affair and the subsequent fall out reveals several points of interest regarding the way the incident and the group of asylum seekers involved were represented. Also of interest are the ways the Tampa incident was contextualised and the manner in which asylum seekers and refugees in general were represented.

Stuart Hall, who has dedicated much of his career to considering the nature and practice of representation, asserts that representations operate as both a concept and a practice.[10] Furthermore, according to Hall, the purpose of representational practice is to fix meaning. Images potentially offer a variety of meanings and representation acts to intervene 'in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one.'[11] In the context of print media, the practice of representation is often performed by captions or headings. According to Roland Barthes, frequently it is the caption which privileges one out of many possible meanings from the image and anchors it with words.[12] An example of this operation is visible in the previously cited front page of *The West Australian* (28 August, 2001). Beneath the heading 'KEEP OUT Boat people not our problem: PM'[13] is an image of the Norwegian freighter the Tampa. On the right hand side of this image is a sketch of the west coast of Australia, labelled "Australia"; slightly above this is Indonesia and the surrounding South East Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Borneo and East Timor. Just south of the southern border of Indonesia, Christmas Island is identified. The reader is informed in the story that 'the ship was anchored just outside Australian waters off Christmas Island'[14] and that Prime Minister Howard 'had refused entry to Australian ports. The matter was for Indonesia and Norway to solve'.[15] The message relayed to the readers of *The West Australian* through the image was that the Tampa was the responsibility of Indonesia. Its location, as identified through the sketch map, was clearly much closer to the border of Indonesia than mainland Australia. The visual representation failed to convey the proximity of the Tampa to the Australian satellite territory of Christmas Island. That this was the

[10] Stuart Hall, *REPRESENTATIONS: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, London, p.226.
[11] *ibid*., p.228.
[12] *ibid*
[13] Mairi Barton & Sean Cowan, 'KEEP OUT Boat people not our problem: PM', *The West Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.1.
[14] *ibid*
[15] *ibid*

representation privileged by *The West Australian* is confirmed by the sub-heading, 'Boat people not our problem: PM'.[16]

To the left of the image of the Tampa was a photo of the captain of the Tampa, Captain Arne Rinnan. Immediately to the right of this photo, the following words, attributed to him appeared: 'I'm not sure what would have happened if we took them back but they didn't want to go and it could have been ugly'.[17] The 'they' to whom the captain was referring were the asylum seekers aboard the Tampa. The event to which he was referring was reported in the following manner by *The West Australian*: 'The rescue took place outside of Australian waters but the Tampa, which was on its way from Fremantle to Singapore, headed for Australia after the boat people used threats to stop the captain taking them to Indonesia on Sunday night.'[18] The words of Captain Rinnan and those of journalists Mairi Barton and Sean Cowan combine to represent the Asylum seekers as a threat. The inclusion of Captain Rinnan's predictions that things 'could have been ugly'[19] reveals the paper's willingness to use speculation to represent the issue, and its use certainly reveals a bias in the journalists' reporting of the incident. While readers are informed of Captain Rinnan's fears regarding the asylum seekers' possible actions, they are not informed of the possible fears of the asylum seekers; fears which one may deduce were considerable. The report does quote a member of the company who owned the Tampa, who hints at their desperation when he states that 'They say they don't have anything to lose'.[20] However, there is a noticeable lack of investigation into why the asylum seekers were so desperate 'that a big number had started a hunger strike.'[21] The lack of focus on what Peter Mares calls the 'push factors'[22], the reasons asylum seekers flee from their homeland, portrays asylum seekers as desperate to the point of irrationality. The lack of context in reporting—which is bemusing since the same paper routinely reports on the troubles in the Middle East—can have a considerable impact upon the manner in which asylum seekers are represented and thus perceived by the population:

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[16] *ibid*
[17] *ibid*
[18] *ibid*
[19] *ibid*
[20] *ibid*
[21] *ibid*
[22] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.30.

> Media reports rarely put Australia's "crisis" in this international context. We seem to be fixated by the pull factors—the attraction that brings people to Australia—rather than the push factors that force them to leave their homes in the first place. There is little analysis of why it is now Afghans and Iraqis seeking to come to Australia, rather than the Vietnamese, or Chinese or Khmer, who made up the previous four peaks on the boat-arrival charts. Could it be that they come here for the same reasons that they seek refuge in other countries? In 1999 more than 50, 000 people from Iraq and Afghanistan sought asylum in Europe.[23]

The West Australian's reporting on the Tampa incident gave little treatment to these push factors. One article, *Vineyard Heaven for Afghan Group*[24] did mention some of the reasons a particular group of Afghans, who had since been accepted as refugees, fled their homeland. The gist of the article, however, focused on their happiness at being accepted into Australia, which was described as heaven.

The reporting of the Tampa incident by *The West Australian* was noticeable for its lack of focus on the human face of the issue. The majority of the reporting related to the way Australia was affected by the issue or conveyed the message that Australia was a country under siege, fighting to protect its sovereignty. This was demonstrated by the front page of *The West Australian's* August 31 edition which led with the headlines: 'CALL FOR HELP' and 'PM turns to UN in boat crisis'[25]. The face of a somber Mr Howard is framed by these headlines as well as quotes from the *Irish Independent*, which calls Australia 'heartless'[26], *The Financial Times* and *The Times*, which defend Australia's right to protect its sovereignty. The reported use of the SAS in the conflict further heightened the sense that Australia was a country under siege. It is a perception that was arguably consolidated by the use of headlines such as 'Ship Seized', 'SAS enforces orders', 'Bid to sink boat people', 'Troops ready for support' and 'Keep Out'[27], all of which appeared in *The West Australian* between Tuesday August 28 and Friday August 31, 2001. Such reporting would appear to fit neatly into the narratives of invasion genre, which according to Mares enjoys a rich history in Australia:

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[23] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.30.
[24] Steve Butler, 'Vineyard heaven for Afghan group', *The West Australian,* 28 August 2001, p.5.
[25] Karen Middleton, 'CALL FOR HELP: PM turns to UN in boat crisis', *The West Australian*, 31 August 2001, p.1.
[26] *ibid*
[27] *The West Australian*, 28-31 August 2001.

> In the late nineteenth century the radical utopian and labour activist William Lane developed a theory of 'swarming populations'. He believed that nations, like beehives, reached a critical stage of overpopulation, at which point mass emigration became inevitable. According to David Walker, Lane calculated that China had an annual 'swarming population' of 65 million and believed there was no land 'so convenient and so promising, so unoccupied yet so hospitable' as Australia. There was a rash of invasion narratives around this time, in which a defenseless and morally weak Australia was overrun by more calculating and ruthless Asians. The genre is still with us.[28]

Mares goes on to identify narratives such as Eric Willmot's *Below the Line* (1991) and the popular John Marsden text *Tomorrow When the War Began* as examples of narratives that conform 'to the key element of William Lane's nineteenth century beehive analogy'.[29] *The West Australian* reporting of the Tampa reveals some elements of this age old fear in its reporting. Its front page story on August 29, the day after the story broke, details fears of more asylum seekers ready to approach Australia's borders: 'Fearing 900 more boat people were on their way on three boats as another 2000 others were ready to leave Indonesia, the Government stood firm and refused to let the Tampa into Australian waters. The Tampa rescued 438 boat people from their stricken vessel…'.[30] By combining the verb 'fearing' with the numbers of estimated arrivals, reportedly in their thousands, the paper successfully creates a sense of Australia as a country under siege. This is reinforced by the picture on the front page of some of the 438 boat people on board the freighter.[31] The shot taken from above shows the so-called boat people sitting in rows, approximately 16 in breadth and 12 deep. As they are shown from above, they are significantly anonymous to the reader and, as they are grouped together, are noticeable only by their numbers. The caption beneath the photograph explains that those pictured comprise only 'some' of the boat people aboard, leading to the obvious inference that there are more than those pictured. It would be a long bow to draw to say, on the basis of this report alone, that *The West Australian* was consciously buying into the invasion narrative genre. Not so far stretched is the assertion that this story, taken with the total sum of reports on the issue by this paper, creates a regime of

[28] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.28.
[29] *ibid*.p.29.
[30] Mairi Barton & Sean Cowan, 'ALL AT SEA: Aid sent to stranded freighter', *The West Australian*, 29 August 2001, p.1.
[31] *ibid*

representation that promotes the fear of invasion and contributes to the marginalization of the asylum seekers. According to Hall,

> …images do not carry meaning or 'signify' on their own. They accumulate meanings or play off their meanings against one another, across a variety of texts and media. Each image carries its own, specific meaning. But at the broader level of how 'difference' and 'otherness' is being represented in a particular culture at a particular moment, we see similar representational practices and figures being repeated, with variations, from one text or site of representation to another…We may describe the whole repertoire of imagery and visual effects through which 'difference' is represented at any one historical moment as a regime of representation.[32]

The West Australian's coverage between the 28th and 31st of August, 2001 included not one, but eight images of the Tampa and five images related to the deployment of Australia's SAS troops to deter the Tampa. These images, taken together over four days of coverage, anchored as they were by captions that reinforced the perception of a country under siege, can be read as a regime of representation, which, in this case, helped to create the impression that Australia was indeed a nation under attack. This regime of representation was all the more powerful when one considers the range of print and television media across the nation actively employing the rhetoric of the invasion narrative:

> The arrival of refugees by boat in 2001 was constructed as a crisis through the use of headlines such as "Island awaits human flood" and "5000 new illegals heading this way." Other front page headlines such as "People-smugglers push Howard's limits" and "Boatpeople turn hostile in ocean standoff" reflect the negative stereotypes that are commonly used to represent refugees and the means by which they arrive in Australia.[33]

Language, and the manner of its use, is essential to the process of representation. As Hall observed, an image can convey an array of possible meanings. Language, however, serves to privilege particular meanings over others. In the case of *The West Australian*'s coverage during the Tampa incident, the language used can at best be described as impersonal and, at worst, as hostile towards asylum seekers. Both of these characteristics are identifiable in *The West Australian's* headlines on the first

[32] Stuart Hall, *REPRESENTATIONS: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, London, p.232.
[33] Peter Gale, *The Politics Of Fear: Lighting The Wik,* Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest, p.145.

day of the paper's coverage of the Tampa affair. 'Keep Out'[34] is stretched across the paper's front page in large, thick, bold, black letters. The heading is fully capitalized as if to add further emphasis to the message. As the two word headline was not attributed to another author, it could easily be interpreted as conveying the newspaper's own stance towards the asylum seekers aboard the Tampa. The subheading on the other hand 'Boat people not our problem'[35] is attributed to the Prime Minister, Mr John Howard. The statement is clearly paraphrased by the editor and reflects the tone of Mr Howard's own statements, contained in the front page report. The impersonal and dismissive nature of the statement is reflected through its subject, 'boat people'. This reduces the asylum seekers to the mode of transport used to seek refuge, and its predicate, 'not our problem', similarly serves reductive purposes by portraying those aboard the Tampa as problems rather than as humans in distress, who, given the opportunity, could develop into valuable contributors to the Australian community. Given that the front page image accompanying this subheading is one of the Tampa, and is completely lacking in any personal representation of the asylum seekers in question, it is fair to assess *The West Australian*'s representation of the issue as favourable to the Government's hard-lined stance. David Marr and Marian Wilkinson's expose of the Tampa affair, *Dark Victory*, supports this conclusion by noting that 'no "personalising or humanising images" were to be taken of asylum seekers.'[36] According to Marr and Wilkinson, this directive came straight from Canberra to the military and ensured that just as 'Australians had only the haziest picture of what life was like behind the wire in Port Hedland and Woomera'[37], their grasp of events aboard the Tampa would be similarly obscure. The extent to which *The West Australian* was complicit in these representations is evident when comparing its coverage to that of *The Australian*. Although the latter is renowned for its conservatism it nevertheless made an effort to highlight the human face of the issue, despite the obstacles enacted by Canberra.

Another adjective often prominent in reporting on refugee related issues is 'illegals'. It is a term that is 'employed in a construction of a binary between deserving and undeserving refugees—those who warrant rights under the international covenant on

[34] Mairi Barton & Sean Cowan, 'KEEP OUT Boat people not our problem: PM', *The West Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.1.
[35] *ibid*
[36] David Marr & Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, p.180.
[37] *ibid*., p.181.

refugees and those who jump the "queue" and are not seen to be deserving of a humanitarian response'.[38] The determinants of who falls into which category are often extremely arbitrary and based upon the mode of transport used by would-be asylum seekers. In an Australian context, those who have tried to make their way to our shores by boat have often been labeled as 'illegals', or 'queue-jumpers', while those who follow approved procedures are seen as legitimate refugees. Such categorizations are curiously ironic when considering the definition of the term refugee as defined by the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* as a person who:

> Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[39]

While it is foreseeable that in some situations refugees may be able to arrange an orderly departure from a country which presents to them 'a well founded fear of being persecuted'[40], it is just as plausible that equally genuine refugees may find themselves in less favourable circumstances: situations that do not permit them the luxury of time to gather the necessary visas and other documents that the Australian government deems necessary for legal entry into its borders. History is littered with documented occasions in which refugees have been forced to flee their country of origin amid situations of immediate danger. To label refugees, who find themselves literally running for their lives as a result of persecution, as 'illegals' because they don't possess the correct documentation or because they arrive by boat is a practice that is both arbitrary, discriminatory, and in breach of both the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the *1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugee*s. [41]

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[38] Peter Gale, *The Politics Of Fear: Lighting The Wik,* Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest, p.145.
[39] Frank Brennan, *Tampering with Asylum: A Universal Humanitarian Problem*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.15.
[40] *ibid*
[41] Frank Brennan, *Tampering with Asylum: A Universal Humanitarian Problem*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p.15.

In his text, *Tampering with Asylum: A Universal Humanitarian Problem*, Frank Brennan addresses the rationale behind the Australian government's attitude toward the illegality of the asylum seekers reaching Australian territory. In general terms the government argues that refugees 'have not come directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened. In the government's opinion, most (if not all) the refugees have had protection available to them in some other place en route'.[42] It is true that many asylum seekers coming from the Middle East do find themselves in Indonesia en route to Australia. However, Brennan asks, 'given that Indonesia is not a signatory to the Convention (cited previously) and given that the country is not governed by the rule of law, how can it credibly be argued that boat people should stop their journey in Indonesia and enjoy sufficient protection?'[43] Brennan goes on to observe that 'under Indonesian law, all unlawful foreigners who are detected are subjected to quarantine detention awaiting deportation'.[44]

Brennan's observations are important because they call into question the accuracy of the government's long held practice of labeling refugees, particularly those who arrive by boat, as 'illegals'. The United Nations definition of the term 'refugee' takes no account of the mode of transport they use to flee persecution. Since Australia is a signatory to this Convention one must question why the Australian Government has chosen to discriminate in such a way? In answer to this question, Mr Howard might cite Australia's sovereign rights in repeating his election winning proclamation: 'We decide who comes to this country and the circumstances under which they enter'.[45] Gale, however, believes the term is utilized as part of a representational theme that 'seeks to reconcile the apparent incompatibility of Australia being perceived as a humanitarian nation and the policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers, including children.'[46]

In Foucauldian terms, refugees are primarily the objects of speech. This is a position that has led to their status as one of the most disenfranchised minorities in

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[42] *ibid*., p.95.
[43] *ibid*
[44] *ibid*., p.96.
[45] Ien Ang, 'From White Australia to Fortress Australia: The Anxious Nation in the New Century', in Laksiri Jayasuria, David Walker & Jan Gothard (eds), *Legacies of White Australia: Race Culture and Nation*, University of Western Australia Press, 2003, p.64.
[46] Peter Gale, *The Politics Of Fear: Lighting The Wik,* Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forest, p.145.

contemporary Australian society. The taboo on their speech has been enforced by a grid of procedures that have served to not only silence their voices, but remove the opportunity for their voices to be articulated to anyone outside the razor wire fences that imprison them. The 'tyranny of distance'[47] long romanticized in Australian literature has been utilized by our nation's politicians to enforce a prohibition on the speech of refugees. By placing the detention centres on the geographical fringes of our country, the voices of those refugees currently held in detention are isolated, cut off from Australia's major population centres. Australian detention centres thus provide a stark geographical signifier of successive governments' determination to place the voices of refugees on the fringes of our society.

This procedure of geographical isolation is further supported by an array of other procedures designed to deny refugees the opportunity of self-representation, making them reliant upon the representations disseminated by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) formerly known as DIMIA (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs)[48]. According to Peter Mares, 'No journalists are allowed into Australia's six immigration detention centres except on occasional guided tours, during which detainees are kept at a distance'.[49] Indeed the taboo on the speech of the refugee is revealed through the government's determination to deny detainees access to almost all channels of communication:

> In late May 2000…a pay-phone was installed at Woomera. Detainees with the money to buy a phone card could at least make direct contact with their families overseas; visitors described long queues as detainees waited their turn to speak to anxious relatives. However at first the pay-phone could only be used to make international calls. A Woomera detainee was not at liberty to call people in Australia, such as members of their own ethnic community, lawyers or, of course, journalists. Although they now had a television in the camp the detainees were only allowed to watch sport and movies, not news programs. There was still no access to newspapers nor to radio.[50]

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[47] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1966.
[48] DIMIA was alternatively known, and criticised by many, as *the department of the Other*. The removal of Indigenous affairs from the department's jurisdiction was undoubtedly a response to such criticism and perhaps recognition of the need to leave behind the marginalising practices of successive Australian governments towards Australia's Indigenous peoples.
[49] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.12.
[50] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.48.

Historically speaking, the denial of access to the media is characteristic of autocratic despots, not something one normally associates with democratic societies. The fact that refugees were denied access to the media suggests that the Australian government was fearful of the impact of refugees' discourses upon their border protection policies. The chance that refugees may be represented as humans, people with real concerns for their safety and well being, people experiencing duress due to their past and present experiences in detention, is one the Government was seemingly unwilling to take. In literary terms it verifies Foucault's observation:

> The prohibitions that surround it (discourse) very soon reveal its link with desire and with power. There is nothing surprising about that, since, as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire—it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.[51]

While the above examples of censorship demonstrate the prohibition on the speech of the refugee, which limit the possibility of self-representation, they are not denied representation completely. Mares cites instances whereby the Australian government has permitted refugee representations to be leaked to the media for circulation amongst the Australian community. Notably, these representations have not been contextualized, and, consequently, have proved highly prejudicial to the cause of refugees in detention. The fact that only representations of this type have been released for circulation and public comment reveals the prohibition on 'the ritual of the circumstances of speech'[52] in operation. As Mares notes, due to the restrictions on access to detention centres 'news reports…relied heavily on the official version of events as supplied by DIMA in Canberra'.[53]

In early February of 2000, detainees at the Curtin Detention Centre held a protest over their treatment in detention. At the time the number of refugees held at Curtin who had come by boat to seek asylum in Australia was 1147; most of them were fleeing persecution in Iraq and Afghanistan.[54] According to Mares their treatment at

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[51] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.211
[52] *ibid*., p.210.
[53] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.12.
[54] *ibid*., p.9.

Curtin made them question whether they could really be in Australia at all, a country they had been led to believe was tolerant and a defender of human rights. They had expected to be treated with dignity.[55] The protest was well organized, with protestors chanting '"Where are human rights? Where is freedom? We want freedom!" There was also a large professionally drawn banner, which depicted the dictator Saddam Hussein expressing gratitude to DIMA for its cooperation in locking up his critics.'[56] Mares goes on to explain that detainees were refusing food and water while a core group of between a dozen to twenty men had sewn up their lips. He notes that while now lip stitching has become a quite frequent form of protest in detention centres at the time of this protest it was unprecedented:

> …the image would not leave me. I found the act both appalling and compelling. People who render themselves dumb, I reasoned, must surely have a pressing need to be heard. An urgent story to tell…symbolically the act of sewing your mouth partly shut is, in itself, eloquent. It communicates the frustration and anger of those made mute and impotent…it shows what people may do when the only power they have is over their own bodies.[57]

While the detainees may have hoped that this would be the way their actions would be interpreted by broader Australia, neither the representations disseminated to the media or the reporting of the lip-stitches were anywhere near as favourable. *The West Australian* and *Sunday Times* used adjectives such as 'bizarre' and 'gruesome'[58] to describe the protesters, while *The West Australian* 'followed up with reports on a subsequent joint visit to Curtin by Mr Ruddock and Mr Court'[59] during which they reportedly spent an hour listening to detainees' concerns. Afterwards Mr Court was reported as saying the detainees '"had a nerve to be complaining" and should show "a little bit of gratitude"'.[60] The premier proceeded to chastise the asylum seekers for their 'irresponsibility' in bringing children to Australia. He admitted that seeing the children 'sort of tugs on the heartstrings', but said that the detainees 'should have had the decency not to subject the children to that "illegal activity"'.[61] The effect of this reporting, and other similar reporting around the country, was to marginalize the

[55] *ibid*., p.10.
[56] *ibid*
[57] *ibid*
[58] *ibid*., p.11.
[59] *ibid*
[60] *ibid*
[61] *ibid*

refugee by portraying them as culturally foreign and alien. In Foucauldian terms, such representations operate as a principle of exclusion, 'not another prohibition, but a division and a rejection…the opposition between reason and madness'.[62] Foucault traces the treatment of the madman's speech from the middle ages and observes that 'whether excluded or secretly invested with reason, the madman's speech, strictly, did not exist. It was through his words that his madness was recognized…but they were never recorded or listened to.'[63] The representations disseminated by DIMA through the media, representation without context, ensured the refugees' actions were deemed as akin to that of a madman, or, at best, of one who shares nothing in common with the people of the land in which they seek asylum. It is highly ironic that detainees who stitch their lips together to demonstrate their voicelessness find themselves further marginalized by the eloquent, albeit misrepresented, articulation of their voicelessness.

The representation of refugees as alien and Other to the values of Australian society extends beyond the Curtin protests of 2000. A remarkable misrepresentation of refugees was disseminated through the media on October 7 2001—the first week of election campaigning, little more than a month after the Tampa incident:

> Phillip Ruddock announced that a group of asylum seekers trying to reach Australia had thrown children overboard "in a clearly planned and premeditated attempt" to force their way into Australia. The story made immediate headlines and two days later, on 9 October, Prime Minister John Howard famously declared on radio, "I certainly don't want people of that type in Australia, I really don't." On 10 October the Defence Minister, Peter Reith, released photographs of children in the sea wearing life-jackets, which he presented as documentary proof of what had happened.[64]

One such photograph appeared on the front page of *The West Australian* on October 11. It shows a member of the Australian navy in the ocean holding on to 'one of the boat people'.[65] The caption beneath the photo reads: '**Safe hands:** A crewman from HMAS Adelaide holds on to one of the boat people who jumped overboard after the

[62] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.211
[63] *ibid*
[64] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.135.
[65] 'Camera snaps boat jumps', *The West Australian*, 11 October 2001, p.1.

boat was intercepted. Children also were thrown overboard'.[66] The story's headline conveys the message, 'Camera snaps boat jumps'.[67] Hall's assertion that 'images do not carry meaning or "signify" on their own'[68] is never more clearly demonstrated than in the reporting of this incident. By itself, the photograph shows some people in a body of water; one person of Caucasian appearance is wearing a life jacket. The image's many possible meanings are reduced to one privileged meaning by the work of the caption, heading and report. Significantly, the refugee is once again the object of the government's speech; the result is the refugees find themselves marginalized, represented as culturally Other and unworthy of participation in Australian culture.

