'I had to do something. I couldn't do nothing!': citizen action in support of asylum seekers in Australia 2001-2006

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‘I had to do something. I couldn’t do nothing!’:

Citizen Action in Support of Asylum Seekers in Australia 2001-2006.

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This thesis is an examination of social action opposed to particular Australian government policies. The policies concerned are those affecting people seeking asylum without authorised entry documents. The period examined is from 2001 to 2006. It is argued that the social action contributed to the achievement of shifts in public opinion and policy during this period.

The context in which this local action is examined is the international system of asylum, and the responses of developed countries to flows of incoming asylum seekers. Political rhetoric has often demonised those seeking asylum, and the term 'asylum seeker' increasingly has negative connotations for many people in developed countries. At the same time, groups of people in asylum destination countries such as Australia, have also responded with support and assistance for asylum seekers.

Using ethnographic methodology and drawing on theories from refugee studies, and collective action and social movement theory, this thesis explores the nature of this particular response. Interviews were conducted with more than 90 people from across Australia, who opposed government policies which criminalised and excluded asylum seekers. In contrast, these people were involved in advocacy and support. Analysis of these interviews reveals the complex interactions amongst and between asylum seekers, advocates, activists, and government. Motivations and emotions of social action are examined in the study, as are tensions over objectives and strategies, and the construction of collective experience and identity.

The analysis illustrates the impact of the activism of the asylum seekers themselves upon the social action in terms of interactions, relationships and joint actions between asylum seekers and citizens. The thesis finds practical and symbolic resonances within the social action, which transcend the particularity of the Australian situation. From this, the potential for a human-to-human dimension of common humanity to build connections between privileged and excluded peoples, is theorised. Through this exploration, contributions are made to both refugee studies literature and to collective action and social movement literature. The research illustrates the impact upon both areas, of the wider structures of globalisation. Conversely, it also illustrates the way in which local action can provide innovative paths for wider social actions and visions.

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Abstract

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To David

For Unfailing Support

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Contents

Publications

Work in this thesis has been published elsewhere:

Journal articles:

Gosden, D 2005, 'What can ordinary people do?: Reflections on advocacy', in *Migration Action*, vol.XXV11, no.3, pp. 26-32.

Peer reviewed journal articles:

Gosden, D 2006, ' "What if no one had spoken out against this policy?" The rise of asylum seeker and refugee advocacy in Australia', in *Portal: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, vol.3, no.1.

Gosden, D 2007, 'From humanitarianism to human rights and justice: a way to go', in *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, vol.13, no.1, pp. 149-176.

Book chapters:

Gosden, D 2007, 'Remembering' in S. Mares & L. Newman (eds), *Acting from the Heart*, Finch Publishing. Sydney.

E Book chapters:

Gosden, D 2011, 'Collective Action in Support of Asylum Seekers: The Action of a Minority Australian Population in the Period 2001-2006', in P. Marcelino (ed) *Home in Motion: The Shifting Grammar of Self and Stranger*, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford, UK, accessed on 31st October 2011, <https://www.interdisciplinarypress.net/online-store/ebooks/diversity-and-recognition/home-in-motion>

Conference presentations:

Gosden, D 2010, 'Collective Action in support of asylum seekers: the actions of a minority Australian population in the period 2001-2006', Paper presented at the 2nd. Global Conference: Strangers, Aliens and Foreigners, Oriel College, Oxford, September 20-22, accessed 19 February 2012,
<http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/gosdenpaper.pdf>.

Abbreviations

AAR	Australians Against Racism
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACHSS	Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AI	Amnesty International
AIA	Amnesty International Australia
AJA	A Just Australia
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASAO	Asylum Seeker Advocacy Organisation
ASRC	Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
CARAD	Coalition Assisting Refugees And Detainees
CASE for Refugees	Centre for Advocacy, Support and Education for Refugees
CHILOUT	Children out of Detention
COF	Circle of Friends
CRR	Centre for Refugee Research
DIMA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
DIMIA	Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DUA	Designated Unauthorised Arrivals
HCA	High Court of Australia
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
IDC	Immigration Detention Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
JAS	Justice for Asylum Seekers
LNP	Liberal National Party
NASA-Vic	Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies in Victoria
NCCA	National Council of Churches Australia
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PICUM	Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
RAC	Refugee Action Coalition
RAR	Rural Australians for Refugees
RCOA	Refugee Council of Australia
RRAN	Refugee Rights Action Network
SLCLC	Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee
TPV	Temporary Protection Visa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney
WARA	Western Australian Refugee Alliance

Definitions

Asylum Seeker

An asylum seeker is a person who has fled their own country and applies to the government of another country for protection as a refugee (AHRC 2012).