There is an important subtext in this report which serves to reinforce the often used Manichean allegory that equates whites with civilization and non-whites with all things uncivilized and savage. This binary is established through the regime of representation constructed by the accumulated messages conveyed through the story's caption, heading and report. Firstly, the reader is informed that the Caucasian person in the photograph is a 'crewman of the HMAS Adelaide'.[69] This information, prefaced by the words 'safe hands'[70], serves to construct the 'white' crewman as the saviour of the uncivilized other who have willingly put themselves, and the crewman, in a situation of danger. This representation attributes heroic qualities to the white crewman while attributing recklessness and a disdain for life to the 'boat people who jumped overboard'.[71] This binary is reinforced by the final sentence of the caption: 'Children also were thrown overboard'.[72] Such information was clearly disseminated to portray the refugees involved as culturally Other. The Prime Minister articulated this belief to the media: 'I don't want people like that in Australia. Genuine refugees don't do that…they hang onto their children…I don't want in this country people who are prepared, if reports are true, to throw their own children overboard'.[73]

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[66] *ibid*
[67] *ibid*
[68] Stuart Hall, *REPRESENTATIONS: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage Publications, London, p.232.
[69] 'Camera snaps boat jumps', *The West Australian*, 11 October 2001, p.1.
[70] *ibid*
[71] *ibid*
[72] *ibid*
[73] David Marr & Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, p.251.

Mr Howard's qualifying phrase, 'if reports are true'[74], reveals his willingness to construct the non-white other as savage and uncivilized on the basis of hearsay and innuendo. In Foucauldian terms, Mr Howard's construction of the refugee Other constitutes a 'will to truth' that conforms to the historically constituted constructions of non-whites by White-Europeans. Veronica Brady traces the causes of this tendency to Australia's imperial origins:

> Like most settler societies, in the nineteenth century especially, Australia is the product of the history of empire, a history, Karl Jaspers suggests which has arrogated to itself a 'grandeur…stolen from God' and has presented itself as fate, a 'grand triumphal march' through the world of certain people, who as the spearhead of civilization are destined to rule the world. As Luiz Carlos Susin points out, it thus becomes a 'form of critical understanding which identifies and distinguishes good and evil in a very particular way, based on itself, on its glorious position as basis and referent of the whole of reality spread out at its feet'. This helps to explain our present government's self-confidence and apparent lack of self-interrogation in its dealings not only with asylum seekers, Aboriginal Australians and those less successful in economic, social or intellectual terms but also with our Asian neighbours.[75]

According to Brady, Australia continues to operate from a mentality founded on the assumption of the 'ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority'.[76] Brady suggests that until the Australian Government stops living out of its imperial past and begins to engage with its actual situation of a multi-cultural society it will continue to marginalise those who do not conform to the imagined White Anglo-Saxon community.

Further complicating this state of affairs are the efforts of the Howard Government to establish Australia's sovereignty in conformance with its ideological alignment with the myth of statecraft, which at its most basic level subscribes to imagined notions of centrality, stability and coherence. It is also 'represented as the sole facilitator of the historically contingent expressions of that coherence, that way of living'.[77] Phrases and terms like those used by the Howard government serve to reinforce the central

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[74] *ibid*
[75] Veronica Brady, 'A flaw in the nation-building process: Negotiating the sacred in our multicultural society', in Elizabeth Burns Coleman et.al. (eds), *Negotiating the Sacred: Blasphemy and Sacrilege in a Multicultural Society*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2006, p.45.
[76] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.42.
[77] Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p.36.

authority which they claim: 'meanings of words like *territory, sovereignty, country, homeland, democracy, citizen, refugee* and *state* are constantly negotiated, differentiated, and heirarchized to affirm the state-centric imagination of the world'.[78] The impact of this process—a process controlled by the state—upon refugees who by their very definition, are synonymous with instability, movement and statelessness, is often to characterise them as a threat to the central authority of the state. This is a phenomenon certainly evident in the Howard government's treatment of their own 'refugee problem'. One needs only to consider the manner in which refugees were pushed to the boundaries and then expelled beyond the boundaries of the country for evidence of the way they were perceived, or portrayed, as a threat to state security. In light of the nation's history of fear of the Other, not to mention the events of September 11, it was an easy fiction to sell.

What then of the consequences of Australia's historical tendency to racially construct the non-European Other, thus continuing the Orientalist's project? In his exposition of interracial relations between white-Europeans and African Americans, Frantz Fanon observes the impact of being racially constructed:

> I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin.'"[79]

As Fanon felt the weight of the history of European constructions of the African American in the stares of the whites, so too is the middle-eastern refugee burdened by the historically constituted construction of the Arab by the West. Indeed, I propose that Mr Howard's construction of the refugees involved in the children overboard affair, far from being an isolated, uncontextualised construction of a single group of refugees, had behind it the full weight of the history of western constructions of the Arab as culturally Other. It is a proposition that will be analysed in greater detail in the following chapters of this thesis.

It is now a matter of public record that the photos released by Peter Reith were actually taken the following day, on 8th October, when the children were rescued

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[78] *ibid*., p.35.
[79] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pluto Press, London, 1986, p.112.

after their boat sank and almost everyone from the vessel ended up in the water.[80] Significantly, this information was only revealed after the Howard Government's victory in the election.

When confronted with such representations, the repulsion of the nation might be understood. What is less comprehensible is why so few questioned the representations spread through the media. The absence of questions from nearly all sections of Australian society about the manner of these representations was particularly disturbing. It highlights the marginalization of the refugees. Had the people of Australia become so used to dehumanizing images of refugees that when the nation's politicians suggested this group were less than human, so few were willing to question them? What was even more disturbing was the manner in which such conscientious efforts to mislead the Australian people and malign the refugee Other was allowed to go unaccounted for. How is it that Australians, who cringed at the idea that children could be abandoned by their parents and supported Mr Howard's cry to repel 'people of that type' from our shores, could be so morally apathetic when it came to their response to the government's deliberate misrepresentation of these refugees? Neither the Prime Minister, Mr Peter Reith nor Mr Phillip Ruddock were called to account for their misrepresentations of the refugees. It would be hard to imagine the above situation being replicated if the refugees had originated from a predominantly White-European country such as England, Scotland or New Zealand. This would seem to suggest that beneath the rhetoric of border security lies the historically ongoing fear of the non-White European Other:

> The government seized on the 'children overboard' story and kept it going long after they knew it was untrue—because it appeared to confirm the view that these people were unworthy of our compassion. How otherwise could they throw their children overboard? The subtext encouraged for the entire episode was that 'people like that are not people like us' and 'if they are capable of treating their own children so callously, what other horrors might they perpetuate if let loose in our country?'[81]

[80] David Marr & Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, p.251
[81] Carmen Lawrence, *Fear And Politics*, Scribe Publications, Carlton North, 2006, p.45.

Such fear manifested itself in the White Australia Policy and, I suggest, has both motivated and drives the Pacific Solution. The work of Peter Gale and Carmen Lawrence verifies this fact. In their respective expositions, *The Politics of Fear* and *Fear and Politics* both authors trace the use of fear-based politics in relation to Indigenous affairs and the Pacific Solution. Gale's work is convincing due to the sheer weight of research upholding his analysis; Lawrence's text attains much of its authority from its author, a woman whose involvement in Australian politics stretches back to 1986. Lawrence's insights into the political machine serve to verify the work of Gale and other social commentators and theorists in this area.

Lawrence notes the importance of the White Australia Policy to the newly formed Commonwealth, evidenced by its legislation as the first act of the new federal parliament. Citing the rhetoric of J.T. Laing who suggested 'that Chinese immigrants would 'swamp the whole European community of these colonies' and 'obliterate every trace of British progress and civilization.'[82] Lawrence goes on to note the same racial overtones and invasion anxiety in the discourse and policies of governments from both sides of the political fence. ''Invasion anxiety' has also informed the imposition of a brutal detention regime upon those seeking asylum on our shores. As well, changes to the assessment system for migrants have resulted in a noticeable increase in those from white, English-speaking nations.'[83]

Lawrence cites the genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines, The Stolen Generation, debates and policies pertaining to Native Title, the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the rise of hansonism and the Cronulla Riots as occurrences which manifest Australia's historically constituted and ongoing fear of the Other.[84] Lawrence is particularly critical of the Howard government's. She traces these events and others like them to a psychology, which is easily manipulated by the media and politicians alike:

> Australian political figures have often portrayed Australia as vulnerable to loss of sovereignty and have used this to generate levels of fear and anxiety that are disproportionate to the actual threats. It is no accident that Philip Ruddock chose to represent the arrival of an increased number of asylum seekers during 2001 as an 'urgent threat to Australia's very

[82] *ibid*., p.43.
[83] *ibid*., p.43.
[84] *ibid*., pp.23-49.

> integrity', and to invoke the phrase 'national emergency' as a way of describing the increase in numbers. The government began with the assumption—no doubt carefully tested in publicly funded opinion polling—that simply to mention 'illegal migrants' to some Australians would cause them to lose their grip on reality.[85]

The politics of fear that has operated within Australia over the past decade finds its support in what Peter Gale calls New Racism. First employed by Martin Baker, the term refers to a new, more subtle form of racism 'founded on symbolic markers of national identity…placing an emphasis on what is perceived as a threat to Australian culture'.[86] Gale asserts that such discourse argues for the reduction of immigration levels or that migrants be selected from countries that are seen to be culturally similar, preserving what is identified as cultural heritage and traditional values.[87]

> The defining feature of this new politics of race is the replacement of biological models of inferiority and superiority, as a racial hierarchy, with a discourse in which one's own group or culture (or country) is believed to be superior to others, with separation from and suspicion of the Other as natural. Within this racial discourse, immigrants, especially non-whites, are not identified as being racially inferior. Nonetheless, their cultures and values are regarded as alien and a threat to what is identified as implicitly western, in particular, core values associated with whiteness, including democracy itself.[88]

A more explicit demonstration of New Racism was reported in *The West Australian* under the headline, 'Migrant race policy defied'.[89] The story by Anne Burns reports the comments made by One Nation senate candidate Graeme Campbell who reportedly called for a ban on immigrants from Islamic countries entering Australia:

> Mr. Campbell a British migrant said Australia's immigration program should not accept people from cultures foreign to the Australian way of life. 'Our immigration policy should be to promote assimilation' he said. Some cultures were too foreign to be assimilated readily…He cites the Dayaks from Borneo, pygmies, and people from most African nations as too foreign to fit into Australia.'[90]

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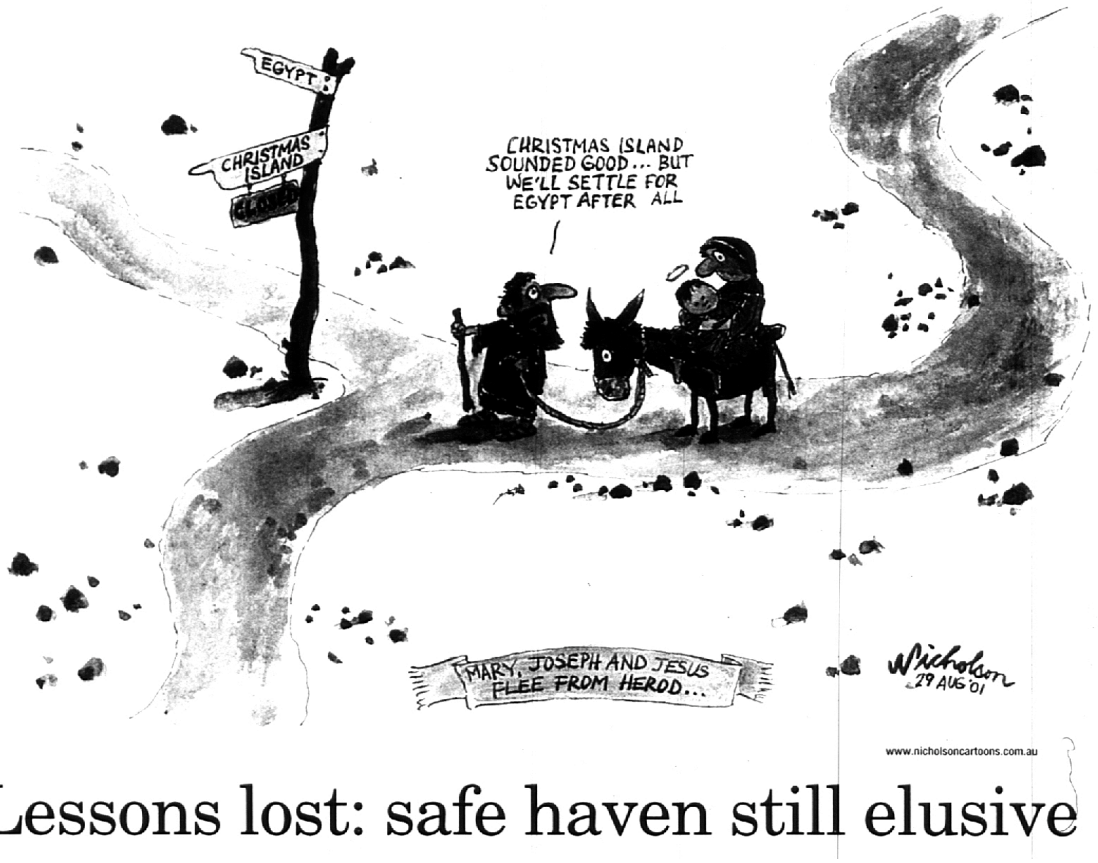
[85] *ibid*., p.41.
[86] Peter Gale, *The Politics Of Fear: Lighting The Wik*, Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forrest, 2005, p.6.
[87] *ibid.*
[88] *ibid*.,p.8.
[89] Anne Burns, 'Migrant race policy defied', *The West Australian*, 11 October 2001, p.7.
[90] *ibid*

Mr. Campbell's comments clearly reveal a concern about the possible dilution of White culture. In naming people from 'most African nations' as 'too foreign to fit in' Mr. Campbell clearly draws a line between white Europeans and the African Other. According to Ghassan Hage such comments 'are conservative forms of "White cultural politics", part of a broader discourse of Anglo decline suggesting there is a threat to perceived core values within contemporary Australia'.[91] Mr Campbell's comments, based on the problematic assumption that Australia is a culturally homogeneous nation with culturally homogeneous values, operate upon the binary that distinguishes Australian values and culture from the culture and values of the Other. By constructing African nations as a threat, his comments re-establish the hierarchy that presumes Anglo superiority over the inferiority of the Other. The Darwinian theories that were once used to substantiate such claims have been replaced by the assumption of cultural superiority.

Jacques Derrida observes that binary oppositions such as the one underlying Mr Campbell's comments are rarely neutral. One pole of the binary is usually the dominant one and includes the other within its field of operations, establishing a power relation. In the case of Mr Campbell's comments it is African culture that threatens Anglo-Australian culture, it is African values threatening Anglo-Australian values, it is African Islam that threatens Anglo-Australian Christianity. The effect of the revival of such binary oppositions is the creation of an atmosphere of fear. Mr Campbell's comments operate from a politics of fear which, taken together with other marginalizing discourses disseminated through the media, assist in the creation of a regime of representation that encourages an apartheid spirit and the perpetuation of the fear of the Other that has driven much of Australia's policy during its first two centuries as a European nation.

[91] Peter Gale, *The Politics Of Fear: Lighting The Wik*, Pearson Education Australia, Frenchs Forrest, 2005, p.6.

CHAPTER TWO



The analysis of *The West Australian*'s coverage of the Tampa and children overboard incidents conducted in the previous chapter highlights an array of discursive and representational practices employed by the newspaper that resulted in the dissemination of representations of asylum seekers that were unfavourable and arguably highly prejudicial to their cause. Conversely, the nature of *The West Australian*'s coverage was extremely beneficial for the government of the day. The biased nature of Western Australia's sole daily newspaper, while evident through the procedures analysed in chapter one, is better appreciated when compared to the coverage of the Tampa and the children overboard incidents over the same time period by *The Australian.* As Australia's only national broadsheet publication *The Australian* necessarily strives to appeal to a broader audience than *The West Australian*, whose readership is the population of a State known for its conservatism. The comparative methodology employed in this chapter will provide the foundations for an exploration of the functioning of what Edward Said has called Orientalism in *The West Australian*'s treatment of asylum seekers. I propose to explore the extent to

which the reporting of *The West Australian* in relation to asylum seekers propagates the mechanisms of Orientalism.

On Tuesday August 28 2001, *The Australian*'s lead story, like *The West Australian*'s, focused on the arrival of the Tampa. *The Australian*'s front page headline read 'Refugees trapped at sea'[92] while its byline announced: 'Canberra sends troops, but the doors stay shut for boatload of sick, starving illegals'.[93] Front and centre of the page is a picture of the Tampa freighter, a head shot of its captain Arne Rinnan and to the right of the Tampa's picture is a map of the Western Australian coast line. To the north is Indonesia. The map and its accompanying text traces the journey of the Tampa from its departure from Fremantle to its arrival off the Australian island territory of Christmas Island. Remarkably, the layout and choice of images employed by *The West Australian* and *The Australian* are strikingly similar. The manner of representations, however, stand poles apart.

Canberra sends troops, but the doors stay shut for boatload of sick, starving illegals

Refugees trapped at sea

Robert Garran
Vanda Carson

A CONTINGENT of troops and medical personnel was ferried from Perth to Christmas Island late last night to provide emergency aid to 438 sick and starving refugees — but John Howard refuses to allow them on to Australian soil.

The mainly Middle Eastern refugees are aboard a Norwegian container ship, the Tampa, which is effectively moored in limbo 26km from Christmas Island and just outside Australian territorial waters in an area for which Indonesia has search-and-rescue responsibility.

While Australia refuses to let the asylum-seekers disembark, Jakarta authorities were last night showing deep reluctance to allow them to be landed at an Indonesian port.

INSIDE

Leaky boat to heartbreak
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Three Hercules aircraft carrying a medical team, soldiers and emergency food and medicine were last night en route to the island.

Military officials in Canberra said their mission was to give humanitarian assistance, though the troops could help maintain order aboard the Tampa, if requested by its master, Captain Arne Rinnan.

Captain Rinnan said earlier he had been forced to head for Christmas Island when several asylum-seekers threatened to jump overboard if they were returned to Indonesia.

"They were aggressive and highly excited, and we were all threatened," he said.

The Prime Minister said Canberra was discussing the situation with Jakarta, but "as a matter of international law, this matter is something that must be resolved between the Government of Indonesia and the Government of Norway".

Mr Howard said there was a clear obligation under international law for the asylum-seekers to be taken to the nearest feasible point of disembarkation, the Indonesian port of Merak.

But Jakarta's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Wahid Supriyad, said that if Australia had refused the refugees entry because they lacked proper documents, Indonesia saw no reason to allow them back.

Indonesian government sources told *The Australian* last night that Mr Howard's rejection of any Canberra responsibility for resolving the crisis was considered "unhelpful" by Jakarta.

Norway urged both countries to act. "We cannot let the countries in the region shy away from their responsibilities," a Norwegian Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Captain Rinnan pleaded for help from Australia, saying he did not have enough food for everyone on board.

But Mr Howard said Australia had to balance its duties of decency and generosity towards boatpeople with the rights of refugees who sought to arrive legally.

On board the Tampa were 26 women, two of them pregnant, 43 children and 369 men, according to a a statement by Wilh Wilhelmsen, the Norwegian company that owns the vessel.

"One survivor is unconscious, others are suffering from suspected dehydration and one has a suspected broken ankle."

The Tampa received a distress alert at 11am on Sunday that a vessel was adrift, and altered course to go to its aid.

The Tampa located the 20m grey wooden fishing vessel KM Palapa 1 about 90km off the coast of Java, Indonesia.

The fishing boat was in poor condition, with damage to the stern and superstructure, the Norwegian company said.

The company was doing all it could for the survivors but its facilities, intended for a crew of 27, were limited.

The survivors said they were from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Opposition Leader Kim Beazley supported the Government's stance, but Donald Rothwell, professor of international law at Sydney University, said Australia was obliged to offer help to people in distress. "If Australia decides it can't accept this vessel, what's to stop other countries saying they are not prepared to accept people rescued at sea for other reasons," he said.

Main picture: Megan Lewis

Floating unwanted: The Tampa, 26km off Christmas Island yesterday, and its captain, Arne Rinnan

1 **Thursday, 12.15am (WST)** Norwegian freighter Tampa leaves Fremantle bound for Singapore

2 **Friday** Fishing vessel KM Palapa 1 with 438 boatpeople on board leaves Indonesia

3 **Saturday, about 1pm** Coastwatch flight spots KM Palapa 1, apparently in distress. Indonesian authorities notified

4 **Sunday, 11am** Coastwatch flight spots KM Palapa 1 signalling SOS about 150km from Christmas Island. Mayday issued

5 **Sunday, 3.15pm-6pm** Tampa arrives, rescues boatpeople and crew. Heads for Indonesia but the refugees persuade the captain to go to Christmas Island. On arrival, it drops anchor offshore and waits

6 **Yesterday, 11am-1pm** The Government refuses the Tampa entry to an Australian port. The Tampa, which has almost reached Christmas Island, is ordered to retreat outside Australian waters, which extend 12 nautical miles (22km) from the island. The Tampa moves outside the zone and waits

Government says the ship is obliged under international law to go to the nearest feasible port: Merak

If the KM Palapa 1 had called for help from within the 12 nautical-mile zone around Christmas Island, Australia would have been responsible for the rescue. Outside that zone is Indonesia's responsibility

An ocean rescue for minister

Dennis Shanahan
Comment

SMALL Business Minister Ian Macfarlane owes his continued life as a frontbencher to two key factors: the proximity of the election and a Norwegian ship picking up 438 refugees.

Yesterday the fate of the minister, who is guilty of allowing unprincipled use of a GST options-milking scheme in his own Liberal Party branch and political ineptitude, became inextricably mixed with the diplomatic fate of refugees on the high seas. Labor was threatening to continue its attack on the minister's involvement in the GST rort — which meant the Liberals were going to get an extra $860 in funds — and it was going to dominate parliament this week.