Refugee

A refugee is a person who is outside their own country and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their:

race
religion
nationality
membership of a particular social group
political opinion
(AHRC 2012)

Boat People

'Boat people' are those who come to Australia by sea without authority. … Even though the number of people involved is relatively small, Australia's treatment of them raises significant and fundamental human rights issues (HREOC 1998:2).

Introduction

Many developed countries have responded to increases in flows of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in past decades with harsh policies which are designed to obstruct and deter those flows of human beings. The same phenomenon has occurred in Australia. However, in certain aspects, Australian policies have been harsher than those in other developed countries. One of these aspects concerns the way in which Australian policies differentially affect those seeking asylum, depending on their mode of arrival. Those who arrive on the Australian mainland by air with the required entry documents, and then seek asylum in Australia, are permitted to live in the community while their claims are being processed. Those who arrive without authorised entry documents and then seek asylum in Australia, are mostly people who arrive by boat (often at Australian territory which has been excised under legislation) and are known as 'boat people' [1]. These people have, since the late 1980s, been detained in immigration detention centres until they are either determined to be refugees under the criteria of the Refugees' Convention, or until they are determined to not be refugees, and are deported. In some cases, this has led to them being held in immigration detention for periods of up to seven years. Such policies and practices contrast with international refugee and human rights conventions which state that asylum seekers should not be penalised for their mode of arrival in a signatory country, [2] since the act of seeking asylum may require them to cross country borders without prior permission.

This and other policies which treat this group of asylum seekers more harshly than other groups of asylum seekers, had been in operation for more than a decade before the period under study. Opposition to these policies had been mounted during that prior period. However, events which occurred in 2001, including repeated protests by asylum seekers in immigration detention centres and by their supporters; media exposure of

[1] 'Under the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth) (the Migration Act), asylum seekers who arrive on the Australian mainland without a valid visa *must* be held in immigration detention until they are granted a visa or removed from Australia … asylum seekers who arrive without a valid visa in excised offshore places such as Christmas Island *may* be detained. The policy of the Australian government is that asylum seekers who arrive in excised offshore places will be subject to mandatory detention' (AHRC 2012).

[2] Australia signed the Refugees Convention (the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees) in 1954 and the 1967 Protocol Relating to Refugees in 1973.

video footage from within immigration detention centres; the refusal of the Australian government to permit asylum seekers rescued at sea by the vessel *Tampa,* to enter Australian territory; and the later drowning at sea of another group of asylum seekers journeying to Australia, became well publicised nationally and internationally.

The publicity surrounding these events increased awareness of the issue for the Australian public. However, of all of these events, that involving the vessel *Tampa* occasioned the greatest publicity and the most intense public response. Political and social constructions around the event facilitated a rise within the Australian population of both greater passionate support for government policies in regard to asylum seekers, and also greater passionate opposition to them. The former response was associated with fear within the Australian community at violation of Australian borders. The latter response was associated with shame at the government's treatment of asylum seekers, and empathy for the asylum seekers' situation. This thesis is concerned with the latter response. Although larger in size than the opposition mounted during the previous decade, it still represented a minority opinion within the Australian population. Yet, in an era in which the international asylum regime is increasingly under strain, the challenge that this social action constituted to anti-asylum seeker political and social trends, is of significance. The thesis explores the meaning of that significance.

Before my engagement in this issue as a researcher, I was involved as a community advocate and activist in support for asylum seekers and in opposition to these policies. After a number of years of this involvement, I wished to situate my understanding of the social action and of the issue generally, within a broader analytical framework. In particular, I wished to locate it within the literature and analysis of the global situation of asylum seekers and refugees. In addition, in order to examine the social action, I turned to the anthropological and sociological literature which had formed the basis of my social science education. I sought, through these research paradigms, a more holistic understanding of the issues involved and the actions taken by those who opposed the policies.