Then the scheduled cabinet meeting, which was due to discuss several matters, discussed just two: Macfarlane's fate and the Norwegian ship heading for Christmas Island with Afghani refugees saved from a becalmed people-smuggling ship at sea.

These were the political considerations facing the cabinet: Macfarlane's defence was paper-thin and inept, the GST

Continued — Page 2
More reports — Page 2

Neck and neck

NEWSPOLL
THE AUSTRALIAN
Federal primary vote

Percentage support	Election Oct 98	Aug 24-26 2001
Coalition	39.5	40
ALP	40.1	40

Full report – Page 2

Spectre of suicide hangs over skipper

Vanda Carson
Natalie O'Brien

CAPTAIN Arne Rinnan was just a few nautical miles off Christmas Island when the message came in.

His ship, packed with hundreds of sick, distressed and some unconscious boatpeople, was refused permission to enter Australian waters within sight of the tiny Australian territory.

Coastwatch officials, relaying a message from Canberra, ordered Captain Rinnan to turn around and return to international waters, but the Tampa stayed anchored 14 nautical miles off the island last night.

Captain Rinnan told *The Australian* by satellite telephone he had at least four unconscious people needing urgent medical attention, two of whom had been foaming at the mouth earlier in the day. A man with a broken ankle and a seven-months-pregnant woman also needed attention.

"It is very frustrating. No one is responding to our requests for medical supplies... we have sick people on board," he said. He feared it was a "hopeless" situation. The boatpeople had threatened to kill themselves if the Tampa tried to leave.

"I am afraid the outcome will be we have to go to Indonesia and they will jump overboard," he said.

After their rescue, five asylum-seekers had threatened to commit suicide if he did not steam towards Christmas Island.

The men had stormed the bridge and threatened to jump overboard if he returned them to Indonesia.

"They were aggressive and highly excited," he said. "We were all threatened. There was a tense moment up there. I felt responsible for the safety of the vessel."

As soon as the Australian search-and-rescue authority had given him permission to enter Australian waters, the group had calmed down.

The Tampa was alerted at 11am on Sunday to be on the look-out for the boat, which was drifting and leaking. It was located at 2.15pm and it took about three hours to offload everybody.

Inside

➤ Island set in a sea of controversy
➤ Concern mounts for teen hunger striker — Page 2
➤ Nicholson's view — Page 12

Figure 2: Front page of *The Australian*, August 28, 2001.

[92] Robert Garran & Vanda Carson, 'Refugees trapped at sea' *The Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.1.
[93] *ibid*

Firstly, the headline of *The Australian* recognizes the status of those aboard as refugees. The significance of this term is twofold: firstly, at the time of this report the status of the asylum seekers aboard the Tampa had not yet been determined. Therefore, the editor's decision to use the term 'refugees' illustrates a degree of presumptuousness. Refreshingly, the editor's presumptuousness was of innocence rather than guilt in relation to the asylum seekers. The use of the term permits the reader to consider the possibility that the asylum seekers aboard the Tampa were genuine refugees who fled their countries of origin out of fear of persecution and/or possibly as a result of imminent threats to their lives. The use of the term also serves to resist the marginalizing characterization of asylum seekers as queue jumpers, a term that implies a lack of morality on the part of the would-be asylum seeker. The second point to be made regarding the use of the term 'refugees' by *The Australian* is that such language provides those aboard the Tampa with an international context. As refugees, Australia has an international obligation to secure their safety. Terms such as 'queue jumpers', 'boat people' or 'illegals' provide no such compulsions.

Clearly the consequences of the use of language are more far reaching than victory in a battle of semantics. The language used by our politicians, newspapers or refugee advocates has national and international consequences. Yet even more importantly they have an impact upon the safety of individual men, women and children, whose lives are largely dependant upon the perceptions of them created by the language we use. A 'refugee' is internationally recognised as a person who 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted…is outside the country of his nationality'.[94] The 'illegal' or 'queue jumper' on the other hand is one without rights, one who has broken international law and who according to the court of public opinion and the court of law is a criminal in every sense of the word. The implications then of calling asylum seekers illegals as opposed to refugees could not be more stark. At this juncture, the work of Said is particularly relevant. If, as he suggests, Orientalism is 'a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought'[95] applied to the Oriental, then the indiscriminate allocation of terms such as 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers' to asylum seekers well and truly falls within the scope of the Orientalist's work, which is always political and designed to promote 'the difference between the familiar

[94] Frank Brennan, *Tampering with Asylum: A Universal Humanitarian Problem*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2003, p.15.
[95] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.42.

(Europe, the West 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them').'[96] Doubt about the ongoing veracity of such a claim is surely undermined by the fact that such terms are rarely applied to the largest group of 'illegals' in Australia: namely those of White European descent who overstay their visas. Soon after the Tampa affair, *The Sunday Times* took up this issue claiming that at the time of publication 58,700 'Overstayers' were present in Australia:

> That's the benign way the Federal government prefers to refer to the tens of thousands of people who overstay their temporary visas in Australia each year. Overstayers are not tagged in the same way as people who arrive by boat—as queue-jumpers, immigrants by stealth, illegal aliens and criminals. And yet the some 58, 700 overstayers now in Australia because they have flouted the conditions of their visas are as illegal, unlawful and—presumably—as unwanted as the people locked up in detention centres. But that's where the similarity ends. For starters, the origins of the main offenders are vastly different from those who are locked up. And how they are treated if apprehended is in stark contrast to that meted out to boat arrivals. The main group of overstayers come from the UK, mainly England and Ireland…the next largest category are Americans…What happens to these unlawful non-citizens if they are located? They are given bridging visas and remain in the community until they can make their own arrangements to depart…none of them is thrown in detention centres, even the ones who refuse to depart voluntarily.[97]

Can such contradictions in the application of Australia's immigration policies be anything other than a clear manifestation of New Racism? If it were not, then surely the same rules would apply to people who are clearly not refugees but tourists or students as apply to those who risk life and limb to make it to Australian shores.

At this point, an anomaly in the newspaper's attitude to the reporting of the issue must be acknowledged. The byline which appears above the headline, albeit in a smaller font size, uses the word 'illegals' to describe the same group of asylum seekers depicted as refugees in the headline of the front page report. I suggest the use of the term is an anomaly because it betrays the tone of the byline: 'Canberra sends troops, but the doors stay shut for boatload of sick, starving illegals'.[98] The description of the 'illegals' as 'sick' and 'starving' goes some way to personalizing the asylum seekers and highlighting their plight. The 'shut door' metaphor used in

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[96] *ibid*., p.43.
[97] Kerry Anne Walsh, 'Who are really the queue-jumpers?', *The Sunday Times*, 2 September 2001, p.40.
[98] *ibid*

the byline further emphasizes the dire condition of the asylum seekers and implies a lack of decency on the part of the government in its approach to those aboard the Tampa. Furthermore, when read in the context of *The Australian*'s coverage of the Tampa incident between August 28-31 2001, the use of the term is peculiar. Headlines such as: 'A leaky boat to heartbreak'[99], 'Cargo of human misery'[100], 'REFUGEE CRISIS'[101] and 'PM's refugee bungling defies reason and decency'[102] all comprise a regime of representation more favourable to asylum seekers. They are shown as real people with real fears and challenges rather than as nameless and faceless Muslims 'jumping the queue' ahead of 'genuine refugees'.

The Australian's determination to present the human face of the asylum seekers is vividly portrayed through its feature article in its August 28 edition titled 'A leaky boat to heartbreak'.[103] Far from representing the asylum seekers as threats to Australian sovereignty and security the article paints a picture of people desperate to reach the safety of Australia and enjoy the 'paradise' promised to them by Indonesian people smugglers. While Australia is portrayed as paradise, the focus of the article is not so much on the pull factors involved in attracting asylum seekers but on the reasons why these people would risk so much to seek shelter in Australia. This purpose is epitomized by the question: 'What makes a caring father sell all he has to place his young family in a small leaking boat to cross a dangerous sea to land in a country he knows nothing about?'[104] The imagery created by this question is replicated on numerous occasions throughout the article:

> It isn't that there are more than 170 people on a craft built for 20, or that it is leaking taking more than 100 litres an hour. No it is the children. There are just so many. Sitting almost on top of each other, personal space stopped being a concept ages ago. They have been at sea for several days, living like cattle in a truck journeying to market…Hamil says she is nine months pregnant and has not eaten for four days. Her husband is concerned and, not surprisingly vocal in requesting, then demanding,

[99] Keith Saunders, 'A leaky boat to heartbreak', *The Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.14.
[100] Robert Garran, Vanda Carson & Tracy Sutherland, *The Australian,* 29 August 2001, p.1.
[101] Paul Kelly, 'REFUGEE CRISIS', *The Australian*, 30 August 2001, p.1.
[102] Editorial, 'PM's refugee bungling defies reason and decency', *The Australian*, 30 August 2001, p.10.
[103] Keith Saunders, 'A leaky boat to heartbreak', *The Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.14.
[104] *ibid*

> assistance. His anguish is tempered by fear and magnified by love. His wife is constantly crying.[105]

The absence of such narratives in the reporting of *The West Australian* reveals a will to truth that is devoid of truth. In other words, in choosing not to include representations that promote the humanity of asylum seekers *The West Australian* reveals its definite bias towards the issue. This bias is even more revealing when one considers that the author of the feature article 'A leaky boat to heartbreak'[106] run by *The Australian* was Keith Saunders, a fisheries officer with the West Australian Department of Fisheries' international operations section. That the national newspaper included a Western Australian source that was privy to the situation of asylum seekers while Western Australia's own newspaper chose to ignore not only this source but all sources of its type demonstrates an unwillingness on the part of *The West Australian* to provide a balanced treatment of the issue. It is highly unlikely that such a biased treatment would have been prevalent in the newspaper's coverage had the origins of the asylum seekers involved been Anglo-Saxon or European rather than Middle Eastern. As it is, the polarized representations promoted by *The West Australian* operate upon binaries which emphasise the differences between asylum seekers and Australians, while ignoring the commonalities shared such as love and sacrifice for their families. This demonstrates the propagation of Orientalism, which according to Said is best understood as 'a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought, than it is as simply a positive doctrine'.[107]

One of the best indicators of the operations of Orientalism in *The West Australian*'s reporting of asylum seekers is the absence and avoidance of narrative in the construction of representations of Asylum seekers. It is an absence or, using Said's terminology, a constraint that is designed to dehumanize asylum seekers. This can only be achieved when the asylum seekers are anonymous, without a human face or characterized as part of a 'horde' invading our borders. Demonising and dehumanizing stereotypes such as these fail in the face of narrative. When confronted with an image of an asylum seeker as a father, trying desperately to protect his pregnant wife who has gone four days without food and his child who has spent days on a leaky boat exposed to the harshest elements the Indian Ocean can

[105] *ibid*
[106] *ibid*
[107] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, p.42.

provide, it is much more difficult to dissociate oneself from the reality that precludes the dissemination of stereotypes and misrepresentations:

> Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake classical civilizations; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision.[108]

As Said states, confronted by narrative the permanence of vision upon which stereotypes rely gives way. Phrases such as 'people of that type', representations of asylum seekers as Muslim fanatics, or terrorists are all betrayed as the mechanizations of a system designed to preserve cultural purity through the demonisation of the Other. In the face of narrative the functioning of representations as formations or indeed deformations[109] is undermined. The importance of narrative's work in challenging representations of the Other is not to be understated; indeed the second half of this dissertation will be dedicated to the consideration of its function as a tool of resistance and self-representation.

In his efforts to illustrate the impact of Orientalism, Said looks at historical constructions of the Arab by the West. One of the case studies analysed by Said, taken from an essay by Harold W. Glidden (a retired member of the United States Bureau of Intelligence and Research) published in the February 1972 edition of the *American Journal of Psychiatry* is well worth revisiting, purely because of the scope of generalities it provides in its representation of the Arab. Much of the representation is still readily recognizable and circulated thirty-five years later.

According to the article the inner workings of Arab behavior which, from *our* point of view is 'aberrant', for Arabs is 'normal'. The reader is told that Arabs operate from a shame culture from which prestige is gained through the acquisition of followers. Therefore Arabs can only function in conflict situations. Furthermore while Arab value systems demand absolute conformity, rivalry among members, which is destructive of this conformity, is encouraged. They therefore operate from

[108] *ibid*., p.240.
[109] *ibid*., p.273.

an internally illogical and destabilizing value system. According to Gidden, in Arab society only success counts and in the attainment of success, the end justifies the means. Arabs live naturally in a world characterized by anxiety expressed in generalized suspicion and distrust. Subterfuge is a highly developed art in Arab life, as well as in Islam itself. The Arab need for vengeance overrides everything, otherwise the Arab would feel ego-destroying shame. So synonymous is conflict with Arab society that is can be traced to Arab tribal society (where Arab values originated), where strife, not peace, was the normal state of affairs because raiding was one of the two main supports of the economy.

In response to this, Said writes:

> This is the apogee of Orientalist confidence. No merely asserted generality is denied the dignity of truth; no theoretical list of Oriental attributes is without application to the behaviour of Orientals in the real world. On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things.[110]

Several of the representations cited by Said continue to gain circulation today. Some of our politicians and sections of the media would have us believe the Middle Eastern Arabs and/or Muslims normally act in a manner which is aberrant to the Western mindset. The most obvious recent example of this orientalising process is its application to the children overboard incident. As noted in chapter one, Mr Howard was more than willing to characterise the Middle Eastern asylum seekers involved as devoid of the basic values that 'we Australian's' take for granted. Through his characterization he revived two hundred years of Orientalising stereotypes and representations used to denigrate the Oriental and elevate the Westerner. Significantly, the foundation of his achievement was a fictional assertion based on a will to truth.

The West Australian, without verifying the accuracy of the reports that children had been thrown overboard, willingly spread Mr Howard's message that Australians would not be intimidated by their own goodness: '"We are not going to be intimidated out of our policy by this kind of behaviour…I want to make that very

[110] *ibid*., pp.48-49.

clear. We are a humane nation but we are not a nation that is going to be intimidated by this kind of behaviour.'"[111] In the same article, published under the heading, 'Howard firm as boat people dive branded a stunt'[112], Mr. Ruddock was reported as joining in on the attack upon the asylum seekers:

> Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock said people wearing life jackets threw children and themselves overboard when crew of the frigate HMAS Adelaide boarded the boat. They were pulled out of the water and returned to the boat, which was flying an Indonesian flag…Mr Ruddock said the stunt was designed to pressure the government. "I regard these as some of the most disturbing practices I have come across in the time that I have been involved in public life—clearly planned and premeditated," he said. "People wouldn't come wearing lifejackets unless they intended some action of this sort".[113]

Like Mr. Howard's comments, Mr Ruddock's representations of the asylum seekers—and by extension, asylum seekers in general—were based, not on empirical evidence, but upon fictional assumptions. To this extent, the representations comply perfectly with the closed system of Orientalism.[114] All their actions are made to conform to the expectations placed upon them by the Westerner. In this system 'Truth…becomes a function of learned judgement, not of the material itself, which in time seems to owe even its existence to the Orientalist'.[115] Another element of the comments of both Mr Howard and Mr Ruddock worth noting is their binary structure: both politicians compare Western decency to Eastern corruptness. Mr Howard calls Australia a humane nation while representing the asylum seeking Other as the opposite. Once again the Westerner proclaims himself as morally upright while disparaging the Other as morally bankrupt. Mr Ruddock expresses his disbelief at the actions of the asylum seekers. He does not consider the possibility that the allegations are untrue and elevates himself above such behaviour by expressing his unfamiliarity with such immoral actions.

These Manichean representations were upheld by *The West Australian* through the use of symbolic markers to distinguish Western uprightness from Eastern immorality. The paper informs its readers that the asylum seekers 'were pulled out of

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[111] Karen Middleton, Andrew Gregory & Geraldine Capp, 'Howard firm as boat people dive branded a stunt', *The West Australian*, 8 October 2001, p.4.
[112] *ibid*
[113] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, p.45.
[114] *ibid.,*p.63.
[115] *ibid*.,p.67.

the water and returned to the boat, which was flying an Indonesian flag'.[116] Though not explicitly stated, the reader is left to assume that the crew of the HMAS Adelaide, who we are told were present, rescued the asylum seekers from their 'self imposed' danger and placed them back aboard the boat from which they had allegedly jumped. Thus the Australian crewmen are cast into the role of rescuers. Conversely the asylum seekers are aligned to the Indonesian flag. The implications of such symbolic marking hardly needs to be spelt out. What does require articulation is the impact of such representations upon the Other and the relative benefit of such representations for their disseminator.

At this point, the observations of Abdul JanMohamed are well worth considering. While JanMohamed speaks in relation to the Colonist's treatment of the native, his observations are equally applicable and relevant to the Orientalist's representations of the Eastern Other:

> If such literature can demonstrate that the barbarism of the native is irrevocable, or at least very deeply ingrained, then the European's attempt to civilize him can continue indefinitely, the exploitation of his resources can proceed without hindrance, and the European can persist in enjoying a position of moral superiority.[117]

What is at stake in the case of the portrayal of asylum seekers as morally bankrupt is the justification of governmental policies and the re-establishment of Western moral superiority. If the Oriental Other can be shown to be morally inept and incompatible with Australians, then the Australian government can more easily justify policies that would exclude them from Australian society. As JanMohamed notes the government requires only the flimsiest evidence to propagate the myth of the Oriental's inferiority: 'the colonizer's (or Orientalist's) invariable assumptions about his moral superiority means he will rarely question the validity of his own or his society's formation'.[118]

In contrast to the comments made by Mr. Howard and Mr. Ruddock opposition leader Mr. Kim Beazley, Democrats Senator Andrew Bartlett and Greens Senator

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[116] Karen Middleton, Andrew Gregory & Geraldine Capp, 'Howard firm as boat people dive branded a stunt', *The West Australian*, 8 October 2001, p.4.
[117] Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr et.al. (ed) *Race Writing And Difference*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p.81.
[118] *ibid*.,p.84.

Bob Brown were also quoted.[119] While Mr. Beazley was reported as saying only his coastguard proposal would solve the problem, Mr. Bartlett and Brown were critical of the accusations of the government and, in defending the asylum seekers involved, claimed that 'only desperate people would throw their children into the sea'.[120] The inclusion of Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Brown's comments did provide some balance to the story, insofar as an alternative perception of the incident to that propagated by the government's rhetoric was included. The nature of the comments by Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Brown encouraged empathy with the asylum seekers and the situation in which they found themselves. However, despite the resemblance of balanced and responsible reporting by the newspaper, it is important to note that, at no stage, was the allegation that children had been thrown overboard questioned; both the headline and the language used within the report presumed the asylum seekers were guilty of the allegations made against them.

Boat children overboard

Howard hard line becomes poll focus

Ian Henderson
Megan Saunders
Jeremy Roberts
Colleen Egan

A BOATLOAD of asylum-seekers throwing children overboard 150 nautical miles from Australian territory as the navy fired over their heads became pawns in the election campaign yesterday.

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, the campaign's main preoccupation.

"Our policy remains quite resolute," the Prime Minister said, when asked his response to suggestions children were being thrown from the boat.

"We are a humane nation, but we're not a nation that's going to be intimidated by this kind of behaviour."

Kim Beazley said the latest boatload of asylum-seekers — intercepted about 150 nautical miles from Christmas Island — had exposed the flaws in the Government's policy.

"It shows that the much vaunted deterrents of John Howard are not working," the Opposition Leader said.

'Mr Howard's approach has snarled one-third of the Australian navy'
Bob Brown
Greens senator

Mr Beazley said the failure of the Government's approach to the influx of asylum-seekers showed "you're not going to cure this until you've got a cop on the beat for 52 weeks of the year, and you won't get that without Labor's coastguard".

Greens senator Bob Brown condemned the Government, saying: "Nobody throws their children overboard unless they are desperate.

"This is not an exercise in war. It's an exercise in politics.

"Mr Howard's approach has snarled one-third of the Australian navy when they should be available for other uses."

Children were thrown overboard and adults jumped into the sea at the height of the dramatic stand-off.

HMAS Adelaide shadowed the vessel, with 187 asylum seekers on board, into international waters yesterday after intercepting it on Saturday off Christmas Island.

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock described the asylum seekers' actions as a disturbing and premeditated act that culminated in about a dozen people being rescued from the sea.

It is understood defence personnel boarded and took control of the vessel after HMAS Adelaide fired warning shots across its bow.

In a sign of increasing desperation, the people-smuggling crew disabled the boat's steering before adults started jumping overboard and children were thrown into the water.

All those on board were equipped with lifejackets, the Government said.

A spokeswoman for Mr Ruddock said last night the navy had boarded the vessel inside Australian waters.

"The boarding party sailed it back to the contiguous zone (between international and Australian waters) and then disembarked," she said. "They (the crew) were given a compass, pointed north and told this is where you need to go."

Naval officers were on alert in case the boat tried to re-enter Australian waters.

A second boat, carrying more than 100 people, was heading to Ashmore Reef but had to turn back after hitting a reef.

The Australian understands at least five other vessels are waiting to leave Indonesia for Christmas Island.

The Government's plans for shipping demountables to Christmas Island for a processing camp have hit trouble with a local union blockade preventing them being unloaded.

A ship was anchored off the Island while the Union of Christmas Island Workers negotiated with the Government over a list of demands, including that the camp not be built next to the island's rubbish tip.

Government officials are adamant about maintaining a tough line with all boat arrivals amid fears of sending a green light to about 3000 people waiting in Indonesia.

Inside

After the navy intercepted the latest boatpeople, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock could offer no guarantees of what would happen to them, because his Government has done precious little to secure regional co-operation to tackle the problem and has instead sought to export it
— Editorial, Page 12
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Life and times of a people-smuggler — Page 11

The Howard Governm
Putting Australia's
Interests First

Chasing votes: Mr Howard launches Danna Vale's bid to retain the seat of Hughes, above. Right: The frigate HMAS Adelaide
Picture: John Feder

Policy roll-out begins

Ian Henderson
❑ Political correspondent

CASH payments for families with children could be offered as Coalition election promises. John Howard has signalled, adding family benefits to the widely flagged income tax cuts as likely elements of the Government's third term agenda.

But any such financial help would be severely limited, the Prime Minister warned on the second full day of the campaign for the November 10 election. He cited the looming slowdown in global and domestic economic growth as the reason for the Government's austerity.

While nothing was definite, Mr Howard said tax relief could "cover a number of areas and one of the areas could be an additional benefit or a separate benefit that went to people with children as well as a benefit going generically to taxpayers." His comments came as Kim Beazley again pledged there would be no new taxes or any tax increases under a Labor government. He blamed the Coalition for the slender budget surpluses that were curbing both sides' election promises, saying policy "backflips" by the Prime Minister had "left this country, in economic terms, in quite straitened budgetary circumstances".

The pace of economic growth had been cut by "something like a third or a half what it had been under Labor with the impact of the goods and services tax," Mr Beazley told the Seven network's *Sunday Sunrise* program.

The first hint that the Coalition might offer its often promised further round of tax relief in the form of payments to families with children came in a summary of the Government's achievements, released by Mr Howard at the Sydney campaign launch of Danna Vale, the Liberal MP for Hughes. "Consistent with our aim of family-friendly tax reform, a Coalition government will return any available surpluses to the Australian people through further tax cuts or increased family payments," it said.

Asked whether that amounted to a change of plan since the Prime Minister had recently put tax cuts on the Coalition's election campaign agenda, Mr Howard said no.

A family benefit was just "another way of describing a tax cut because the family benefits can be taken either as a benefit from Centrelink or as a tax rebate at the end of the year," he said. "The initiatives we have may well be of greater benefit to people with children. They have been in the past and they could well be in the future."

Leaders mark out territory

Dennis Shanahan
Political editor

THE election campaign has begun with John Howard promoting the language of international insecurity and Kim Beazley seeking to concentrate on the issues around the kitchen table.

In a 56-page Liberal Party document, Putting Australia's Interests First, the Prime Minister emphasises the "great uncertainty in the world", "a global economy that is losing confidence and momentum" and warned that "many accepted norms have been suddenly swept away and new challenges loom large".

Though the Liberal document is a record of the Howard Government since 1996, the language is steeped in post-September 11 atmosphere and resonates with allusions to the Tampa crisis.

Bracketed with Howard's "sweeping away" of certainty and the threat of "some (who) seek to create division and sow dissent among us" is his claim to the leadership certainty and preparedness to meet any "attack upon our age".

Howard's language and campaign is imbued with a sense of Armageddon.

Labor's first pitch of the campaign is directed to family concerns and the great domestic issues — health, education and tax — rather than international events.

Beazley declares in the ALP's first election television ads that he "stands for" investing in schools and Medicare. His portrayal of crisis is a domestic one; health under threat, jobs insecurity and tax pressure on families.

ELECTION2001
- Tax cuts and higher family payments on the Coalition's agenda
- Beazley promises help for pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Howard says voters should be harsh on Labor for its hypocrisy over the GST
- Beazley promises not to create a by-election if he loses; Howard fudges

33 DAYS TO GO
The Australian today

Figure 3: Front page of *The Australian*, October 8, 2001.

[119] Karen Middleton, Andrew Gregory & Geraldine Capp, 'Howard firms as boat people dive branded a stunt', *The West Australian*, 8 October 2001, p.4.
[120] *ibid*

On the same day *The West Australian* published its account of the children overboard incident, *The Australian* ran its report of the incident as its front page story. There are many similarities in the reporting of the two papers as well as some intriguing differences. Much of the content of *The Australian*'s report was similar. The comments of Mr. Howard, Mr. Ruddock, Mr. Beazley and Mr. Brown were all reported in a similar manner to that of *The West Australian*. The intriguing difference in the two reports pertains to the manner in which the asylum seekers involved were represented. The headline of *The Australian*'s report read 'Boat children overboard'[121] beneath it the byline stated, 'Howard hard line becomes poll focus'.[122] Noticeably, the headline is lacking in any of the value judgments contained in *The West Australian*'s headline. The editor has chosen to state the facts as he knew them, namely that children of asylum seekers were overboard but has refused to use the headline to marginalize the asylum seekers involved. Instead, through the byline, it is suggested that the incident and Mr. Howard's 'hard line' stance is politically motivated. This is reiterated in the opening paragraph of the report: 'A BOATLOAD of asylum seekers throwing children overboard 150 nautical miles from Australian territory as the navy fired over their heads became pawns in the election campaign yesterday'.[123] While the reporter has stated that asylum seekers were throwing their children overboard, the inclusion of the details regarding the navy firing over their heads places their actions in a completely different context. The inclusion of this information, which is absent from *The West Australian*'s initial report, suggests the parents were acting to save their children rather than place them in danger. While the navy knew they were firing above the boat holding the asylum seekers, was this made clear to those aboard? Was it possible that the parents considered their children to be in danger and acted to increase their chances of safety? These questions may not be answered. It is, however, important to note that the reporting of *The Australian*'s journalists facilitated the asking of such questions. In Said's terms, the report of *The West Australian* was an enclosed system insofar as the incident was reported without question, as if the way it had been reported by our nation's leader reflected exactly the way it unfolded. As we have seen, the binaries upheld by the report in *The West Australian*, were challenged by *The Australian*. Oriental guilt and

[121] Ian Henderson, Megan Saunders, Jeremy Roberts & Colleen Egan, 'Boat Children Overboard', *The Australian*, 8 October 2001, p.1.
[122] *ibid*
[123] *ibid*

immorality was not assumed and events were contextualized. The work of challenging the assumptions of Orientalism continued through *The Australian*'s editorial of the same edition, half of which was dedicated to Mr. Howard's treatment of asylum seekers. It is worth quoting extensively as it demonstrates the vast difference in approaches of the two papers:

> John Howard analyses the thought of children being thrown overboard by their boatpeople parents as "a sorry reflection on their attitude of mind". He is right to condemn in the strongest terms anyone who would put the lives of children at risk, for any cause. But the Prime Minister is also as blind as he who cannot see beyond political self interest—blind, if you will, to the sense of desperation that would drive a parent to this sort of behaviour. If these stranded people were simply selfish enough to buy a better life, or rort our immigration system, or in a conspiracy to intimidate Australia, would they throw their children overboard? Surely not, for to believe they would is to demean not only them as humans but to believe they would risk their lives so strangers who follow in their wake could find it easier. The Howard Government, with opposition support, has a refugee policy based on treating indecently those it catches in the forlorn hope that this will deter others, most of whom have genuine claims for asylum. It is blind to the global refugee crisis, makes no allowances for human despair, and holds little time for coordinated regional solutions. Yet deterrence has not worked. Rather, the laws on which it is based are now forcing boatpeople to take even more risks with their lives and those of their children. No matter how great the spectre of Australian troops using force, no matter how dreaded the fear of being locked up in detention centres or on naval vessels or Pacific islands, these people are desperate to flee despots…Thankfully those who jumped overboard yesterday were rescued and placed back on deck. But Australia has sent them back towards international waters, with HMAS Adelaide shadowing their vessel until "it looks like its not going to come back". Another successful mission for the Howard Government. Another success in exporting our problems and our decency.[124]

The editor's criticisms of the Howard Government's response to asylum seekers is founded on an appeal to basic humanitarian principles. Asylum seekers are characterised as *people* (my emphasis) fleeing despots. The representations of asylum seekers often utilized by the Howard Government are identified and rejected as unreasonable and based on a lack of decency rather than rationality. *The Australian*'s editor places the issue within a broader international context, 'the global

[124] Editorial, 'Children the victims in refugee exodus', *The Australian*, October 8 2001, p.12.

refugee crisis'[125] and accuses the government of showing a lack of willingness to cooperate with other nations in responding to the international crisis.

Regardless of whether or not one agrees with the opinions expressed by the editor of *The Australian*, it is a significant treatment of the issue based purely on its resistance to the Orientalising project. The Manichean structure upholding much of *The West Australian*'s coverage is absent: the old binaries of 'us' versus 'them', Western morality versus Eastern immorality, 'our' rationality versus 'their' irrationality are all challenged, as are those of our politicians that attempt to preserve them.

While my analysis of *The Australian*'s coverage has thus far been limited in its scope, a broader consideration of the newspaper's coverage demonstrates that the observations made thus far are reflected in its wider coverage of issues pertaining to asylum seekers. There is, for instance, a consistent effort to portray the human face of the issue, which is reflected through the number of stories focusing on the human impact of the Howard Government's immigration policies as they relate to asylum seekers and refugees. *The Australian*'s coverage between August 17 and October 26, 2001—a period of seventy days—illustrates the point. During this period no less than 35 articles focusing on the human impact of the government's policies were published, a rate of one article every two days. In terms of overall coverage, no less than 234 articles on issues pertaining to asylum seekers appeared in *The Australian*, which equates to more than three reports per day.

To appreciate the tone of these articles consider the following headlines which appeared within the cited seventy days of coverage: 'A leaking boat's cargo of humanity',[126] The human face of our rising tide of refugees',[127] 'Refugees trapped at sea',[128] 'A leaky boat to heartbreak',[129] 'Cargo of human misery',[130] 'REFUGEE CRISIS',[131] 'PM's refugee bungling defies reason and decency',[132] 'Those who come

[125] *ibid*
[126] Belinda Hickman, 'A leaking boat's cargo of humanity', *The Australian*, 17 August 2001, p.1.
[127] Vanda Carson, Natalie O'Brien & Megan Saunders, The human face of our rising tide of refugees', *The Australian*, 24 August 2001, p.1.
[128] Robert Garran & Vanda Carson, 'Refugees trapped at sea', *The Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.1.
[129] Keith Saunders, 'A leaky boat to heartbreak', *The Australian*, 28 August 2001, p.14.
[130] Robert Garran, Vanda Carson & Tracy Sutherland, ' Cargo of human misery', *The Australian,* 29 August 2001, p.1.
[131] Paul Kelly, 'REFUGEE CRISIS', *The Australian*, 30 August 2001, p.1.
[132] Editorial, PM's refugee bungling defies reason and decency, *The Australian*, 30 August 2001, p.10.

across the seas now face troops',[133] 'Much pain, no gain in taking a tough stand',[134] 'Let the refugees land',[135] 'Inflammatory denial of human dignity',[136] '"We needed blankets…but we got guns"',[137] 'Four weeks at sea for a future in limbo behind a fence',[138] 'Costly refugee laws offend decency, duty',[139] 'Afghans tell of pain and persecution',[140] 'Governments must comply with the rule of law',[141] '5 million Afghans at risk',[142] 'Forsaken refugees don't know what fate awaits them',[143] 'Children the victims in refugee exodus',[144] 'Forced on to death boat'[145] and 'Life and death, relief and grief'.[146]

Headlines such as these demonstrate a willingness on the part of *The Australian* to challenge the Orientalising work of many of the nation's leaders who were determined not to release 'personalising or humanising images'.[147] By employing terms such as 'refugees' 'children' 'humanity' 'human dignity' and 'decency' the newspaper reminds its readers that the government's actions are affecting living, breathing people rather than reductive impersonalized stereotypes. Headlines and accompanying images of asylum seekers challenge the government's dehumanising rhetoric by highlighting the humanity of asylum seekers and the commonalities 'we' all share. This is further challenged by the efforts of *The Australian* to provide a platform for the voices of actual refugees and asylum seekers to be heard. This is not to say that the coverage of *The Australian* was void of marginalising rhetoric. Reductive terms such as 'illegals' and 'boat people' are occasionally used. Articles

[133] Elisabeth Wynhausen, 'Those who come across the seas now face troops', *The Australian,*31 August 2001, p.13.
[134] Catherine Dauvergne, 'Much pain, no gain in taking tough stand', *The Australian*, 31 August 2001, p.13.
[135] 'Let the refugees land', *The Australian*, 1-2 September 2001, p.1.
[136] Greg Sheridan, 'Inflammatory denial of human dignity', *The Australian*', 6 September 2001, p.11.
[137] Eric Ellis, 'We needed blanket…but we got guns', *The Australian*' 7 September 2001, p.1.
[138] Sian Powell, 'Four weeks at sea for a future in limbo behind a fence', *The Australian*, 20 September 2001, p.1.
[139] Editorial, Costly refugee laws offend decency, duty', *The Australian*, 20 September 2001, p.12.
[140] Sian Powell, Afghans tell of pain and persecution', *The Australian*, 21 September 2001, p.10.
[141] John Corcoron, 'Government must comply with the rule of law', *The Australian*, 21 September 2001, p.15.
[142] John Zubrzycki & Megan Saunders, '5 million Afghans at risk', *The Australian,* 27 September 2001, p.1.
[143] Ian MacKinnon, 'Forsaken refugees don't know what fate awaits them', *The Australian*, 1 October 2001, p.
[144] Editorial, 'Children the victims in refugee exodus', *The Australian*, 8October 2001, p.12.
[145] Don Greenlees & Megan Saunders, 'Forced on to death boat', *The Australian*, 25 October 2001, p.1.
[146] Stuart Rintoul & Vanessa Walker, 'Life and death, relief and grief', *The Australian*, 25 October 2001, p.2.
[147] David Marr & Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest NSW, p.180.

supporting the Howard Government's actions are also published. (To fail to include such content would open the newspaper up to allegations of unbalanced journalism.) There is, however, a definite trend to resist polarized, binary-based coverage that would dehumanize asylum seekers and refugees. No such efforts are made by the editor of *The West Australian.* To this extent, *The West Australian* has upheld the assumptions of Orientalism. Said has observed, 'What the Orientalist does is to confirm the Orient in his readers' eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions'.[148] To this extent Orientalism is not a positive knowledge of the Orient but a matrix of knowledge imposed upon the Orient by the West: 'Orientalism…is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline or governing'.[149] In Foucauldian terms it could be classified as a will to truth insofar as it is a 'science' based not on empirical evidence but on Western assumptions: the Orientalist's knowledge of the Orient is true because he or she wills it so.

Even when faced with evidence that may challenge its assumptions, Orientalism functions to manufacture and maintain Western superiority over the perceived inferiority and backwardness of the East. It is upon this flexible positional superiority that Orientalism depends, for it consistently places the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships without losing the relative upper hand.[150] It is the efforts of *The Australian* to resist this tendency that most markedly distinguishes its coverage from that of *The West Australian*.

[148] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, p.65.

[149] *ibid.,*p.41..
[150] *ibid*., p.7.

CHAPTER THREE

During the first two chapters I have argued that many of the rhetorical and discursive practices employed against refugees manifest the project of Orientalism by fixing the refugee Other in time and space; for, as Said reminds us, 'the Orient is synonymous with stability and unchanging eternality'.[151] The use of binaries, carefully constructed representations and other literary and discursive devices assist the Orientalist in his or her efforts to reduce the Oriental Other to the stereotypes that best serve and justify the colonizing process. Any efforts therefore to challenge the Orientalist's work must begin by challenging the permanence of vision propagated by Orientalism. The most effective way to achieve this is through narrative which 'asserts the power of men to be born, develop and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change…above all, it asserts the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history'.[152]

According to Said, narrative by its very nature places its subject in context; it cannot work with reductive stereotypes and must infuse life into its characters, giving them shape, form, a history, presence and a future. If this is so, narrative threatens reductive representations and binaries, forcing the reader to confront the reality of life as a dialogue in which the Oriental Other speaks, projecting his/her voice — a voice shaped by the past — into a future. Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on dialogism in the novel will largely inform the following analysis, states that:

> These languages develop out of the tension of conflicting centripetal and centrifugal forces in society: alongside the centripetal forces the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.[153]

Essentially, Bakhtin is asserting the interconnected relationship that exists between dominant ideologies and those literatures that we might term literatures of resistance, albeit in a more convoluted manner than Said. Bakhtin's work is important because

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[151] *ibid*., p.240.
[152] *ibid*
[153] Gabriele Helms, *Challenging Canada: Dialogism And Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2003, p.22.

he places literature firmly within the historical and sociological context from which it emerges. The relevance of Bakhtin's contestations is apparent when applied to the literature of refugees, for this literature is in both form and content reflective of the contexts from which it emerges. It attempts to challenge the centripetal forces that would oppress these people and to reshape the society that has necessitated their authorship.

Within a Bakhtinian framework, to speak of 'refugees' literatures' or 'language/s of refugees' is to acknowledge not only their historically constitutive origins, but also the reality of metalinguistics, a term coined by Bakhtin to describe the dialogic nature of language.[154] According to Bakhtin if language emerges from historically contested events, then it is necessarily orientated towards the other and as such invites a response. As such, language is innately dialogic. Indeed the term metalinguistics 'implies that the appropriate terms for the study of language are beyond linguistics…[that] linguistics alone is inadequate for analyzing language as a dialogic phenomenon'.[155] To accept this is to accept that in order to understand how language operates we must go beyond the type of systematic linguistics advocated by Saussure and others to consider language at the level of its origin, its utterance and its meaning. According to Bakhtin, a single utterance occurs only once in time and can never be repeated. The meaning or content of a particular utterance can, however, be repeated even reshaped through future utterances. Dialogue then is an exchange of meaning through sequential utterances. It is at the site of this exchange that language is stretched, challenged, even reshaped. It is through dialogue that language is 'pulled in opposite directions: centripetally, towards the unitary centre provided by a notion of a "national language"; and centrifugally, towards the various languages that actually constitute the apparent but false unity of a national language'.[156] Language then, is a highly dynamic and contested phenomenon which, in its dialogic manifestation, acts like a pendulum—swinging from side to side in search of meanings that ring true.

To acknowledge dialogic language as the exchange of competing voices is to acknowledge the reality of the presence of a plurality of voices within society. While

[154] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, Routledge, London, 2003, p.33.
[155] *ibid*
[156] *ibid.,* p.35.

this is hardly a revelation, there are critical implications for the study of language, the most important of which, foreseen by Bakhtin, is heteroglossia: a term of his own invention used to define the multiplicity of actual 'languages' which are at any time spoken. Languages of social groups, classes, professionals, or different generations as well as those languages determined by their context are all encompassed within heteroglossia. At one end of the scale the term can refer to large dialectical differences which can produce mutual unintelligibility while at the other, it can allude to the distinguishing slang of one year to the next and even to the slogan of the hour.[157]

Heteroglossia is further manifested through the politically charged nature of particular utterances. Not only do utterances emerge from specific circumstances, they respond to these same circumstances and the discourse surrounding them. According to Bakhtin, every utterance participates in the 'dynamics of a language in tension, so that every utterance involves the taking of sides in all the multiple conflicts and negotiations that constitute the politics of language.'[158] The politics surrounding the representation of refugees has been established in previous chapters. Refugees' literatures emerge to challenge these representations by contesting the meaning surrounding the discourse that constitutes them. In other words, through the utterances of refugees the dominant discourse surrounding them is challenged and, if successful, so too are the marginalizing effects of this discourse.

To acknowledge this interplay of languages is to simultaneously recognize the dangers of colonizing practices reemerging. It is the task of the one wishing to provide an avenue for the Others' voices to be heard to acknowledge this risk. It would be wrong, for example, to presume that we in the 21st century have gone beyond attempting to colonise the languages of others, for the birth of postmodern literature in the 20th century was a direct response to this very tendency. There is a continued presence of languages that suffer the effects of the colonising project. The existence, exposure and continued production of refugees' centrifugal texts is critical therefore if the rolling back of opposing centripetal texts is to occur. The texts chosen for this study have been selected because they attempt to do just this. Prior to commencing an analysis of these texts, however, it needs to be noted that while

[157] *ibid*
[158] *ibid*., p.36.

Bakhtin's work in the area of narrative has almost exclusively evolved from his study of novels, particularly those of Dostoyevsky and Dickens, the importance of his insights is evident through their pliability. Just as I am not the first to discover applications for Bakhtin's theories beyond his own, neither will I be the last to apply his theoretical insights to other narrative forms.

The forms of narrative to be analysed in the following chapters are both varied and 'necessarily embedded in the structures (they) seek to undermine or subvert'.[159] All texts to be analysed find their genesis in the detention centres which have come to embody Australia's attitude towards refugees. In terms of their form, content and purpose the texts are intractably bound to their context. They share the common goal of exposing narratives of those who have experienced the oppressive prohibitions exercised behind the razor wires of Australia's detention centres; narratives which seek to illuminate the human impact of the discursive and practical prohibitions used to justify and uphold Australia's mandatory detention system. As such, these narratives are constructions that operate within fields of power relations and consciously or otherwise act to challenge the dominant forms of ideological and cultural productions. They do this through illumination: voicing their social discontent, imagining and re-imagining, shaping and reshaping their situations through their texts.

From Nothing to Zero[160] is a compilation of letters from refugees in Australia's detention centres. Each chapter provides the reader with an individual's experience within the context of the refugees' shared experience, so the individual's story is part of the greater narrative. This culmination of micro-narratives to form a meta-narrative creates a polyphonically conceived world in which each voice adds weight to the other to convey the shared experience of refugees while also challenging the social and ideological hegemony of the dominant society, which in this case is mainstream Australia.

The first chapter 'Life at Home' contains letters that speak of the lives of refugees in the countries from which they subsequently fled. Chapter two 'The Journey'

[159] Gabriele Helms, *Challenging Canada: Dialogism And Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2003, p.9.
[160] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.), *From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray.

provides details of refugees' often harrowing journeys to Australia, while the third chapter 'Life in Detention' contains letters which look at life in Australia's detention centres. The subsequent chapters are organized according to the authors' experiences and circumstances in detention. Chapter four is entitled 'Children in Detention' and contains those letters written by the children held in the nation's detention centres. Nauru and refugees' experiences of Nauru are included in chapter five, while chapter six focuses on the mental anguish experienced by detainees. The following three chapters are entitled 'The Process', 'Thoughts about Australia' and 'The Letter Writing Campaign', while the final chapter looks at 'The Future' as seen through the eyes of those in detention.

The well established dependence of narrative, rhetorical, or linguistic devices upon the social and cultural practices within which they are embedded is clearly evident in *From Nothing to Zero*, for its pages contain a multitude of independent voices whose utterances originate from the common experience of being refugees within the nation's detention centres. In many respects they share a common past and present and very likely, a common future. They cease to be queue jumpers or simply boat people and are instead placed into the human story, a story they share with thousands of other refugees. Thus, at the level of form and content, *From Nothing to Zero*, is deeply embedded within the shared experience of refugees everywhere.