One of the tensions within anthropology and sociology is between explicating the wider historical, economic, political and social structures within which particular human action is situated, *and* explicating the subjective dimension of meaning-making which

individuals and groups bring to their actions. However, the two dimensions are inextricably intertwined, with structural aspects facilitating or constraining individual and group behaviour, and individuals and groups acting upon their structural environment. The thesis therefore engages with the task of seeking to understand this social action from these various perspectives, i.e. of the aspects of intention and experience for those who were involved in the social action; the structural factors within which they operated in the local and national context; the impact of the global flows of asylum seekers to countries such as Australia and the responses by those countries; and the wider structural factors influencing those movements and those responses.

Chapter 1 explores the dominant cultural constructions in Australian society which were current at the beginning of the period studied. The chapter examines the way in which geographical, historical, economic and political circumstances had influenced these over time. The chapter also analyses the way in which these cultural constructions were utilised in representations of the nation and its responsibilities towards asylum seekers and refugees. It then examines the impact of particular 2001 events and representations of them, in reinforcing those dominant constructions for the majority of the population and in producing a counter effect for a minority of the population.

Chapter 2 situates these national events and responses by reviewing refugee studies literature concerned with the wider global context of asylum seeker and refugee flows and the responses of receiving countries. It also explores the effect of these aspects on local populations. Although fear and hostility have been documented as common responses of the publics of receiving States, this has not always been the case. The chapter also reviews the literature of the less common response of support and solidarity for asylum seekers and refugees, by sections of local populations. It then engages with the work of two theorists in particular, refugee studies theorist Matthew Gibney and philosopher Seyla Benhabib, in exploring political and social solutions to the current impasse of increased State resistance to increased movements of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Chapter 3 engages with the literature and analysis of collective action and social movements. This is a literature specifically focussed on the analysis of social behaviour in which individuals come together in actions which attempt to bring change to the

societal status quo. The chapter examines this literature for theories which will contribute most valuably to analysis of this particular social action. It also reviews the way in which current theories of social action, collective action and social movements reflect the impact in recent decades of the historical, economic and political forces known as globalisation. After considering these various aspects, the work of sociologist Alberto Melucci is chosen as a guiding tenet for the thesis.

Chapter 4 details the methodologies and methods used in the research. It illustrates the ethnographic paradigm within which the research is situated, and it explores my positioning within that as a participating advocate and activist as well as researcher. The ethnographic research is informed by the qualitative research theories of social constructivism and critical inquiry. Together, these theories acknowledge the experiential existence of multiple constructions of reality, at the same time as situating them within empirical structures of constraint and enablement, equity and inequity. The chapter also details the research methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, and documents the application of those methods in the process of the research.

Chapter 5 begins the empirical findings section of the thesis, based on data obtained from analysis of participant observation and in-depth interviews. The chapter introduces the narratives within which interviewees located their involvement in the social action, from their first awareness of the issue through to their ongoing involvement, and it examines the range of emotions and motivations which interviewees gave for their involvement. The chapter analyses their perceptions of a violation through the government policies, of both their personal and national identity, as well as their hopes and visions for Australian society. In this regard, engagement in the social action often complied with a personal moral necessity for action, with non-action perceived as untenable. In analysing the data in this chapter, the insights of philosophers Rosalyn Diprose and Raimond Gaita have been particularly valuable.

Chapter 6 continues the narratives of the interviewees. It documents a bridging of the physical and social distance between the asylum seekers and the Australians sympathetic to their situation, and it explores the interactions that followed between the two groups. The chapter examines the way in which, through those interactions, the

projects of each group were enhanced, and joint asylum seeker and supporter projects were undertaken. The chapter also details the relations of solidarity and care which often ensued between individuals in these groups of asylum seekers and supporters, and analyses the impact that these relationships had upon the social action of the Australian supporters.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 explore different aspects of the development of the collective action in support of asylum seekers. Together, they provide an ethnographic analysis of the non-discursive and discursive actions of those supporting the asylum seekers, and of the meanings attached to that action and discourse.

Chapter 7 explores the range of individual and group actions which were pursued, in attempts to assist the asylum seekers and to bring change to the policies. It documents a plurality of perspectives and strategies. Despite this variation and divergence, the chapter elucidates the centrality for participants, of a core concern with the well being of the asylum seekers. While the primary intent of the research was to examine the social action of that part of the Australian population supportive of the asylum seekers, the chapter also illustrates the agency and actions of the asylum seekers themselves, and the important way in which this triggered and facilitated the actions of supporters.

Chapter 8 continues this exploration by examining the discursive and non-discursive communicative actions of the participants. The chapter explores the development and communication of a counter discourse. It also explores the constraints on this development and communication, within an environment in which the government held superior resources of control of information, as well as of the legitimacy normally accorded to authoritative discourse. The chapter examines the innovative and creative actions which were consequently engaged with by participants, in efforts to communicate with fellow Australians and with international organisations. It also examines the role of Australian media in this process. Significantly, within the constraints of the political and media environment of the period, certain aspects of the counter discourse were more favourably received than others.

While chapter 7 and chapter 8 explore the actions and discourse of participants, chapter 9 examines these aspects from a collective action perspective. The chapter explores the

nature of the collective action that was formed; the style of its growth and development; the political and social environment within which it formed and developed; and the effect of that upon the nature of the collective action. The chapter also explores the collective action task of constructing a collective identity from amongst the diversity of perspectives and strategies examined earlier. It documents a range of tensions and internal conflicts within the collective action population; analyses the process of finding commonality within that diversity; and illuminates the way in which the collective 'We' that was formed, was grounded in the pragmatics of the situation of the asylum seekers.

Chapter 10 traces and analyses the trajectory of the collective action of 'the Australian refugee movement'. It examines the period 2001-2006, in terms of what were regarded within the narratives of interviewees as 'turning points' in that endeavour for change. In following this trajectory, the chapter documents the way in which shifting political opportunities alternately favoured or disadvantaged various aspects of the multiple roles which are required for advocates of social change, i.e. of rebel, citizen, reformer, and change agent. It documents the way in which a degree of change was achieved in this period in terms of public opinion and policy. It also highlights the fragility of such change in a political and social environment in which the issue still retained its domestic political power.

Chapter 11 analyses the data provided in the preceding chapters for the insights they provide on the social action of the participants. It explores the connections and contradictions illuminated in the research between personal, national and global phenomena, and the interactive impact of subjective and intersubjective as well as structural factors. The chapter summarises the contributions of the research to the literature of refugee studies and the literature of collective action and social movement studies. In doing so, it illuminates the way in which impacting global aspects have become intimately intertwined in contemporary life with national, local and personal aspects. The chapter argues that this in turn has affected the way in which collective action studies and refugee studies need to be analysed. One influence is from global structural factors constraining or enabling national structures. The other influence is from the impact of individual and collective subjectivity and intersubjectivity already altered by the impact of globalisation, upon perceptions of asylum and refugee issues, and upon consequent social action.

The chapter concludes by elucidating the relevance of the messages of this collective action for wider global justice action and visions. It argues that social constructions such as those developed within this collective action, carry cultural models which importantly challenge representations of asylum seekers as burdensome, alien and deviant. Within a global society which assigns a critical role to flows of information and cultural codes, a crucial role is posited for such constructions and such collective action mobilisations on behalf of vulnerable populations.

The Post-Script briefly summarises the trajectory of political and social change on asylum issues in Australia, since the end of the period studied. This summary therefore covers the period from 2007- late 2011. It reinforces the arguments developed in the thesis on the challenge for the collective action participants in engaging with a trajectory of alternating periods of progress and regression in terms of reform of the Australian asylum regime.

Appendices A-D:

Appendix A contains information on the mapping of the collective action in terms of the categorisation of sectors, of networks across and within sectors, of movements across those sectors, and of the multiple roles played by many participants in the collective action.

Appendix B contains visual representations of the sectors of the collective action.

Appendix C provides information on the process by which participants were selected and invited to participate in the research through in-depth interviews, and on the interviewees who participated.

Appendix D contains the University of New South Wales Participant Information and Consent Forms that were provided to participants in the research.

Chapter 1:
The 'Australia' that the vessel Tampa sailed into!

INTRODUCTION: A CATALYTIC EVENT

'Something has to be done to stop that flow of humanity' [3]

In August 2001, the response of the Australian government to the arrival of asylum seekers on board the Norwegian vessel, the *Tampa*, created a national and international incident. This incident resonated internationally as well as nationally, since it concerned the international 'law of rescue at sea', as well as international refugee and human rights conventions. Although the government had earlier requested assistance from near-by vessels for the asylum seekers who were on board a sinking boat, it subsequently refused permission for those rescued by the crew of the vessel *Tampa*, to be disembarked by the *Tampa* onto Australian territory. Finally, in response to unsuccessful calls by the Captain of the vessel for medical assistance for the asylum seekers, the *Tampa* entered Australian territorial waters to seek that assistance. It was then boarded by Australian SAS troops. Eventually, those asylum seekers on board were transferred to an Australian vessel as part of the government's newly formed 'Pacific Solution' [4] for asylum seekers.