In order to provide a forum for the voices of refugees to speak the editors of *From Nothing to Zero* have edited sparingly, and where errors in grammar or spelling have not affected clarity, they have been left in. It is a decision which preserves the authenticity of the voices articulated through the text. It is also important to note that all letters included in *From Nothing to Zero* are published anonymously, with all identifying information from the letters removed. As the editors explain, this has been necessary to 'ensure the refugees are not individually targeted…and to preserve their status as asylum seekers'.[161]

Following the analysis of *From Nothing to Zero*, our attention will turn to *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire.*[162] This text shares similarities with *From Nothing to Zero* insofar as it provides an avenue for the voices of refugees to be heard, while

[161] *ibid*
[162] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne.

also presenting itself differently in terms of structure and form. Unlike *From Nothing to Zero*, there is a great deal of authorial intrusion into the refugees' stories. Indeed it is Heather Tyler, a journalist for *The Daily Telegraph*, who speaks for the refugees who have consented to the publication of their stories. This does not, however, preclude the voices of refugees from being heard, for direct quotes and information taken from interviews have been included and act to bind the stories together, giving them their authenticity. Yet it is evident that any grammatical or spelling errors that we might expect from people speaking English as their second language have been edited out. This not only serves to diminish the consciousness in the reader of the refugees' cultural differences which, whether we like to admit it or not, often increases the level of empathy felt for the refugee by the reader, but also demonstrates the mediated nature of the text. In the words of Helm, literatures of resistance are 'produced and reproduced through readers who are situated within their own specific contexts. Resistance is always constituted through multiple ideological relations.'[163] In the case of many refugees it can hardly be otherwise. In order for non-English speaking refugees to successfully convey their experiences to a largely English speaking audience some mediation is unavoidable; furthermore, in some cases such mediation is desired by those wanting their stories to be told. It is a common phenomenon in the realm of postcolonial literature and much academic work has been carried out investigating the ramifications of this process of mediation.[164]

Structurally, *Asylum: Voices Behind the Razor Wire*, is organized into thirteen chapters. The first chapter provides some background into the plight of refugees who find themselves in Australia's detention centres. The following seven chapters each deal with the story of individual asylum seekers. All provide details of the circumstances which led the refugee in question to flee his/her country of birth and all provide insights into the difficulties these people experienced both in their journeys to Australia and during their time inside Australian detention centres. As with *From Nothing to Zero*, this layering of voices across successive chapters emphasizes the shared nature of the experiences being conveyed. Chapter nine looks

[163] Gabriele Helms, *Challenging Canada: Dialogism And Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2003, p.8.
[164] Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, *Reinventing The Enemy's Language*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, 1998; Anne Brewster, *Literary Formations*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995.

at the visit of the United Nations working group to Australian detention centres, while chapter ten looks at the story of a refugee family. Chapter eleven places the nation's present policy pertaining to refugees in an historical context, while the voices of supporters are heard in the penultimate chapter. The final chapter is only one page in length and is comprised of a poem written by a refugee in detention. As stated earlier, the forms of literature included in Tyler's text are varied: while each chapter is written in prose, diary excerpts, letters and poems are also to be found.

In this thesis, refugees' stories are read as texts that challenge the 'objective history' so often written and promoted by those embedded in the dominant ideology. This New Historicist approach challenges the traditional linear reading of history by advocating the inclusion of the stories of marginalized peoples as 'counterhistories'[165] that remind us that history consists of 'a dynamic, unstable interplay of discourses…negotiating exchanges of power'.[166] Stuart Hall in his paper 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies'[167] asserts that the work of cultural studies 'has to analyze certain things about the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death'.[168] Hall reminds us that the battle over representation is keenly fought with consequences that stretch far beyond the political to a battle for the most basic tenet of our existence: life itself. The needless and tragic deaths of 353 asylum seekers in the northern oceans of Australia in October of 2001 are a stark reminder of this. It is doubtful that without the ambivalence of Australian authorities to the plight of asylum seekers such needless loss of life would have occurred. The situation highlights the consequences of misrepresentation and emphasizes the urgent need for self-representation.

Julian Burnside QC, who has waged a long fight against the Australian government's policies pertaining to asylum seekers, is a high profile refugee advocate who has worked to provide forums for refugees' self-representations. In the preface of *From Nothing to Zero*, he notes the purpose of the book is 'to give a face to the faceless; a

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[165] Catherine Gallagher & Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicisng New Historicism*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p.52.
[166] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, New York, p.285.
[167] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies And Its Theoretical Legacies', in Vincent B. Leitch et.al. (eds), *The Norton Anthology: Theory And Criticism*, W. W. Norton Company, New York, 2001, pp.1898-1910.
[168] *ibid*.,p.1908.

voice to the voiceless. To show the people we hold in indefinite detention are human beings like the rest of us'.[169] Such purposes stand in opposition to the Manichean based representations promoted by the government, which seek always to promote the superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the refugee.[170] It is when refugees' self-representations are read from this perspective that the reductive representations imposed upon them can be challenged.

Former Prime Minister John Howard is on the record as complaining about current revisionist history, calling it a '"systematic", "deliberate" and "insidious" process and "an abuse of the true purpose of history"'.[171] Stephen Greenblat, however, views the narratives of the marginalized as necessary intrusions that provide a counterbalance to the traditional dominant histories that have sought to render minorities voiceless. 'The desired anecdotes would not, as in the old historicism, epitomize epochal truths, but would instead undermine them. The anecdotes would open history, or place it askew, so that literary texts could find new points of insertion.'[172] With this in mind, the self-representations of refugees provide a history from below 'to counter the history of the victors with that of the vanquished'.[173] Contrary to the view of history held by Mr. Howard such intellectual activity is, according to Roland Barthes, essential in order to gain a truer understanding of history as the record of competing voices rather than a monolithic narrative:

> He (Barthes) defined the discourse of history in modern times as one that constantly tries to efface the difference between the signified and the referent by presenting its own narrative sequence (the signified) as identical to a sequence of past events (the referent). But this elision of signified and referent is exposed when some mere "notation," often an anecdote incompletely digested by the larger narrative, divulges a different reality, which is behind or beside the narrative surface and

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[169] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.), *From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.V.
[170] Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr et.al. (ed) *Race Writing And Difference*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p.82.
[171] Graeme Davison, 'Agenda Setting: The Use and Abuse of Australian History', in Deborah Gare & David Ritter (eds), *Making Australian History: Perspectives On The Past Since 1788*, Thomson, Victoria, 2008, p.581.
The question needs to be asked, What exactly does Mr Howard mean by the 'true purposes of history'? Is it to reconfirm the Orientalist's project all over again, namely to re-assert Anglo-Saxon superiority over Oriental inferiority?
[172] Catherine Gallagher & Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, p.51.
[173] *ibid.,* p.53.

> composed of things that historians cannot assimilate into typicality or coherent significance.[174]

In the context of Australia's recent history pertaining to asylum seekers, refugees' self-representations do indeed divulge a very different reality to that promoted through much of the nation's media and many of its politicians. Consider for example the following excerpt found in the opening chapter of *From Nothing to Zero*:

> You want to know about my family it's very sad story. I had a happy family, but the Al-suna religion (Pashtoon and Tajik) killed two of my older brothers.
>
> Before I came here three years ago, one of my younger brothers was missing. I don't know where he is—is he alive or died? One of my sisters with her husband had been missing two years when I came here. I don't know about my parents—are they alive or not? I have had no contact with any family member.
>
> I escaped from Afghanistan and came in your country to seek asylum. Your government have protected me in Jail—what a democratic country?! What a big joke with humanity and human rights. Al-Suna religion was better than this modern and democratic regime—they killed just one time but this regime is killing us every day, day and night, morning and evening. What we'll remember is how they treat us.[175]

When placed alongside self-representations such as this, reductive terms like 'illegals', 'boat people' or 'queue jumpers' are disarmed of their power. These referential terms commonly employed against refugees not only label and reduce refugees to their supposed action or mode of transport but also defer meaning to any number of associations the reader might make when confronted with such terms. As JanMohamed notes, the effect of such discourse is to commodify the 'subject into a stereotyped object…by negating his individuality, his subjectivity, so that he is now perceived as a generic being that can be exchanged for any other native (they all look alike, act alike, and so on).'[176] Narrative, however, asserts meaning. In the words of Hall, 'if signification depends on the endless repositioning of its differential terms, meaning, in any specific instance, depends on the contingent and arbitrary stop—the

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[174] *ibid*., p.50.
[175] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.*), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.4.
[176] Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr et.al. (ed) *Race Writing And Difference*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p.83.

necessary and temporary break in the infinite semiosis of language.'[177] Drawing upon Derrida's insights into the relationship between signification and the deference of meaning, Hall demonstrates the critical role of narratives in making meaning as opposed to labels and binaries that empty reality of its meaning. History has shown that those wishing to marginalize others begin by first dehumanising them, denying them their identity. A critical step in the process is the removal of dissenting voices. Hence, as was the case with Nazi Germany's Final Solution where books were burnt and names replaced by numbers, Howard's Pacific Solution placed opposing voices on the fringes of society. Detained refugees were also identified by assigned number. This of course reinforces the indelible link between knowledge and power and highlights the desire of the Howard government to govern our 'will to know'.[178]

> We are part of an oppressed and deprived ethnic group in Afghanistan. Instead of taking part at schools and learning centres, we were forced into hard labour. Ethnic cleansing was pursued. Yes, these were the seeds which produced thousands of orphans, widows and homeless peoples to rush towards neighbouring countries in the hope of asylum. We are part of those homeless and oppressed people fleeing persecution and fear and the threat of execution who arrived at the door of Australia and humanitarian people. We touched the handle of the door and knocked it requesting refuge but unfortunately the owner of the house refused us entry and instead of protection he sent us as exiles to Nauru.[179]

A common experience appearing through the aforementioned narratives is the movement from persecution to persecution. The tone of each utterance can be best described as melancholic, with the first utterance moving from sorrow and melancholy to anger, anger directed towards the Australian authorities. The respective tones of these narratives both reflect upon and respond to the contexts from which they are born, for as Simon Dentith observes 'language always occurs in situations, so the force of an utterance can never be decided by a mere account of its formal meaning'.[180] This is a critical point when considering narratives; their power lies not only in what they say, but how they say it. The pathos of any narrative is

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[177] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Pearson Education Limited, Essex, 1994, p.397.
[178] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', in P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.212
[179] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds*.), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.10.
[180] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, Routledge, London, 2003, p.29.

conveyed largely through its intonation and this is clearly evident in the narratives of refugees.

The following utterance is a good example of the role of content and intonation in the conveyance of meaning. The majority of the following account is expressed quite methodically and when read appears devoid of emotion. This is as revealing as strong overtones of emotions, such as anger, as it reflects the power context has exercised over its subject:

> I am an Iranian man, 35 years old and single. I came here with a boat about 18 months ago. I was in water about one week. My family is on blacklist in Iran because my brothers were members of opposition parties. One of them was detained and when he was released he lost his mental health. Another one was detained and then lost his job. My nephew was executed in 1988. I am not muslim but I was obliged to say I was a muslim when I went to school. I didn't pray and my teacher hit me. One time I was arrested by police in Iran. They kept me in a solitary cell for four days without food and water. In my country I and my family didn't have the right to work (many works are in government's hands). They used persecution and discrimination against us. I lived in this situation in my land, and when I couldn't endure this I decided to flee here. Why your country, I don't know. Maybe the reason is what you said in your letter—'multicultural'. I have been persecuted in my home and everybody knows my country is in third world with dictator regime. But your government also persecutes me and other people. Why!?[181]

Interestingly, and appropriately, the utterance is framed as an exclamation and a question. As an exclamation the 'Why!' expresses the writer's utter confusion over the manner of his treatment at the hands of Australian authorities. As he states 'everybody knows my country is third world with dictator regime. But your government also persecutes me and other people. Why!?'[182] At the level of the question the writer's words demand a response from the reader. It is the climatic moment of the narrative and the point which most powerfully reveals the dialogic nature of the narrative.

The question with which the writer concludes his narrative draws the reader to respond. The instigator of the dialogue awaits his response and the tone of his utterance demands that such a response is given. In the words of V.N. Voloshinov,

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[181] *ibid*

[182] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.*), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.11.

'Life begins only at the point where utterance crosses utterance, i.e., where verbal interaction begins, be it not even "face-to-face" verbal interaction, but the mediated, literary variety'.[183] Voloshinov's point is an important one for, as is the case with all the narratives examined through this dissertation, no face-to-face dialogue ever takes place. Rather the dialogue is always mediated by the author or editors of the published texts in which they are found. It is enough, however, that the utterances are verbalized, for in the literary space they occupy these narratives operate on the dialogic level as they instigate the speech act and simultaneously demand a response. The following narrative expressed in understated prose operates in a different manner to the previous account. The lack of questioning or intonation combines with the harrowing and detailed content to convey the heroic strength of the writer, which simultaneously invites reflection and questioning on the part of the reader:

> I am an only child, born in the Indian sector of Kashmir. I fled India because the authorities wanted to prosecute me and they killed my father. I received news that my father had died while I was studying. I was subsequently advised that my father had been tortured and killed by security forces that claimed he had weapons hidden.
>
> I returned immediately to my home town and went with my mother to see my father's body on which the injuries as a consequence of torture were clearly visible. My mother became extremely distressed, collapsed into coma and was taken to hospital. She never came out of the coma and three months later she died. I remained at her side in the hospital throughout this period. Following my mother's death I became deeply distressed as I felt I had no one else in the world and little reason to live. One of my uncles had been looking after the family home and my father's business affairs. He tried to console me and told me I should put the death of my parents behind me. He also said that he would look after me like a son and persuaded me to return to my studies, which I did.
>
> A friend came to me and advised me that my uncle had been arranging for my family's property to be transferred into his own name by bribing officials (which is very easy to do). I obtained support and assistance from my best friend and his family who took me in whilst I continued with my course. During this period, partly as a result of my anger about my parent's deaths, I participated in protests and obtained anti-government literature that emanated from Pakistan. I was at a house with friends one night when security forces raided the house and took us to an interrogation centre, where we were questioned and tortured. The security forces accused us of assisting the militants and helping in border

[183] Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, Routledge, London, 2003, p.31.

crossings. They had searched the house for ammunition but only found literature.

Torture is used to extract information, to punish detainees and try to force detainees to become informers or to join counter-militant organizations. I was kept in the interrogation centre and was tortured frequently and asked a lot of questions about the Mujahidin, but I could not tell them anything because I knew nothing about them. They tied me up and removed the nail from my left thumb then they put chilli into the open wound. The pain was excruciating. They used a roller to apply excruciating pressure to my legs. The roller is rotated over my legs, and one of the security people was standing on it. I was often denied water during interrogation and frequently became dehydrated. The whole night they kept pouring water onto my face and blinding me in a powerful light beam. I was tortured relentlessly for ten days.

After ten days my friends and me were being moved to the central prison, along with the commander/section leader of a military group. Associates of this man attacked the vehicle in which we traveled. This gave my friends and me an opportunity to escape, which we took, as we believed we were being taken to be executed.

We hid in various parts of Kashmir for the next nine months, sometimes in the forest and sometimes in safe houses in towns, staying for only short periods in any one place. We went from Kashmir to Punjab via a circuitous route, traveling mostly at night. In Punjab security forces were looking for us. We obtained false travel documents through our contact in Punjab and flew to Singapore. There in desperation I stowed away on a container ship.

I had no idea where it was going. The ship docked in Port Moresby (PNG), which is not a signatory of the convention of the United Nations. I sought asylum (refugee) but unfortunately PNG immigration laws were unable to help me because there are no asylums in PNG. This left me no alternative but to seek refugee asylum in another country. A friend told me a boat was leaving for Australia that day and there was no time to consider the opportunity (I did not pay a single cent to the people smugglers). It was a terrifying journey as I had never learnt to swim and several times we were caught in storms out of sight of land.

Eventually we landed on an Island and immigration officers later interviewed me. More than three years later I find myself in limbo in this detention centre.[184]

* * *

[184] *ibid*., p.18.

What each of these stories demonstrates is that textuality is indeed a site of life and death. This is true not only of the content of these narratives, all of which tell the tale of torture, execution and genocide, but also at the site of their prohibition, which has resulted in the loss of hope in many detainees who have subsequently ended their lives behind the razor wire of Australia's detention centres.

In his paper 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora'[185] Stuart Hall questions traditional concepts of identity as something inherent to the individual and forever fixed and suggests that identity possesses fluidity, that it is 'a production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation'.[186] He bases this conception of identity on the underlying premise that 'practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write—the position of enunciation'.[187] Hall then goes on to outline two ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first definition he gives is that of a shared culture, which he defines as a collective 'one true self' that is assumed to be part of the fabric of those people with a shared history and ancestry.'[188] The second dimension of identity Hall identifies is that formed through rupture. By rupture he refers to those historical incidents which give new meaning to a people's identity. This is best explained using Hall's own example:

> We might think of black Caribbean identities as 'framed' by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity; and continuity and the vector of difference and rupture. Caribbean identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes. The one gives us some grounding in, some continuity with, the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of profound discontinuity…The paradox is that it was the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world that unified these people across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past[189]

Like the disenfranchised Caribbean, the refugee languishing in detention shares a common fate with his/her fellow detainees which has both cut them off not only from

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[185] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Pearson Education Limited, Essex, 1994, pp.392-403.
[186] *ibid*., p.392.
[187] *ibid*
[188] i*bid*., p.393.
[189] *ibid*., pp.395-396.

their past but also from their future. While it is true that the Caribbean Diaspora was a result of colonizing activities of the west, it is equally true that the colonizing activities of groups such as the Taliban, Indian security forces and the Iranian government have forced refugees into detention. Of course, I speak here of discursive colonization; attempts to crush dissenting voices, to ban literature that does not conform to the dominant discourse, to execute those suspected of being subversive. As is demonstrated through the self-representations so far cited, it was so often this form of colonization that forced refugees to flee their homes and seek refuge in Australia. The great irony of their fate was that in seeking refuge in Australia they found their discourses oppressed regardless.

How then are Hall's understandings of culture manifested in the stories emerging from detainees? If we turn to the first of the most three recently cited representations, we hear the writer speak of a common past. A past experienced as a minority: 'We are part of an oppressed and deprived ethnic group in Afghanistan'.[190] Through the collective pronoun, the writer speaks of a shared history, a history of marginalization, a history of persecution attributed to a history of belonging to a minority ethnic group from Afghanistan. The reader can, with a degree of certainty, assume that the writer is a member of the Hazara ethnic group for, as Phil Sparrow notes, the large majority of those (Afghani) seeking asylum in Australia since 1998 belong to this group. Furthermore, Hazaras are largely adherents of the Shia branch of Islam, which is the minority in Afghanistan and worldwide.[191] According to Sparrow, their status as the persecuted minority stretches back across centuries. For hundreds of years they have had little status and are certainly regarded as the most deprived ethnic group in Afghanistan. Their villages have been considered unworthy of development, and the development of infrastructure in the Hazarajat (the high, remote and mountainous region defined by the Hindu Kush mountain range) has scarcely progressed in over a century.[192] There has never been a Hazara as president, *amir* or king in over three hundred years of recorded history. Rarely has a Hazara

[190] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.*), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.10.
[191] *ibid*
[192] *ibid*., p.28.

held government positions of any significance. They have consistently been deprived of an education.[193]

With such clear historical evidence of persecution of the Hazara ethnic group available, the case against their claims for refugee status is unclear. What is clear is that their shared history, which clearly defines their self-representation and identity as a marginalized people, has not prevented their further isolation from the mainstream population of Australia, the country in which many have sought refuge. Despite the fact that the narrative of this particular writer conforms perfectly to the well documented history of his/her people, the writer finds him/herself exiled to Nauru facing a future as uncertain as the past. This disregard for the marginalized Other's history, according to Franz Fanon typifies the Colonialist's approach to its Other: 'Colonisation is not merely satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.'[194]

The power of self-representation lies in its ability to remember what was forgotten, to recreate what was destroyed. Hall explains the process well, again in regards to the Caribbean experience when in speaking about the photographic works of Jamaican and Rastafarian artists seeking to visually reconstruct the underlying unity of the black people affected by slavery he states that 'no one who looks at these textual images now, in the light of the history of transportation, slavery and migration, can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the 'loss of identity', which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place.'[195] What is true of the Caribbean experience is just as true of refugees whose narratives play a significant role in the recreation of the histories that inform so much of their identity. Their narratives now encompass not only their experiences in the country of origin, but also their experiences in and of the country that detains them. Thus their narratives both recreate their past and identity in a simultaneous process. Furthermore, their articulation challenges and reshapes the society to which and in which they speak.

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[193] *ibid*.
[194] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Pearson Education Limited, Essex, 1994, p.393.
[195] *ibid*., p.394.

The third chapter of *From Nothing to Zero* is entitled 'Life in Detention':

> Since the moment we arrived in the detention centre, we have forgotten what happiness and laughter means, and scenes of suicides, death and terror make us more depressed. I think the world has forgotten me. When I come across the detainees who are weeping with pain, I am unable to control myself and tears start rolling down from my eyes because we can understand each other and the pain there is common to us all. I compare the people in detention with a small baby who has just started to walk and even a slight push will tumble him down—it's the same case with us. Even if the weather cools down a bit, we catch a cold and the slightest hot weather gives us dehydration.
>
> I am talking about a true prison, where thoughts are killed and death is always knocking at the door. The look of the security guards towards a detainee can be exactly compared with the look of a master to a slave, and when a detainee fighting for his self respect opposes the guard, there is very cruel treatment. The result is always the same—mental and physical hurt.
>
> The most awful thing we come across is mothers with their children—one can clearly witness the fascism and racism at this moment. Because there are more restrictions for everyone, it becomes intolerable. In my country, a female has got many restrictions—but I would like to know has a female got any right here? Can a female in detention centre care for her baby as an outside woman? I think no.
>
> The children always want to play, laugh, listen to stories, etc. If a mother wants to tell a story to her child, who is the hero—the people who attempt suicide? Or the people who are slowly heading towards death? Or who are mentally retarded or paralyzed? I would like to ask if children witness those suicides, death, fear etc. What effect does it have on their developing minds? Won't their gentle soft spirits be killed?
>
> We feel like all the world is unaware of us. Hail Australians! You should open your eyes and be aware of what is being done in your name. I have a request for Australians to spend a few months to think about us and be aware of the criminal action being done on behalf of Australians. Certainly, this injustice done to innocent people will form a dark spot in Australian history and Australians cannot escape from it.[196]

The distinct uncertainty of the detainees' existence is expressed by the writer of this story as existing on several levels. There is the individual writer's uncertainty about his/her present situation, which is volatile and makes him/her susceptible to a violence and persecution from which there is no escape, unless through suicide: 'I

[196] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.*), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.38.

am talking about a true prison, where thoughts are killed and death is always knocking at the door.' The detainee also exists in a state of uncertainty about his/her future which is a consequence of detention and largely exacerbated by the temporary protection visas which ensure refugees remain in a state of limbo regarding their future. Alongside the individual's uncertainty is his/her concern for those who share the circumstances: 'when I come across the detainees who are weeping with pain, I am unable to control myself and tears start rolling down from my eyes because we can understand each other and the pain there is common to us all'.[197] On another level is a concern for the future of the children in detention. Considering that children are universally regarded as the embodiment of the family, culture, nation and world's future it must be particularly difficult for detained refugees when their own children's future remains in limbo.