These events were portrayed by the government as actions taken to protect Australian borders against alien others. This representation was accepted and replicated by the majority of the Australian media, and received as such by the majority of the population. In contrast, for a minority of Australians, the government actions represented a breach of international convention obligations, as well as a breach of moral and humanitarian obligations. Domestic public passion was stirred by these divergent representations. Despite government restrictions on media coverage of the events, digital photographs taken by *Tampa* crew showed images of the 438 rescued people on the deck of the 44,000 tonne cargo vessel to worldwide audiences. These

[3] (Prime Minister Howard 2001, quoted in Grewcock 2009:167).

[4] See Grewcock (2009:167-169) for detailed analysis of the relevant legislation, including the removal of 'unauthorised arrivals to declared third countries' (2009:169) for asylum claim processing.

images increased the impact of the event, as did the international ramifications of the government's actions.

For the Australian population, the impact was further magnified by political electoral representations of the incident. In analysing the symbolism of the event, philosopher Rosalyn Diprose notes the 'spectacular wave of disorientation' (2005:385) of the reactions of fear, anger and shame that followed within the Australian community. Indeed, the incident was reported as a catalytic one for many of the people interviewed for this thesis research, and one which often led directly into engagement in support for the rights of asylum seekers negatively affected by Australian policies. At the same time, this support represented a minority position within the Australian public, and one which would often be denigrated as un-Australian.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PERIOD

This chapter explores the many influences that combined to create the Australian political and social environment that the *Tampa* sailed into in August 2001. It does so firstly in order to contextualise the divergent responses of the Australian public to the government actions and discourse at that time. It also seeks to understand the way in which the events of the *Tampa* and other related events in 2001 and 2002, either reinforced or challenged dominant social and political constructions. Examining these aspects illuminates the challenge faced by any endeavour at bringing change to the dominant political and social attitudes and governmental policies of the period. While a minority of the population was opposed to the government actions, the majority was supportive of them. What especially marked both of these responses however, was the degree of passion invested in them. As noted earlier, the response of the majority opinion was marked by fear of the permeability of Australian borders; outrage at their penetration by asylum seekers; and support for government actions to exclude them. The response of the minority opinion was marked by empathy for the asylum seekers; outrage at government actions to exclude them from their protection rights; and shame at the violation by these actions of the international principles mentioned earlier. In order to situate the social action being studied in this thesis, this chapter therefore begins by examining a range of historical, geographical, racial, cultural, political and

economic influences that combined to create the divergent and passionate nature of these responses in this place and at this time.

Relevant history and geography

Racial determinism

Australia is an ancient continent, and human occupation has been documented for 60,000 or more years for the Indigenous peoples of the country. However, with the British colonisation of the country in 1788, a doctrine of racial determinism provided the rationale for the appropriation of Indigenous people's lands and their discriminatory treatment under this conceptual framework (Tavan 2005:12). While the British settlement which began as a penal colony, subsequently expanded with free settlers and immigrants, a conceptual framework of racial determinism and discrimination continued to operate in relation to non-European entrants (Tavan 2005:12. See also McMaster 2001). For example, the 1901 Federation of Australian states was based on an ideal of an homogenous, exclusively 'white' population, as expressed in the 'White Australia' doctrine, in overt contrast with the country's geographical position in the Asian-Pacific region.

Historically, early British settlement in Australia was perceived as having a precarious existence. For the period of federation in 1901, Gwenda Tavan also records deep anxieties about strategic insecurity. She also notes the legislative representation of this anxiety in the White Australia policy. These historical attitudes, represented in legislation and policy until 1973, were culturally maintained to a significant degree by various mythologies of Australia's isolation from Britain as 'the mother country', and of the threat of invasion from the Asia-Pacific area. They were also strengthened by the reality of its strategic vulnerability during the Second World War, which was remarkably (compared to most countries), the first time since the period of white settlement that the country's defences had been breached.

Immigration

In terms of immigration issues and their importance to the community, Australia's geography as an island continent had provided it with what has been described as 'an enviable ability to control immigration' (Crock et al. 2006:26). This aspect has been pertinent in shaping both the nature and size of its population, as well as in continuing

to reflect dominant cultural ideologies. The formulation of refugee policies has also been significantly shaped by that influence, and the majority of refugees in Australia have arrived as authorised by and chosen by the Australian government.

With increasing public fears following the near invasion by Japanese troops in World War II, the slogan 'populate or perish' was revived (Jupp 2002:11). The establishment of a designated Department of Immigration after the Second World War was central to the mass immigration program planned by the government to increase its population (Neumann 2004:110). When British and other Caucasian migrants could not be recruited quickly enough to supply the demand, immigration officials increasingly focussed on the possibilities of selecting from those in refugee camps following the war.

It is from this period, David Marr and Marian Wilkinson argue, that the word 'refugee' took on a particular meaning for Australians which it never subsequently lost (2003:35), as Australian officials 'were sent to Europe to *choose* suitable white refugees' (2003:35). Ever since, they observe, 'genuine' refugees have been conceptualised by Australians as 'people who wait patiently in camps far away for us to come and select them' (2003:35). This orientation has continued to be evident in Australian governments' preference for refugee intakes through agreements with United Nations and other international agencies, rather than from applications by asylum seekers in Australian territory.

It has been argued that a culture of immigration department control of refugee policy has also strongly shaped Australian responses to refugees (Neumann 2004:108; Jupp 2002; Palmer 2007; Grewcock 2009). Tavan, for example, observes that there has been 'a stronger tradition of public administration and state intervention in Australia than countries like Britain and the United States' (2005:23), noting that Australians have generally accepted 'the authoritative role of the bureaucracy in public life' (2005:23). [5] Specifically, she observes, the Australian public has not concerned itself with immigration policy unless immigration department decisions 'blatantly contradicted

[5] Amy Nethery notes that the Australian constitution enables the Executive to 'incarcerate certain categories of people, including non-citizens' (2010:2). It does however, indicate that administrative detention should be for administrative purposes only and not for the purpose of punishment. Yet, she observes, since 1992 the power of the courts and other bodies to 'regulate the policy and practice of immigration detention' (2010:2) has been steadily eroded.

ideals of equity and justice' (2005:23). Rather, any concerns about the humanitarian ramifications of policies such as the White Australia policy, were countered by the strength of the 'dominant racial ideologies and legal-bureaucratic conventions' (2005:23) of the society. One hundred years after the 1901 Federation, Tavan observes, a similar scenario would be played out, and 'a large section of the Australian public would apparently accept at face value' (2005:23) their political leaders' reassurance 'that refugee policy was being handled in a professional and ethical manner' (2005:23).

Globalisation and associated economic and social change in Australia

Michael Grewcock and Tavan both illustrate the way in which government discourses, policies and practices of exclusion which accompanied cultural fears of invasion, have historically functioned as official remedies against perceived dangers. These patterns of control and exclusion have traditionally provided a symbolic protection for Australian citizens. However, with the advent in recent decades of economic, cultural and political forces such as globalisation, countries have become increasingly unable to isolate their territories and populations from the uncertainties and impacts of a global economy and culture in flux. At times of economic and social upheaval, as have occurred worldwide in recent decades, it is not surprising that such historical cultural fears would become reactivated (McMaster 2002a). Community retreats to ideologies of homogeneity and tradition, such as have been documented in Australia by Ghassan Hage (1998), provide symbolic reassurance for sections of populations in such periods. They also provide a fertile arena for exploration by political parties of the electoral advantages of championing those ideologies.

In terms of the impact of globalisation, the 1980s and 1990s in Australia were a period of economic rationalism, rapid economic and social change, and new 'winners and losers'. David McKnight observes that two upheavals occurred in Australia in this period. One was caused by global economic forces, and the other by broader social and cultural change. In the former, the working lives of people changed as economic efficiency became the new measure of value (2005:139). In the latter, personal roles and accompanying identities, including national identities, were brought into flux (2005:139). McKnight argues that these changes made Australia a more tolerant, diverse society, just as the economic changes spurred economic dynamism, but that with

these economic and social changes, came losses as well as gains, in terms of the loss of stable livelihoods and the ebbing of familiar truths (2005:154).

Amidst a rise in representations of rights and opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups, and a decline in economic opportunities for particular, previously employed sections of Australian society (Megalogenis 2006), these social and cultural changes often became symbolically associated with the negative impact experienced from economic globalisation factors (Viviani 1996:143-148). There was little that individuals could do to stem the effects of globalisation or of the broader social change philosophies which had swept across the world. A perception of threat to a specific national identity was something that was more easily identifiable as a concern, and a personal rallying point. It was in this economic and social environments, for example, that the political party One Nation emerged and developed.