The narratives in *From Nothing to Zero* mirror the lives of their authors, whose existential meaning is constantly deferred by the uncertainty of their destination in the light of the certitude of their present suffering, an account of which follows:

> Curtin on 19.04.02 (Friday)
>
> Women and children and other people were having dinner in the mess of camp. Suddenly 12 ACM's guards arrived in the mess and closed the doors. And turned over the tables and beat the people. Everybody was terrified and women and children were screaming loudly, and other people who were standing outside the mess saw the fighting through the windows. They got very angry and when the doors of the mess were opened the woundeds got out and guard's party attacked other guys with their shields and batons. They left camp's area and didn't come to camp for 5 days. During the 5 days the phone area was closed and they didn't serve food to people.
>
> People were using the foods which were in the kitchen of the mess. After 5 days police and ACM's party arrived in detention centre and collected the woods and knives which were on the floor of the kitchen, and they were serving just one meal in the day.
>
> And it was really awful. They arrested 20 persons of us and took them to the penitentiary and all of the fights were tragic scenes.[198]

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[197] *ibid*

[198] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.*), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.42.

The suffering of the refugees conveyed through this account occurred as a direct result of their treatment at the hands of the Australian authorities. As we have seen, images of refugees fighting against such treatment were used by the Australian government to reinforce its representation of refugees as ungrateful and unworthy of a place in 'our civilized nation'. Yet when such fights are contextualised in the manner of this account the refugees' response could easily be interpreted as reasonable. It is certainly difficult to envisage mainstream Australia putting up with such conditions without responding similarly, particularly when faced with ongoing mistreatment of themselves and their loved ones:

> I don't know how much you know about me and my children and our life in the camp. We have been 20 months in the detention centre and we are living in a small room. Six months ago my son started stammering when he had started speaking. He is afraid and shocked by things happening in the camp and he became stammering. My daughter must go to school and play with children but now she is like a bird in the cage. We have seen two christmas in the camp,. She has watched the christmas ceremony on T.V. When children with their parents go to the shop, when they dance in the streets, she must look at your world from inside of the prison. Is this fair? A few days ago someone on the news said about saving a dog from the valley but I don't know why nobody can say anything about saving children in the camp. Why are you quiet?[199]

An analogy often used by refugees in their accounts of detention is to describe their treatment with the treatment animals receive in Australia. In the narrative above the unidentified mother compares her daughter's life to that of a caged bird. It's a powerful analogy due to the obvious images it brings to mind. Like a caged bird, this mother's daughter has had her wings well and truly clipped. The possibility that this child will be able to develop normally is severely hindered by the situation in which she has been placed. While the animal analogy highlights the suffering of the young girl it also turns the reader's focus to those who place children in such damaging situations. Written by both detained adults and children many narratives involve analogies with animals:

> One night a kangaroo came near the fences and watched detainees who walked in the yard of the detention. He wondered and said to himself: unbelievable, who is animal, me or them? Then he thought that night and repeatedly asked himself, who is animal, me or them?

[199] *ibid*., p.62.

> Kangaroo came with his friend the next night and showed detainees to his friend. The second kangaroo said to the first one, I know these. They are criminals and very dangerous. They must be kept in detention. You must not love them, and now we must go. But the question remained in the kangaroo's mind: who is animal?[200]

The frequent use of such analogies provides an insight into the writers' psychological and physical state. In some narratives analogy combines with anthropomorphic utterances, as is the case with the kangaroo narrative. In this particular narrative, nature itself is portrayed as rejecting refugees: 'The second kangaroo said to the first one, I know these. They are criminals and very dangerous. They must be kept in detention. You must not love them, and now we must go.'[201] Psychoanalytic criticism may suggest that this portrayal reflects on some level a fear of abandonment which according to Tyson is 'the unshakeable belief that our friends and loved ones are going to desert us (physical abandonment) or don't really care about us (emotional abandonment).'[202]

While the narratives of refugees cited thus far largely reflect close filial bonds, refugees are defined according to their ostracism from their homeland. At the national level therefore, refugees have a well founded reason to feel abandoned. In the case of Australian refugees, their sense of abandonment is surely exacerbated by their rejection, perceived or otherwise, by the nation to which they entrusted their fragile future. It is worth quoting at some length the self-representation of an Afghani girl:

> I am from Afghanistan, a girl full of pain, a disappointed girl. I live with my family in detention centre. We want to see you, we want to be free like you, but not as a poor bird in the cage like we are in. We are in a very bad situation in here. I am very tired and gloomy. I am always crying because of my mother, she is old. She cannot tolerate this treatment in this cage any more. Also I am sad about people who are here, poor children, when they see a person outside detention centre, even in an airplane in the sky, they cry and they take the chains with a disappointed and broken heart, shout, We want freedom, we want freedom freedom. Women are crying because of their children. Also I want to say about the young hopeless boys and girls that there is no wish and hope in their hearts. We think we are not alive. It is better to die. Many young men and women want to kill their selves.

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[200] *ibid*., p.37.
[201] *ibid*., p.37
[202] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p.16.

> Please say to government of Australia we are human. We are not animal. We are not criminal to tolerate this much treatment. We escape from war, pain until we have human right in here, so where is human right? We want freedom, we want life, we want to be free like other human.
>
> Also children, old people, young people in here become hopeless and disappointed in this long time in jail, some of them become mad or crazy.
>
> We are here about seven months. Every day is like one year, because we have just one dark room. The whole day I am sitting in the dark room, so here is nothing to make me happy.
>
> I learned English in Afghanistan, before Taliban had come there. When Taliban had come, they had not let us study, work. They treated people so much, especially women. So I could not study any more. I like to study English and I would like to be a designer in future, but unfortunately I am despair and desolate in here. Nothing to have just gloomy heart!
>
> Please say to Australian public we need help of them, we love them, we wish them to know about us. We need freedom, we hope to see people in Australia, flowers, sky, shiny sun, stars, moon…in freedom life.[203]
>
> * * *
>
> …The government policy treat us in awful way. They put us in cages and put us in something like zoo area. I suggest to call the detention centres human zoo, that is correct name for this situation. There are fences, bars, razor wire same thing like jail or zoo. I cried a lot when I saw the two year old child behind the fence. What did he do? What is his fault and offence to keep him in this way. I am ashamed and feel lowly and humble. We feel we are in bottom levels of humans and we are less from other peoples.
>
> Please forgive me if I write some hard words that is arising from hopeless and lifeless. Most people think about suicide, little of them do that because maybe aren't brave or they are thinking about their kids and family. They want to be released from this human zoo even if they die.[204]

As mentioned earlier, the narratives of Australia's detained refugees are often characterised by a lack of hope. It is an attribute that largely reflects the impact of the immigration policies of the Australian government which have subjected these people to intolerable circumstances; circumstances they liken to living in a zoo. Ironically, however, with the design of contemporary zoos reflecting a more

[203] *ibid*., p.69.
[204] *ibid*., p.41.

humanitarian approach to the way animals are kept in captivity, the animals' existence is undoubtedly better than that experienced by detained refugees.

The Howard government introduced Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), a measure initially suggested by Pauline Hanson[205] and designed, in the words of a spokesman for the former immigration minister Mr. Ruddock 'to reduce the attractiveness of Australia for those seeking to enter illegally and claim asylum'.[206] According to Burnside TPV's are characterised by five things:

> Self evidently, they are temporary. This makes it difficult for the holder to do much more than subsist in Australia. Once the initial term of three years is up, the holder will have to apply for a further visa.
>
> They carry very few entitlements. A TPV holder is ineligible for most government programs, including federally funded employment programs and services such as English-language tuition.
>
> The holder cannot leave the country and re-enter it. If a refugee leaves Australia whilst holding a TPV they will not be eligible for a further TPV or permanent protection visa. At present, there are TPV holders whose husbands or wives or children have been taken to Nauru; they cannot visit them there, because they would not then be allowed back into Australia.
>
> The holder cannot sponsor members of their family to migrate to Australia, or apply for family reunion visas.
>
> The holder cannot gain permanent residency in Australia.[207]

The impact of TPV's on detained refugees effectively increased their already high levels of anxiety, extinguishing any faint hope that their futures could be secured. This is powerfully conveyed through the narratives found in chapter ten of *From Nothing to Zero*.

In the following narratives, the writer conveys his/her decision to return home indicating a preference for possible persecution, even death, over the continued state of uncertainty and mental anguish brought about by detention. These are shocking

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[205] Pauline Hanson first rose to prominence when thrown out of the Liberal Party after advocating the removal of welfare for Australia's Indigenous peoples. In 1997, Hanson formed her own 'One Nation' party. After a period of relative success, the Pauline Hanson's 'One Nation' party began to lose popularity. Hanson most recently contested the 2009 Queensland Elections as an independent nominee for the seat of Beaudesert.
[206] *ibid.,*p.170.
[207] *ibid*., p.169.

admissions, indicating the degradation they have experienced. They are admissions which reflect appallingly upon the nation's treatment of these already vulnerable people.

> My hope to make life in your country really is finished. And when I leave here I don't know what will happen to me in Iran but I know death in my land is much better than dying in this detention or this hell. I lost everything. I lost my life, my love, my family and now I think maybe if I stay here I lose my mind.[208]

The sense of loss expressed by the writer is replaced by uncertainty, resignation and a desire to reunite with family:

> I have signed to go back to my country. I don't know what will happen to me in Iran. Maybe they will capture me at airport and put me in jail. I will be happy even if I be in jail if I can meet with my family. I left my country and during my absence my father has died, I will never see him again. Now my mother is sick. I want to see her at any cost even if I will face plenty of death. I will never forget the hospitality of Australians in all my life. I'm too much thankful for people like you who helped us during hard and difficult conditions.[209]

This narrative is remarkable not only because it powerfully portrays the anguish and loss of hope experienced by the writer as a result of detention, but also because of the utterance that expresses gratitude to those Australians who have lent assistance to the writer. The sentiments expressed here are not of a person who is vindictive, wanting a free ride or a threat to national security. Rather they reveal a person who is rational, able to distinguish between good and evil, and someone who longs to reestablish filial ties, risking persecution and death to do so. The loss of hope felt by Australia's detained refugees permeates their accounts. Their narratives, which speak unanimously of uncertain futures, fears of persecution or even death reflect the writers' psychological states, 'If I stay more I may go mad.'[210]

The following narrative's writer expresses similar sorrow at his own degradation. Yet undoubtedly the starkest statement in this writer's account is his opening one in which he expresses happiness at his decision to return home. Even though it will

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[208] *ibid.,* p.171.
[209] *ibid*
[210] *ibid*., p.172.

likely result in his persecution and possible death he at least now knows what the future holds for him:

> I would like to in form you that I have been in detention two years and now I have decided to go back to my own country even though I will be persecuted or I will face death but I am much happy and ready for everything because these things are better than detention. During two years I have lost everything—my feeling, myself.
>
> When I came to this country my feeling was the same as human but now I don't think so. Even I don't know who I am. Here in Woomera I have learnt how to be a bad person. How to lie and how to treat people badly. I am very sorry and concerned about the way your government treats people who seek asylum in their country. I wish someone would tell me what I have been guilty of in jail for two years.[211]

At the heart of the confusion and uncertainty in these narratives is the question, "What have I done to deserve this treatment?" It is a recurring question in so many of the narratives and a question that has been met with stony silence by those responsible for their continued incarceration. Assuming Helm is correct in her assertion that as writers give voice to social discontent and often expose social injustice, they continually imagine and reimagine the site of their critique[212] one wonders how this country is being reimagined by its refugees? Whatever the answer might be, according to Helm, 'we have a responsibility to discriminate among the versions circulating around us. Not all versions will be equal; some may indeed be dangerous.'[213]

In the epilogue of *From Nothing to Zero*, Julian Burnside observes:

> Under section 196 of the Migration Act, refugees are the only group in our community who can be imprisoned indefinitely, by order of parliament, regardless of the fact that they have not committed any offence. No court can say that the person's detention is unnecessary, or cruel, or damaging, or pointless. No other group is treated in this way. Imagine the public reaction if the victim of this legislation was a member of any other innocent minority—all blind people, all journalists, all Jews or all children with green eyes—most Australians would respond with outrage. How is it that the arbitrary imprisonment of refugees has not caused similar outrage? I believe it is because the government has

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[211] *ibid*
[212] Gabriele Helms, *Challenging Canada: Dialogism And Narrative Techniques in Canadian Novels,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2003, p.4.
[213] *ibid*., p.6.

> deliberately contrived to prevent the public from seeing refugees as human beings at all.[214]

The human impact of Australia's immigration policies as they pertain to refugees is powerfully conveyed through their narratives. On one level they document years of emotional and physical abuse brought about through mandatory detention of innocent men, women and children. On another level these narratives remind their readers that they share the same hopes, dreams and desires as mainstream Australians. They desire a life free from fear and persecution so that they and their children may live and grow to lead fulfilling and productive lives. These narratives undermine the efforts of Mr. Ruddock and his contemporaries, who choose to refer to detained and suffering children as 'it'[215], thus depriving them of their gender and humanity. They remind us that behind the razor wire of our detention centres live human beings whose only real difference to 'us' lies in the levels of epidermis in their skin. This is powerfully expressed by the writer of the following poem, written from behind the razor wire of one of Australia's detention centres:

The night is as dark as tar.
The sky is without a star.
I'm looking at the distance
My destination is very far
I wish I could fly
as light as the top of the sky
to see my beloved with freedom and joy[216]

[214] *ibid*., p.184.
[215] Mungo MacCallum, 'Girt By Sea: Australia, The Refugees And The Politics Of Fear' in *Quarterly Essay*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2002, p.6.
[216] Meaghan Amor & Janet Austin (eds.*), From Nothing to Zero*, Lonely Planet Publications, Footscray, p.179.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reality in its entirety is not to be exhausted by what is immediately at hand, for an overwhelming part of this reality is contained in the form of a still latent, unuttered future Word

Dostoevsky[217]

One of the insights of the previous chapter is the intimate connection that exists between language and its context. Every utterance receives its vitality, life and potency from the situation of which it is borne. Whether it be the narrative of the Afghani refugee who, having had two brothers murdered in Afghanistan, speaks of being killed every day by Australia's mandatory detention, or the words of the Iranian man asking the reader why, after having fled a regime that executed his nephew and black listed his family, he finds himself persecuted by the Australian authorities from whom he sought protection. Every utterance responds to the past and asks a question of the reader about the future.

As we have already seen, a crucial dimension of every utterance is its reception; the extent to which an utterance is heard, conceptualized and integrated into its recipient's world view. Through the theoretical insights of Emmanuel Levinas, questions regarding the most effective means of negotiating refugees' literatures will be explored in this chapter. I propose that utterances conveyed orally are more effective in conveying the full impact of detainees' experiences as their transmission necessarily comes from what Levinas calls the 'face'. This can be seen in an analysis of the form and content of refugees' stories included in Heather Tyler's *Asylum: Voices behind the Razor Wire*.

Heather Tyler's text contains narratives that follow a similar pattern to those found in *From Nothing to Zero*. This is not surprising since those whose stories they tell share a similar history of persecution and suffering. This common history and shared context has demanded that the past be responded to and questions of the future be asked by refugees as well as the Australian community at large. This, however, is

[217] David Patterson, *Literature and Spirit: Essays on Bakhtin and his Contemparies*, University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1988, p.138.

largely where the similarities end. Stylistically the two texts are strikingly different. While *From Nothing to Zero* strives to preserve the integrity of the narratives at the level of content and style, allowing them to speak for themselves, albeit polyphonically, Tyler has chosen the path of heteroglossia, whereby a variety of voices are used to convey the story of selected refugees. In Bakhtinian terms, *From Nothing to Zero* adheres to a linear structure, as it focuses on the content of the reported speech and maintains a strict boundary between authorial reporting of speech and the speech reported, while *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire* is pictorial in style because it infiltrates the reported speech with authorial retort and response to it.[218] The extent and effect of these different approaches to narrative will be seen in this chapter.

According to Bakhtin, because language is historically constituted it is necessarily dialogic:

> The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.[219]

The inherently dialogic nature of language of which Bakhtin speaks is clearly evident throughout the narratives contained in Tyler's text. Each and every story brings together a variety of voices all competing and cooperating in order to convey the stories of Australian refugees. Heather Tyler's voice is prominent in every chapter and it is her voice that directs the movement of each narrative; the voices of the refugees whose stories are told are similarly prominent and are reported directly and indirectly throughout each chapter. The voices of psychologists, professors, politicians and people from a variety of other professions are also included. Each of these voices acts like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle playing its part in constructing the final narrative. As such the various voices are interdependent, each relying on the other in order to articulate the narrative in its completeness. These utterances, therefore, far from being indifferent to one another, instead mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character. Each utterance is filled

[218] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Volshinov*, Arnold, London, 2003, p.61.
[219] *ibid*., p.76.

with echoes and reverberations of other utterances and thus must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances. Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account.[220] The first two pages of chapter one, "Behind the Iron Curtin", exemplify this.

Opening the first chapter of *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire* is a quote from the then Inspector of Custodial Services in Western Australia, Professor Richard Harding, who, in commenting on the secrecy surrounding the inner workings of detention centres, stated that 'it is appalling that public information about what is going on in detention centres has to come out by default'.[221] Immediately below this Tyler has placed a letter written by an unnamed refugee in detention addressed to an anonymous person known only as Edward:

> Dear Edward,
>
> A kind guard told me that people live long distances from each other in country like this, and that almost every man has grown up with a gun. Do they use them on each other or is this only to kill the kangaroos? And he told me those who live out here are different from city people, that they are brave and kind, not afraid of the heat and the emptiness and they love the red sand, the gum trees, the blue hills. I want to see the long road out of here again. In my desert prison rubbish blows fat against the fences. Sand and dust live inside my ears and eyes. It is choking my soul where life used to be. Will some of those brave people come to visit us one day? Forgive me, but I am afraid of the emptiness and now I hate the colour red.[222]

Following the letter, Tyler relays the story of her own experience of being contacted by a refugee recently released from Curtin detention centre wanting to pass on a video smuggled out of Curtin that reportedly provided a shocking insight into life within detention.

> The video eventually appeared on ABC's Lateline—and it was a shocker. Hazaras, a persecuted minority in Afghanistan, who had been screened out of the asylum application process after one short interview and kept in isolation for months with no telephone, television or even a radio, were wailing and smashing their heads against the walls of their cells. Eventually one Hazara emerged, blood running in rivers down his face,

[220] *ibid*., p.85.
[221] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.1.
[222] *ibid*

> asking not for medical attention but why he had been held in isolation. 'They need to check your wounds,' one guard was heard to say. 'But it is my heart that is breaking,' the bleeding man answered…Lateline lined up the hard-hitters for presenter Tony Jones to interview: Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry spokesperson Dr Louise Newman, disaffected former chairman of the Multicultural Australia Council Neville Roach, and Professor Richard Harding, Inspector of Custodial Services in Western Australia.[223]

The above excerpts raise several questions: to what extent do they demonstrate within themselves heteroglossia? what is the relationship between these excerpts? how do the utterances respond to one another? what significance lies behind their inclusion? what do they contribute to the overall narrative?

The first voice encountered in the opening chapter of *Asylum: Voice behind the razor wire* is that of Professor Harding. His position as Inspector of Custodial Services in Western Australia informs the reader of his area of expertise and the likely content of his utterances, while also adding weight to these utterances. The significance of the utterance selected by Tyler to open the first chapter lies in its placement, accent and content. By situating his utterance immediately below the chapter title, 'Behind the Iron Curtin'[224] a sense of covertness is conveyed to the reader. This is of course reinforced by the content of the utterance which alludes to the existence of an 'Iron Curtin'[225] preventing the Australian public from accessing information about the inner workings of mandatory detention. Its placement also provides the reader with an idea of what is to follow. The most powerful aspect of Professor Harding's utterance, however, lies in its connotations. Words such as 'appalling' and 'default'[226] suggest a feeling of disgust towards the events and/or utterances which prompted his own utterance. The significance of this goes beyond the expression of an individual's feelings regarding a particular issue. Professor Harding's context combines with the content and accent of his utterance to pose a highly political question to those who are orchestrating the cover up of which he is speaking. This knowledge no doubt played a large role in Professor Harding's choice of terminology and his decision to articulate his criticism. These same factors undoubtedly influenced Tyler's decision to open her first chapter with Professor Harding's

[223] *ibid*., p.3.
[224] Tyler's play on words is making clear parallels between the veil of secrecy over the Curtin Detention Centre and the Iron Curtain associated with the former Communist run Soviet Union.
[225] i*bid*., p.1.
[226] *ibid*

utterance. There is no doubt that Bakhtin places a great deal of importance upon the expressive element of the utterance, seeing it as highly significant in determining the compositional form of every utterance:

> There can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance. The speaker's evaluative attitude towards the subject of his speech (regardless of what his subject may be) also determines the choice of lexical, grammatical and compositional means of the utterance. The individual style of the utterance is determined primarily by its expressive aspect.[227]

It is worth reiterating the importance of context at this juncture, for in the absence of context, the dialogic element of the utterance is removed and the expressive element that provides much of the potency of the utterance is in most cases limited. This is exactly why those in authority rarely contextualize utterances that would threaten their interests. For this same reason their own discourses, which seek to marginalize the Other, are so often presented in black and white terms and are almost always void of the shades of grey that context inevitably supplies. Authoritative discourse 'enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it'.[228] Furthermore, since it is the emotive aspect of utterances which motivates others to respond, those seeking to operate covertly oppress all utterances that possess this expressive element. Herein lies another example of the modus operandus of the Orientalist.

The restrictions placed upon refugees' communications have been well documented and the subsequent limitation upon face to face contact with those from the 'outside world' has necessitated the refugees' reliance upon letters—though at detention centres such as Curtin this form of communication was also initially forbidden.[229] The letter thus symbolizes the oppressed state of detainees. It enables detainees to express their needs, fears, concerns and anxieties through a relatively simple style more conducive to those whose familiarity with the English language is often limited. The letter also provides a forum more adaptable to the incorporation of the oral elements of refugees' language. Additionally, letters are innately dialogic: one provides information about oneself and seeks information from the one to whom the

[227] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.85.
[228] *ibid*., p.78.
[229] Peter Mares, *borderline*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, p.13.

letter is directed, thus they provide the ideal forum for refugees to attain responses to their utterances. The personable nature of the letter is also ideal for those reaching out to the world beyond the razor wire. For the detained refugees, the act of writing is as expressive as the content of their communication, for it conveys their reliance upon those who have initiated the dialogic exchange in which they are participating. Indeed for many detainees the letter signifies their final hope that beyond the oppressiveness of their lives within detention, people do exist who care for their plight. This is clearly demonstrated through the first of several letters incorporated by Tyler into her text: 'In my desert prison rubbish blows flat against the fences. Sand and dust live in my ears and eyes. It is choking my soul where life used to be. Will some of those brave people come to visit us one day?'[230]

Beyond the desperation and diminishing hope conveyed by this letter which is characteristic of many utterances emerging from detainees, the letter possesses other characteristics which highlight the complex social significance of both this utterance and others like it. Firstly, the question posed to the reader who in this case is Edward and any one else who has read Tyler's text, demands a response. 'The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, orientated toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction.'[231] In this case that future answered word could come from as many directions as there are recipients to the utterance. This dissertation could be considered one such response; the letter, returned by Edward to the author of this letter, another. The significance of this is that the future answer-word is not limited to a certain time or space but can emerge both immediately after the utterance is circulated and any number of times thereafter. Herein lies the potency of what Bakhtin calls 'the word in living conversation'.[232] It remains living for as long as someone exists to receive it.

This openness of the utterance to any number of responses is but one dimension of its dialogic nature, for, as is the case with the letter to Edward, utterances not only demand responses but also act as responses to previous utterances. In the case of the

[230] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.1.
[231] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.76.
[232] *ibid*

aforementioned letter, it acts in part as a response to previous utterances; this is indicated in its opening sentences: 'A kind guard told me that people live long distances from each other in country like this…And he told me that those who live out here are different from city people'.[233] Clearly the refugee who penned this letter had reflected on an earlier conversation which in turn formed an essential component of his/her own utterance. This interdependence of utterances not only demonstrates the dialogic nature of the letter but also highlights the process of reception within any dialogue:

> In actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement.[234]

In each utterance the response plays a primary role, as through it understanding is signified. Indeed understanding becomes clear only through the response. These two processes are dialectically merged and mutually condition one another. One is synonymous with the other. It is through the response that one's utterance is integrated into a new conceptual system. It is exactly this process which the speaker counts on.

In the case of the letter to Edward, the detained refugee has heard and understood the guard's utterance and then applied this understanding to the new utterance which he/she has created. According to Bakhtin, this process conforms exactly to the expectations of the speaker. In the absence of the guard's complete conversation with the detainee, we can only hypothesise about the intended purpose or speech-will of his utterance. We can, however, with far more certainty assume that he expressed his utterance with the expectation of attaining a response. We know also that at least part of the guard's words lived on in the detainee's utterance as it has in turn been received by Tyler and those who have read her text. This is but one example of the living force of language and it highlights the potency of the spoken word in its ability to initiate reflection and propagate further utterances. It is for this reason that Said can say that the greatest pressure one can exert upon the authoritative utterance is

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[233] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.1.
[234] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.76.

narrative as it acts to introduce diachrony into the system. What seemed stable—such as reductive, binary based representations of refugees—is suddenly destabilized: 'Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision.'[235]

The third piece of direct discourse, the third voice to be heard from the opening chapter of *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, comes from the author Heather Tyler. In comparison to the utterances of Professor Harding and the anonymous detainee Tyler's discourse is the most extensive. It is, however, also the discourse most saturated with heteroglossia. Tyler's voice is first heard on the second page of the opening chapter, which—as mentioned previously—begins with the story of her experience of being contacted by a recently released refugee seeking to pass on a video of coverage within the Curtin detention centre.[236]

It is immediately obvious to the reader that Tyler's story is dialogic. Like the detainee's letter to Edward, the origins of Tyler's utterance arise from a previous conversation. The significance of this conversation to the author is conveyed through its placement at the beginning of her narrative. It is likely that this initial contact was formative in the conception of Tyler's interest in the plight of refugees and/or in the writing of *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*. It is certainly significant that the text strives to achieve exactly that which the detainee central to Tyler's opening narrative was seeking of her through his initial contact, namely to make the plight of detained refugees known. Eight of the thirteen chapters within the text, which deal exclusively with the conveyance of refugees' stories, are dedicated exclusively to this end.

It is worth noting that Tyler's opening story incorporated fifteen other voices. Each of these represented different sectors of the Australian community and their respective utterances conveyed contrasting attitudes towards the plight of detained refugees, thus demonstrating some of the 'thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an

[235] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.240.
[236] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.2.

utterance'.[237] Through the clash of these utterances the battle between the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language is manifested. Consider the following as an example of this interplay:

> ABC TV reporter Margot O'Neill spoke with former Curtin detainee Fashid Kheirollahpoor, who was in Curtin at the time of the riot. Fashid said the men resorted to hunger strikes and extreme measures because they had no money and no way to help themselves. 'The only thing they had to sell was their own blood.' O'Neill, aghast, had to ask him to repeat it. At the end of the Lateline report, O'Neill said: 'This was just one incident, on one day, in just one detention centre.' The Department of Immigration brushed the tape aside, blaming the disturbance on 50 people 'who had no legal basis for being in Australia'.[238]

The above dialogic exchange involves the voices of three stakeholders in the issue: journalist Margot O'Neill, the detainee Fashid Kheirollahpoor and The Department of Immigration. O'Neill's position as investigative journalist requires some level of professional distance from the subject. That the content and accent of her utterance reveals a level of empathy with Fashid and other detainees suggests the shocking contents of the tape viewed by O'Neill. This is supported not only by the emotive utterance of Fashid but also by the bland response of the Department of Immigration who, rather than addressing the concerns arising from the video, chose instead to lay blame for the riot on 50 detainees and attack them as illegals. The fact that most have since had their status as refugees recognised and are now living in the community reveals the desperation of the Department of Immigration to hide the true nature of detention from the Australian public. Hence the appropriateness of the title of Tyler's opening chapter: 'Behind the iron Curtin'.[239]

Finally, it is important to note that the above dialogic exchange demonstrates another aspect of heteroglossia noted by Bakhtin, namely the stratification of language: 'At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also…into languages that are socio-ideological: languages

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[237] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.76.
[238] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.5.
[239] *ibid*., p.1.

of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages…'[240] In the case of the above dialogic exchange we have two professional voices and one generic voice contesting the circumstances surrounding the subject of their utterances. It is fortunate for Fashid that his utterance is supported by Margot's 'professional' utterance. Fortunate, not because Fashid's utterance lacks credibility in and of itself—indeed since it expresses the account of an eye witness it is all the more credible—but fortunate, because, as Foucault points out, one of the principles of exclusion placed upon discourse is that of the speaking subject. 'There is a rarefaction, this time, of the speaking subject; none shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so.'[241] In the case of the Department of Immigration's utterance, the credibility of Fashid was attacked on the false premise that he had no legal standing in the Australian community. In essence the implication of DIMA's statement is that as he is not 'one of us' his words should not be trusted. It was not an accusation that could be attached to O'Neill.

Chapter two of *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, entitled 'Please, let me go home' is dedicated to the story of Dr Abdul Rahim. According to Tyler he arrived in Australia without a passport on November 14 1999 after having fled the Taliban.

Dr Rahim had solid grounds for being concerned. Tyler relates the fact that his wife, a teacher, 'knew that while the Taliban remained, she would not be able to teach in a school again. The couple had seven children: their four daughters would have to terminate their education at the age of eight, and their three sons faced being schooled in religious dogma.'[242] Under the intensely anti-intellectual and anti-western regime the future of Dr Rahim and his family was undoubtedly bleak.

Upon arriving in Australia Dr Rahim asked for asylum. Instead 'he was driven 45 minutes west to the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre…He was put into the ugly Stage One compound, where detainees considered to be a potential security risk

[240] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.75.
[241] Michel Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (Fourth Edition), Arnold, London, 2001, p.219.
[242] *ibid*., p.35.

are secured.'[243] Dr Rahim expressed shock at the conditions of the compound which he described as worse than an Afghan jail: 'Hygiene was poor he said. The bedding was soiled, the toilets grimy. The fetid dormitories became sweat boxes in the humidity of the Australian summer. "The conditions were shocking", he remembered. "I didn't expect conditions like this in a civilized country."'[244] After eighteen months of life at Villawood and limited contact with his family depression set in on Dr Rahim. During this period his application for asylum was rejected as was his appeal to the Refugee Review Tribunal.[245] 'He said he was told bluntly by the Tribunal his story of persecution was not credible. "They told me, 'I don't believe your story and you are not a truthful witness'" he recalled with barely disguised anger.'[246] One of the reasons given as evidence of Dr Rahim's lack of credibility was that he used different words to tell his story on different occasions:

> If you changed your words about the story in any way, they would use that as an excuse to reject. How can any person tell the same story twice using exactly the same words, especially if they are already under great stress from arriving in a strange country and suffering from the trauma of fleeing their country and what happened to them in their homeland?[247]

At this point Tyler again takes up Dr Rahim's story, describing the impact of the rejection of his asylum application:

> With these rejections for asylum, Australia was officially saying it did not believe Dr Rahim was who he said he was. He was denied all credibility and the monotony of detention took its toll. Deprived of any semblance of normal life, without even the simplest task to fulfill that would maintain his self esteem, Dr Rahim's depression deepened. He couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep and a feeling of intense isolation made him withdraw from conversation with other detainees…Helplessness overwhelmed him. Returning to Afghanistan was not an option. It was too dangerous. And while he was stuck behind the razor wire his wife and children were dependant on others to survive. He felt as though he had abandoned them, and he in turn felt abandoned.[248]

Further blows arrived with the news that in their efforts to flee persecution in their tribal lands, a member of his family—his nine year old son—had lost his life in a

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[243] *ibid*., p.38.
[244] *ibid*
[245] *ibid*., p.39.
[246] *ibid*
[247] *ibid*
[248] *ibid*., p.40.

flooded river. 'Thousands of kilometers away from his family, he was only able to comfort and grieve with occasional phone calls.'[249] In November, two months after al-Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Centre, the Taliban fell and, despite the fact that pockets of al-Qaeda and the Taliban still remained ensconced in Afghanistan, Dr Rahim wrote a letter to Mr. Ruddock asking for repatriation:

> On 22 November 2001, he applied to the Department of Immigration to be repatriated. There was no reply from Canberra. At the beginning of February 2002 he wrote to Mr. Ruddock saying he had 'made an unforgivable decision to escape the tyranny of the Taliban' and had suffered greatly as a consequence. His family had lost everything. He urged Mr. Ruddock to speed up his request for repatriation because his country needed qualified people to reconstruct the health system.[250]

In a note to Tyler prior to his eventual repatriation Dr Rahim wrote:

> I have been in struggle since November 2001 to go back to Afghanistan. No one was ready to respond to me in a reasonable way. I wrote again to Ruddock to consider this application seriously, but still there was no reply. Eventually with the help of compassionate Australians I won the fight of going back. I am happy for two reasons. One is that I am joining my frustrated family and the other is that I am leaving the country in which punishment of innocent people is lawful. I am very thankful to my friends who have given me courage and helped in terrible times.[251]

At the level of content, Dr Rahim's story is reminiscent of many of the stories told by Afghan refugees, which makes DIMA's rejection of his application all the more incredible. Like so many other cases the human cost of Dr Rahim's detention extends beyond his immediate sufferings. In light of these events, it is surprising that the accent of Dr Rahim's utterances is not characterised by greater anger.

At this point a consideration of Tyler's role in the construction of Dr Rahim's story is appropriate. Stylistically, Tyler follows the pictorial form of narrative which focuses upon the individualized qualities and style of the reported speech and, as previously mentioned, 'finds ways of infiltrating the reported speech with authorial retort and response to it, or, alternatively, the reported speech may begin to infiltrate the authorial context.'[252] This interplay between the authorial utterances of Tyler and

[249] *ibid*., p.43.
[250] *ibid*
[251] *ibid*., p.44.
[252] *ibid*

the utterances of those whose stories are being told is prominent throughout the text. In the case of Dr Rahim's story it is evident throughout the chapter. Consider the following:

> World Health Organisation statistics estimate that 40 per cent of the Afghan population suffer from mental stress accumulated after so much conflict. One day Dr Rahim and I talked about this accumulation of trauma, as drizzle enveloped the visitor's compound of Villawood. He was frowning and oblivious to the beads of water seeping onto his threadbare shirt as he said: Nobody is normal in Afghanistan. How on earth can they create such figures when every person has suffered? Nobody has remained untouched by the past 23 years. Children are born into conflict and die because of it. A large majority of people suffer from severe depression and anxiety neurosis. Children play on the streets from dawn to dusk with no one watching them because their parents are too concerned with their own problems. They are unable to nurture their children.[253]

The interdependence of Tyler and Dr Rahim's utterances is obvious: Dr Rahim's utterance, which at the level of content and accent, expresses frustration and anger, is a direct response to the preceding utterance from Tyler. Of course Tyler's utterance is also dependant on the utterances of the World Health Organisation, which informs the content of her narrative. It is also worth mentioning that the content of Tyler's utterance was very likely determined by the context of her respondent. In quoting statistics taken from the World Health Organisation it is likely that Tyler, aware of Dr Rahim's own qualifications and experience, was seeking his professional response. This demonstrates the indelible link between the two speakers in the formation of the word: 'Orientation of the word towards the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two sided act* …As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.*(Bakhtin's emphasis) Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other."'[254] Just as Tyler's utterance is determined by her knowledge of Dr Rahim's context as a doctor, Afghan citizen and refugee, so too does the reverse apply. It is likely that the content and accent of Dr Rahim's response was in part determined by the relationship that he had established with Tyler. It is

[253] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.33.
[254] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.61. Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov,* Arnold, London, 2003, p.58.

unlikely that Dr Rahim would have responded in exactly the same manner if Tyler's utterance had been delivered from a member of the World Health Organisation.

It has been said that there is no such thing as an original thought, the premise being that everything one thinks and says is in some way affected by the utterances received from others. One internalizes the meaning and expressive elements of previous dialogical exchanges and incorporates this new knowledge into what Bakhtin calls inner speech. From this inner speech our future utterances emerge. With this in mind, it can be reasonably asserted that from the time Tyler made contact with Dr Rahim her inner speech was altered and this can be seen to be manifested through her narrative. This is of course true not only of her encounter with Dr Rahim but of all her dialogic exchanges. Bakhtin explains the process in the following terms:

> This active inner-speech reception operates in two directions: first, the received utterance is framed within a context of factual commentary (coinciding in part with what is called the apperceptive background of the words), the visual signs of expression and so on; second, a reply (*Gegenrede*) is prepared. Both the preparation of the reply (internal retort) and the *factual commentary* are organically fused in the unity of active reception, and these can be isolated only in abstract terms.[255]

In the case of the first manifestation of inner speech, examples are to be found throughout Tyler's narrative. The following excerpt incorporates an acknowledged quote from Dr Rahim as well as information that has presumably come from this same source which is presented through Tyler's paraphrased utterance: 'Kabul's soccer stadium had been transformed into a grotesque forum where executions and amputations of limbs were carried out in front of a crowd of spectators. Dr Rahim said Afghans were forced to "watch and learn that dissension brought pain and death".'[256] A similar pattern is repeated in the next excerpt although on this occasion all of the reported speech is fully incorporated into Tyler's own language: 'Dr Rahim said diagnostic procedures became a battle of wits and the effectiveness of available drugs a flexible question. The majority of Afghans were deprived of even the most basic health care. He estimated that about half of Afghanistan's 330 districts were without accessible health centres, although the World Health Organisation listed only

[255] *ibid*
[256] Heather Tyler, *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Lothian Books, South Melbourne, 2003, p.34.

50.' These are two of many such examples of Tyler incorporating knowledge attained through previous utterances into her inner speech and then articulating this knowledge through factual commentary of events formerly the subject of her previous dialogic exchanges. What then of the gegenrede? Where is Tyler's response to the utterances of Dr Rahim to be found? It could be argued that the entire chapter dedicated to Dr Rahim's story is Tyler's response. One could extrapolate further and suggest the entire text embodies her response. What is certain is that Bakhtin is correct when asserting the project of separating the authorial commentary from the response is an exercise in abstraction.

In chapter two of *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, Tyler tells the story of Majeed an Iraqi Shi'a Muslim tortured by government officials working for the Intelligence Security Force. Majeed's story is one of torture, cover ups and forced deceit and ironically, the same techniques used by Majeed to survive his persecution in Iraq saw his application for asylum rejected by Australian authorities. Tyler begins chapter two, 'Everything but the truth' with a quote taken from Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial*: 'The culture of state terror is neither secret nor openly acknowledged. Information circulates—neighbours witness disappearances or kidnappings, torture victims return to families, newspaper readers know exactly what was censored—but is simultaneously denied.'[257] The shocking element of Cohen's utterance is that every element of its content can be applied to the experience of Majeed:

> For each round of torture, Majeed was naked, forced to disrobe in his communal cell and walk the short distance from its fetid confines to a dark room embellished with the instruments of torment. Without his clothes, powerlessness was absolute even before the first calculated blow. No matter what information he had to hide, raw pain and mortal fear was inescapable. The perpetrators were free to do what they wanted. The torture ended when Majeed was considered to be of no further use. While the acts of suffering stopped, they became indelible, etched in physical scars and recycled in nightmares at night. By day a state of denial helped him construct something of a life. Suppression wasn't difficult for Majeed. In Iraq, truth was dangerous and, for its persecuted citizens, deviation was as natural as breathing.[258]

[257] *ibid*., p.48.
[258] *ibid*

The grim opening to Majeed's story foreshadows the harrowing details to follow and also provides the reader with an insight into the problems persecuted refugees face when confronted with the sight of razor wire, ACM guards or even riot police, not to mention immigration officials who demand their stories match, word for word, every time they are asked to recount them.

> "I was always tortured naked," Majeed said of the place where he was brutalized. "They would hang me up by my legs, and then they would take a 7UP bottle and shove it up my anus. They did this many times. We had to joke about this place where they did this to all of us, because it was the only way to stay sane. We are Middle Eastern men—we had to be brave. We called it the Bottle Room. In there they made me eat a lot of watermelon and then blocked the end of my penis. This hurt a lot, you know, it was agony. They beat us until we went unconscious. I used to pray to become unconscious quickly. We were bleeding everywhere—from our eyes, noses, ears—and when we were taken back to the cell, the other detainees cleaned the blood off and helped put our clothes back on."[259]

According to Tyler, under the duress of torture Majeed told his interrogators everything they wanted to know, 'although he made up details about his mother, father and five brothers in order to protect them. "I didn't care what I told them, I just blurted anything out. I wanted to survive and I didn't understand why they wanted to do these things to me. I was not politically important to them".'[260] Eventually Majeed was released, 'he was taken to a highway and thrown out onto the road…Bruised, malnourished and suffering from a broken rib, he wandered in a daze for some hours before he was able to hitch a ride back to Basra.'[261] Tyler then asks Majeed, '"Didn't anyone ask you what had happened to you?" to which Majeed responded, "I didn't need to say. People know what is done to many individuals in Iraq and they don't ask questions. They are afraid to know. I was alive and that was all that mattered."'[262]

It was for this same reason that Majeed never revealed the details of his torture to his family. In Saddam Hussein's Iraq information was dangerous. Majeed had experienced this first hand and would not place his family at risk by revealing the

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[259] *ibid*., p.53.
[260] *ibid*
[261] *ibid*., p.54.
[262] *ibid*

extent of his suffering.[263] In a country such as Australia, which does not subject its citizens to torture, the idea that Majeed could keep the information about his own sufferings to himself seems beyond belief. Yet Tyler has incorporated sources into her narrative which testify to the credibility of Majeed's assertions. In an email to Tyler, Thomas Cromwell, a journalist with twenty years experience in the Middle East, wrote:

> Your contact is right about hiding the truth. I soon learned in Egypt that many there would say what they thought would be best to say rather than the truth so as to avoid what they perceived as dangers, or just negative reactions. This comes from living in a police state, and all the Middle East countries are police states, regardless of the nominal structure of the regime: monarchy or republic. The fear is that if authorities know too much about an individual's life, they might use that information to destroy him and/or his family or livelihood.[264]

Majeed's silence regarding his torture was not, however, solely due to his fear for his family and distrust of authorities: 'I don't remember much about the day I was released. I had spent three months trying to forget everything. This torture was very extreme, it hurts the mind as much as the body'.[265] Such a response is understandable considering Majeed's circumstances. Unfortunately DIMA had no such understanding as Majeed's application for asylum was rejected. Even more incredible is that DIMA officials failed to recognise these strategies as indicative of someone who had been persecuted.

Having had his application and appeal rejected, Majeed wrote two letters to Mr. Ruddock appealing for intervention on humanitarian grounds—these too were turned down. Additionally, the experience of detention was exacerbating Majeed's trauma:

> He felt afraid in crowds and found the incessant throngs in detention difficult to deal with. Anything with the sound of metal—such as door bolts sliding or jangling keys, sounds familiar to all detainees—made him jump, and the opening of doors was enough to make him sweat. He could not forget how the door to the cell in his mountain prison grated open when his torturers came to get him for another round in the Bottle Room.[266]

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[263] *ibid*
[264] *ibid*., p.55.
[265] *ibid*., p.57.
[266] *ibid*., p.60.

Worse was to come for Majeed and the other detainees when on the 11 May 2001 a riot broke out:

> It was sparked by ACM's manhandling of Iranian detainee Morteza and his father, but tension between detainees and complaints over the quality of the food also contributed. Detainees hurled whatever they could find, overturned tables in the dining room, broke windows and battled with officials wearing full riot gear. 'The next morning at 5a.m., officers in riot gear came to our rooms in the single men's block, bashing on the walls and doors yelling "Wake up!" We had to kneel with our hands behind our heads, and then they put boots into our backs to make us fall to the floor. We were not allowed to turn our heads left or right. They used batons to poke at our buttocks if we moved. If any of us wanted to go to the toilet we were not allowed to stand upright, but had to bend over with our arms twisted behind us. We were given exactly one minute in the toilet and we were not allowed to close the door. We stayed on the floor from 5a.m. to 11a.m. The police were arresting people over the riot.[267]

Prior to the riots, Majeed had busied himself by helping other detainees by acting as a negotiator in their dealings with the Department of Immigration and ACM. 'Detainees said he was kind, unfailingly compassionate and had a keen sense of humour.'[268] After the riots, however, Majeed fell into a state of deep depression which was exacerbated by the loneliness of detention: 'No one got visitors. The social isolation was the cruelest thing of all. You forget social etiquette, which is important in my culture, you forget how to talk with people. I didn't know any more how to sit around a table and have a cup of coffee with many people talking at once about a variety of subjects.'[269]

Majeed spent three years in Australia's detention centres, after which we are not told of his fate. It is a case marked by tragedy and an understandable unwillingness to tell Australian authorities about his torture in Iraq. His silence not only reflected his own context but also the failings of Australia's immigration system:

> I just told immigration lies about why I wanted asylum and the lies got bigger and bigger and it got out of my control. When you come from a country where the truth puts you in peril, you automatically hide it. You say everything but the truth. I didn't know the mentality of Australian authorities, I wasn't at all sure I could trust anybody. I wasn't alone in this. We grew up not being able to trust the governing system. We knew

[267] *ibid*., p.62.
[268] *ibid*., p.61.
[269] *ibid*., p.62.

> nothing about Australia, only that it was supposed to be a safe place to come to. Many of us are afraid the things we tell to (the Department of Immigration) might be filtered back to Iraq. The system of detention makes you mistrust people even further, because you are not treated as human. You are treated with the utmost suspicion and adult responsibility is taken away from you. So you are suspicious in return…I want to forget this evil, to deny what happened to me. I told you, but I cannot face telling it over and over again. It brings back the past and creates too much pain. I have nightmares every night still. It never leaves me. I feel like my life is already over and I am in this big hole that I can never climb out of.[270]

As the title of chapter two suggests, Majeed's experience is one of survival through deceit. Raised in Iraq, Majeed knew only one way to deal with authorities, namely to tell them what they wanted to hear, or, if it was a matter of protecting one's family, tell them lies and hope they didn't find out. He, like all Iraqi citizens, was at war with his government. Majeed's fate is now unknown.

What then becomes of Majeed's story? In light of his uncertain whereabouts, does not an ethical imperative to tell his story exist? Indeed, given at least 386 asylum seekers have lost their lives in either trying to reach Australia, while in detention or after having their applications rejected[271] is there not a moral responsibility upon those with this knowledge to tell and retell their stories, not to mention the stories of those who have suffered and survived the traumatic effects of Australia's mandatory detention system? Given that the suffering experienced by asylum seekers and detainees was and is a result of a system and policies founded upon a matrix of reductive procedures which have actively worked to erase the face of the Other, the need to return truth to the situation is urgent.

In the face of the horrific impact of Nazi Germany Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas stated that 'Truth is inseparable from its historical expression and without its expression, thought thinks nothing.'[272] Such sentiments, historically grounded as they are, form yet another premise upon which accusations of fallaciousness can be attached to much of the rhetoric of the Howard government as it pertained to those seeking asylum in Australia. In the light of the stories examined in this dissertation

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[270] *ibid*., p.64.
[271] Linda Briskman et.al.: *Human Rights Overboard: Seeking Asylum In Australia*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2008, pp.7-9.
[272] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2006, p. 18.

and the thousands of others told elsewhere or those yet to be uttered, reductive terms such as 'illegals' fail to tread water. As Levinas says, 'signification needs all the density of the story'[273] and without it attempts to signify the Other[274] are meaningless. Indeed, according to Levinas' philosophy, the uncontextualised act of signifying says more about the signifier than their object. In other words, the Howard government's attempts to signify the asylum seekers revealed far more about itself than the reality of those seeking asylum. History has demonstrated that the questionable ethics behind such signifying practices has never stood as an obstacle to those wishing to marginalize the Other: 'Needs, admirably direct and impatient in their aims, give themselves multiple possibilities of signification solely to be able to choose the unique path to satisfaction. Man confers a unique sense to being by working it, not by celebrating it'.[275] Arguably, the Howard government felt the need to marginalize asylum seekers in order to maintain its hold on power. It is widely acknowledged that the Labor party's hopes of winning government in 2001 went down with the hopes of those aboard the Tampa when they were signified as a public enemy.

Levinas' words stand as a warning to all of those who would represent the Other, even those wishing to provide avenues to the Other for self representation. This is especially the case for those, such as Tyler and indeed the author of this dissertation, adopting the pictorial approach to narrative of which Bakhtin speaks. For whenever a third party is involved in the representational project of the Other, the danger of colonizing the Other all over again re-presents itself. This said, such dangers can be minimized by ensuring that access to the Other being represented is maximized which is something those wanting to marginalize the Other rarely bother about. What this warning does highlight is the importance of the personal encounter with the Other. It is a theme Levinas takes up in his work.

In his text, *Humanism of the Other* Levinas places the spoken word at the heart of relationship and seems to imply that this word, far more than an expression of one's

[273] *ibid*., p.20.
[274] Levinas often uses the capitalized 'Other' to signify the divine 'Other' in his writing while the lower case 'other' signifies the human. However, as there are inconsistencies in this regard Levinas' work, I have elected to continue to use the capitalized 'Other' in line with the usage employed by Said and other theorists cited within this dissertation.
[275] *ibid*., p.21.

being, is an ontological signifier of the Other to whom one speaks. Furthermore the spoken word is especially significant when encountered through face to face contact, for it is at this level that the Other conveys him/herself as being most completely:

> The Desire for Others that we feel in the most common social experience is fundamental movement, pure transport, absolute orientation, sense. All analysis of language in contemporary philosophy, emphasizes, and rightfully so, its hermeneutic structure and the cultural effort of the embodied being who expresses himself. Hasn't the third dimension been forgotten? The direction towards the Other who is not only collaborator and neighbor of our cultural work of expression or client of our artistic production, but interlocutor: the one to whom expression expresses, for whom celebration celebrates, he who is both term of an orientation and first signification. In other words, before it is a celebration of being, expression is a relation to the one to whom I express the expression and whose presence is already required so that my cultural gesture of expression can be produced. The Other who faces me is not included in the totality of being that is expressed. He arises behind all collection of being, as the one to whom I express what I express. I find myself facing the Other. He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is primordially *sense*, because he lends it to expression itself, because only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself, of itself, into being.'[276]

The personal encounter possesses great power, for through it we discover a person's being as everything that has constituted them to that point in time. It is little wonder that the Australian government went to such extraordinary lengths to prevent such encounters. The rarity of such face to face contact facilitated perfectly an environment in which the public could be easily persuaded that asylum seekers posed a serious threat to Australia's national security. According to JanMohamed, such prohibitions reflect Manichean ideology and functioning.[277]

According to Levinas, 'The manifestation of face is the first discourse. Speaking is first and foremost this way of coming from behind one's form. An opening in the opening.'[278] He goes on to assert that it is through such encounters that the individual finds him/herself infinitely responsible:

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[276] *ibid*., p.30.

[277] Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr et.al. (ed) *Race Writing And Difference*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p.82.

[278] *ibid*., p.31.

> The challenge to self is precisely reception of the absolutely other. The epiphany of the absolutely other is face where the Other hails me and signifies to me by its nakedness, by its destitution, an order. Its presence is this summons to respond. The Ego does not only become conscious of this necessity to respond as if it were a demand or a particular duty it must decide upon. The Ego is through and through, in its very position, responsibility or diacony, as in chapter 53 of Isaiah. To be Me/Ego thenceforth signifies being unable to escape from responsibility, as if the whole edifice of creation stood on my shoulders.[279]

It is this encounter with face which gives the narratives analysed through this dissertation their potency. In the act of meeting Australia's detainees and refugees, Julian Burnside and Heather Tyler encountered embodied stories before a word was spoken. In these encounters, given the stories that have emerged from them and the conditions in which they occurred, one suspects the words of Isaiah, taken from the Bible, ring eerily true:

> He had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
> Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
> He was despised and rejected by others;
> A man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
> And as one from whom others hide their faces
> He was despised and of him we held no account.[280]

This country consciously chose to hide its face from those seeking its assistance; we refused the invitation to personal encounter with the face of the refugee Other, and thus absolved ourselves from the infinite responsibility to respond.[281] Or so we thought.

In November of 2008, SBS televised 'A Well Founded Fear'[282] which documented the travels of Phil Glendenning, the Director of the Edmund Rice Centre, who journeyed to Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey, Iran and Canada in order to discover the whereabouts of those asylum seekers rejected by Australia. In his own words, Glendenning outlines the purpose of his travels and the program by asserting that the only way to do justice to those asylum seekers rejected by Australia is to say to them 'we want to know your face and we want to know your name'.[283] During the

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[279] *ibid*., p.33.
[280] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, p.940.
[281] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2006, p.33.
[282] *A Well Founded Fear*, television program, SBS Corporation, Australia, 19 November 2008, Directed and produced by Anne Delaney.
[283] *ibid*

following 50 minutes Glendenning introduces his viewers to several of those asylum seekers, who after being told by DIMIA that the fear which drove them to seek asylum in Australia was not well founded, were subsequently sent back to the countries from which they fled.[284] Due to the visual medium used, Glendenning is able to share his face to face encounters with his viewers, and in so doing he shares stories which are contextualized by embodiment.

One of the most powerful of these embodied narratives is conveyed through Glendenning's encounter with Rajabi Abdul Azim. (pictured below)

Figure 4: Rajabi Abdul Azim

Azim is introduced as a Hazara, a member of the most persecuted minority in Afghanistan. Membership of this group immediately made Azim a target for the Taliban. Adding to his woes was the fact that Azim also gave up his Islamic faith and married outside of his ethnic group. To a fundamental group such as the Taliban such actions warranted the most severe of punishments. In their pursuit of Azim, the Taliban captured and interrogated his father who refused to give up the whereabouts of his son, an act which cost him his life. According to Azim, after being bashed to

[284] Cases of asylum seekers being sent to Syria by DIMIA on false passports (provided by DIMIA) are also documented in the program. This is despite the fact that these refugees were not from Syria.

such an extent that 'his entire body was blackened with bruises'[285] he was dumped at his home and died two days later as a result of his horrific injuries. Azim immediately sent his family into hiding and fled to Australia to seek protection from the authorities. After a period of mandatory detention, The Australian government rejected Azim's pleas for asylum, claiming that because the Taliban was no longer in power, there was no longer any danger to his life. Azim was offered $2000 to return to Afghanistan and told if he chose to stay he faced indefinite detention as his claim would never be accepted. In the face of such an ultimatum Azim returned to Afghanistan. One night, after returning to his homeland, Azim heard a massive explosion outside his home. His two daughter's Yalda and Rowna (pictured below) were hit by shrapnel which flew into the house and both lost their lives.

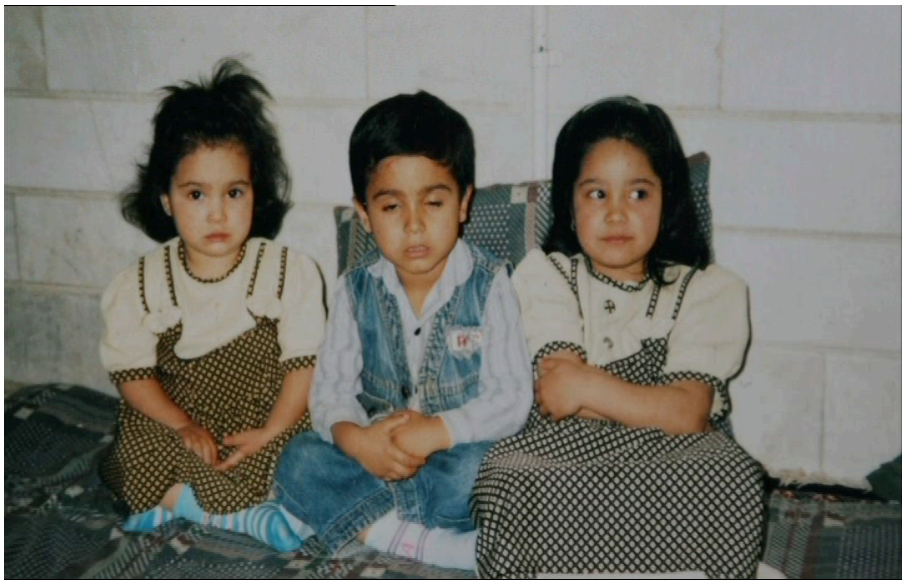

Figure 5: Azim's three children

As a detainee on Nauru, Azim was allocated and identified by the number, nr03-0054-02. In contrast, Glendenning's encounter with Azim revealed a loving father and husband who had needlessly lost two daughters after already losing his own father. In the encounter with Azim, Glendenning found himself 'infinitely responsible':[286] 'It's about human beings, it's about their hearts, it's about their kids, it's about their marriages. We couldn't summon up enough love to do the right

[285] *A Well Founded Fear*, television program, SBS Corporation, Australia, 19 November 2008, Directed and produced by Anne Delaney.
[286] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2006, p.33.

thing'.[287] The sense of responsibility Glendenning, as not only an Australian citizen but a fellow human being, felt in the face of the Other, was a response the Howard government went to great expense to 'protect' the Australian public from. No pathos can be evoked by the number, nr03-0054-02. Yet when confronted with the face of Rajabi Abdul Azim, a face that in an instant conveys years of suffering, grief and loss, one is indeed 'unable to escape responsibility'.[288] The encounter with the face makes present the interdependency and responsibility that comes with being a member of the human family. In the words of Levinas, 'signification, the intelligible, is being showing itself in its nonhistorical simplicity, its absolutely irreducible unqualifiable nakedness, existing "before" history and "before" culture.'[289]

Herein lies the potency and importance of narrative. Narrative, as stated previously, defies the permanence of vision brought about by the sort of reductive procedures of exclusion spoken about by Foucault and utilized against Australian asylum seekers. Narrative by its very nature is embodied. It emerges from people of history and simultaneously conveys their humanity which is beyond this same history. It speaks contextually, to the present and into the future. Its potency lies in its demand of a response. In the face of narrative, one is compelled to engage with its complexity, one enters into the shades of grey that characterise every human life. The Manichean allegory, which upholds the arguments of those seeking to marginalize the Other, collapses like a house of cards. The work of narrative is not complete at the conclusion of its first utterance, but lives and finds itself rewritten in each of its recipients. Whether it be through the dialogic theories of Bakhtin or Levinas' philosophical approach, we are reminded that narrative is a constantly evolving and interdependent phenomenon. Its evolution occurs within the liminal space at the fringes of each discursive act; the space between the utterance's origin, the utterance itself, and its destination. Furthermore, since every utterance emerges from a socio-historical context, each is politically charged, reflecting its source and destination and manifesting its speech will through its accent. This desire, innate to all narrative, gives it its potency and, as history testifies, makes it the primary object of censorship from those whose power it most threatens.

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[287] *A Well Founded Fear*, television program, SBS Corporation, Australia, 19 November 2008, Directed and produced by Anne Delaney.
[288] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2006, p.33.
[289] *ibid.,* p.38.

CONCLUSION

Conceived during a period of Australia's history that saw levels of anxiety and hostility towards the refugee Other reach fever pitch, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine questions pertaining to the political nature and impact of the rhetoric employed by some of Australia's leading politicians and sections of the media towards refugees from the Tampa incident in 2001 to the defeat of the Howard-led Coalition Government in 2007. The decision to employ a comparative analysis of *The West Australian* and *The Australian* newspapers is consistent with the intention to focus on the language and representations employed and disseminated by these newspapers and to evaluate their effect on the socio-political climate of the period, as well as on refugees in detention. In order to further highlight the political nature of language and representations surrounding refugees, this same methodology is employed in the analysis of refugees' self-representations conducted in the latter half of the dissertation. Inseparable from this methodology are the historical, social and political conditions that gave birth to the representations and self-representations in the first place.

The Howard Government, through its policies and rhetoric, assured Australians living in a post September 11 world that they would determine who came to their country and the circumstances in which they came.[290] Though many saw such an assertion as a reasonable declaration of the nation's sovereign rights, to those with an understanding of Australia's history it was reminiscent of the White Australia Policy and other draconian and racially motivated policies of the nation's not too distant past. The nation's borders were tightened and when the Norwegian freighter Tampa, carrying 438 refugees, sought entry into Australian waters, it was refused permission and told to take its 'cargo' elsewhere. Tampa was a watershed moment for the government of the day, which enjoyed renewed popularity for its hard-lined stance and went on to win an election, the result of which previously was uncertain. The Tampa incident marked a distinct hardening in Australia's approach to refugees. Though mandatory detention was initially introduced in 1992 by the then Keating Labor Government, it was under Prime Minister Howard that its application was

[290] Ien Ang, 'From White Australia to Fortress Australia: The Anxious Nation in the New Century', in Laksiri Jayasuria, David Walker & Jan Gothard (eds), *Legacies of White Australia: Race Culture and Nation*, University of Western Australia Press, 2003, p.64.

most severely exercised. As a key component of the government's Pacific Solution, mandatory detention was designed to discourage refugees from fleeing to Australia as a safe haven. Those refugees who did seek entry to the country found themselves detained indefinitely and in a constant state of uncertainty regarding their future. Placed literally on the fringes of Australian society, they found themselves both geographically and emotionally isolated.

To justify its approach and limit criticism of its policies, the government enacted a range of discursive and political procedures. These amounted to the prohibition of refugees' voices in mainstream society, ensuring their cries like their bodies would remain cut off from the nation they had hoped would provide them refuge. When their voices did manage to seep into the realm of public discourse, they met a range of representational procedures that sought to discredit them as inhumane and certainly unworthy of a place in this 'civilized' nation.

During the course of this dissertation I have argued that much of this intolerance demonstrates the determination of sections of the Australian community to Orientalise the Other. Through a comparative analysis of the reporting of *The West Australian* and *The Australian* newspapers it is argued that *The West Australian* bought into, and even promoted, efforts to marginalize the refugee Other based on the threat to Australian culture they allegedly posed. In so doing, the newspaper cooperated with some of Australia's most prominent politicians in promoting what Peter Gale has rightly identified as New Racism, prejudice based on cultural rather than biological indicators.

I maintain that in the culmination of the reductive representational and political procedures enacted against refugees in Australia the project of Orientalism was upheld. Indeed the very motivation for the implementation of these procedures was to maintain the myth of White Anglo-Saxon superiority over the uncivilized, non-white Other. As I suggest in chapter two, it is highly unlikely that such measures would be taken against so called 'illegal immigrants' if they were Anglo-Saxon or European in appearance. In fact, one need not look any further for proof of this than the knowledge that at the time of the Tampa affair the largest group of illegal immigrants, in the true sense of the word, was from the United Kingdom. According

to a report in the *Sunday Times*[291], written at the height of the Tampa affair, some 58,700 people from the United Kingdom, mainly England and Ireland flouted the conditions of their visas and were in the country without any legal authority.[292] However, rather than being called 'illegals' or 'queue jumpers', the Howard Government referred to these white Anglo-Saxons as unlawful non-citizens.[293] At the levels of both action and rhetoric this clearly contrasts with the rapid response 438 refugees aboard the Tampa approaching our shores drew from the government.

In contrast to the coverage of *The West Australian* and other sections of the media, *The Australian* played an important role in challenging the prejudicial assumptions disseminated by the government regarding asylum seekers, achieving this largely by refusing to concede to age old assumptions of non-white inferiority. While *The Australian* played an important role in challenging the assumptions of Orientalism, the most vital players in challenging the Orientalist's project are refugees themselves. Though the government constructed a matrix of reductive procedures to prevent the dissemination of refugee discourses, the time came when the voices of detainees, through texts such as *From Nothing to Zero* and *Asylum: Voices behind the razor wire*, started to reach the Australian public; the importance of these texts lies in their ability to introduce diachrony: terms such as 'illegals' and 'boat people' are dispelled with and replaced by 'Mother', 'Father', 'Brother', 'Sister', 'Daughter', 'Son', 'Grandmother', 'Grandfather', 'Granddaughter', 'Grandson', words which remind the reader of the common humanity they share with the authors of the stories they read.

The power of these narratives is revealed not only through the efforts to suppress them, but also through their ability to demand a response. They are politically

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[291] According to the most recent figures taken from the Department of Immigration website, as of June 2004, 51,000 unlawful non-citizens had overstayed their visa, down from an estimate of 59, 800. Those who had overstayed their visas by more than 10 years made up 10% of this number. The largest number of overstayers, approximately 5,500 came from the United Kingdom with an approximate number of 5,200 coming from the United States constituting the second largest group. The 2006 figures indicate another drop in the number of overstayers, with the USA making up the largest group with 4,840 overstayers followed by the United Kingdom with 3820. Indications suggest that the figures provided by the Sunday Times were the most accurate available for the period of publication of the cited article. Australian Government, 'Appendix C Estimate of Unlawful Non-Citizens', Department of Immigration and Citizenship, www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/popflows2003-4/ch5_pt4.pdf , [29 March 2009].

[292] Kerry Anne Walsh, 'Who are really the queue-jumpers?', *The Sunday Times*, 2 September 2001, p.40.

[293] *ibid*

charged because they emerge from a particular set of socio-historical circumstances and respond to these same circumstances. They challenge the reductive procedures which gave birth to them, and by incorporating the impact of these same procedures into their story they recreate, reinterpret and dare to re-imagine a future that incorporates their story. In a very real sense the narratives of refugees are working to recreate the identity of the nation state to which they speak. Perhaps more than any other reason, this is why they are met with such resistance. 'As the German novelist Gunter Grass points out, refugees become "irritants to the rigid orders of the self", constantly reminding others of the arbitrariness and contingence of identity borders and boundaries. In this way, refugees help remake the conventional language in which tales of the so-called citizenry, national community, and territorial state are told.'[294] It is perhaps a reflection of our relative immaturity as a nation[295] that we have yet to learn how to let go of the myth of centrality which lies at the heart of statecraft, and truly embrace our multiculturalism. For Australia to remain viable in a constantly changing world, it is essential the nation continually re-appropriates its meta-narratives to incorporate the constant social and political shifts with which it is faced.[296]

While this was a task which proved beyond the Howard Government's capabilities or willingness, it remains the challenge that lies ahead of our country if we are to emerge as a genuinely mature global resident. In this post-Howard era, our nation has the opportunity to embrace the stories of refugees. Their narratives will mark a moment in the nation's history and if we are to learn from our past it is essential that we listen to the voices of all of those who contribute to this country. The Rudd Government's apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples in February of 2008 gives one cause for optimism that the voices of refugees will also be recognised and heard.

History demonstrates that Australia has continued to find ways to abrogate its responsibilities towards those who do not look or sound 'Australian'. Our First

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[294] Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p.15.
[295] I acknowledge that Australia is an ancient land with a rich cultural heritage. Recent evidence suggests Australia's indigenous peoples have inhabited the land for up to 60, 000 years, making them one of the world's oldest cultures.
[296] Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p.46.

Nations, immigrants, and most recently, refugees have borne the consequences of this tendency. Voices from history, such as Levinas, warn us that while it is important the voice of the Other be listened to, a full appreciation of the experiences of the Other can only ever be fully gained when an encounter with the face occurs. Only in encountering embodied stories does one come close to walking in the Other's shoes and sharing his/her humanity:

> One is moved to alleviate the pain of others because as an embodied being, the self enjoys the elements, is happy through them, and is thereby also able to appreciate viscerally the pain of physical suffering, deprivation, disease and ageing in others…in a moral vulnerability to the other's vulnerability, suffering for other's suffering, man lives for a future beyond his own death, whether in the immediacy of the face of the other person whose needs are one's responsibilities—'unto death,' if need be—or in consideration of an unredeemed humanity and its future generations, for whom one is bound by the demand of justice.[297]

[297] Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2006, p.xxxiii.

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