One Nation

A number of authors note the appearance of the Independent MP Pauline Hanson in 1996, and the political party One Nation which she formed in 1997, as having a profound influence on subsequent Australian political, media and community discourse, including issues of immigration and asylum (Grewcock 2009:262; McKnight 2005). George Megalogenis suggests that those displaced by the economic impact of globalisation, and Australia's adaptations to it, were attracted to One Nation politics because of their sense of economic and social powerlessness (2006:223). He argues that the experience of economic and social displacement caused this constituency to look for more tangible scapegoats (2006:223), and that their attention can be observed to have moved from one social and economic issue to another, in which they perceived themselves to be victims of other more fortunate sectors of the community (2006:225). In addition to what was perceived as the unfairness of an unequal distribution of economic loss and gain within the society during the period of economic change, Indigenous issues, feminism, multiculturalism, migration, and asylum seeking were all part of this focus. One Nation provided this section of the electorate with a political voice which articulated their anxieties and concerns (Hanson 1996).

The construction of 'culture war'

What has been described as Australia's 'culture war' had followed an earlier North American neo-conservative version which denounced the values of 'the radical social movements of the 1970s' (McKnight 2005:143). The Australian version followed a similar trajectory but also focussed on issues of particular relevance to Australians, including contentious debates from the 1980s onwards about Australian history and Indigenous rights, as well as the racial composition of Australian society. In this period, what had existed as a traditional distinction of disparity of power between a 'big business' minority and a traditional 'working class' majority became reconstructed primarily as a cultural divide. In this new construction, the divide was categorised in terms of an 'intellectual elite' who supported multiculturalism and associated social change philosophies and policies, and a majority 'mainstream' of 'ordinary' Australians who did not (Brett 2004; Hindness and Sawer 2004; Higley and Pakulski 2004; Dymond 2004; Cahill 2004; Mickler 2004; Johnson 2004; Scalmer and Goot 2004; Wilson and Breusch 2004).

The development of this backlash against what is commonly referred to as 'elite opinion' became an increasing phenomenon in the 1990s in Australia, both culturally and in media and political discourse (Lygo 2004; McKnight 2005). In this construction, 'elites' were identified primarily in terms of intellectual support for a range of social justice issues and anti-discrimination policies. In contrast, regardless of the relative wealth, power or influence of the speaker, support for opposition to these philosophies and policies was treated as exempt from this 'elite' categorisation. In addition, while a number of politicians identified themselves with public concerns on these cultural issues, consecutive Australian governments continued to expand those factors of economic globalisation which had resulted in local economic displacement. In this regard, political support for symbolic politics often masked a lack of structural support for those displaced by the economic forces of globalisation.

One of the ways in which this 'culture war' was played out in Australia from the 1980s onwards, was in terms of a desire for a communitarian focus around an earlier Anglo-Australian mode of belonging, which was projected as being in contrast to an Australian cosmopolitanism which advocated a multicultural Australia (McKnight 2005). With both major political parties in an embrace with the same free-market orientation to the

economy, cultural political orientations provided increasing areas for differentiation. One Nation had a substantial electoral impact with the potential for holding a balance of power in the 1998 federal elections (Grewcock 2009:262). In this political climate, Grewcock argues, a pattern was established of the government (LNP) appropriating One Nation's agenda on issues such as 'immigration, population and social cohesion' (ON 1998, cited in Grewcock 2009:264).

A discourse of anxiety over social cohesion, immigration, multiculturalism and economic and social change then became focussed on asylum seekers as a symbol of much that was perceived to be in the process of being undermined. The association having been made, asylum seekers provided an easy target for political and media scapegoating in Australia as elsewhere (van Dijk 1997). This political and social climate; the construction over some decades of an association of 'progressive' social justice views with an elite mentality at odds with the concerns of 'ordinary' Australians; the single ownership of the majority of newspapers in capital cities by one news corporation; and its championing of an 'anti-elite' discourse (Lygo 2004), were all part of the environment into which the asylum seekers on board the *Tampa* would arrive in 2001.

Australian policies and discourses towards asylum seekers from the late 1970s.

The specific governmental discourses, policies and practices of exclusion of particular groups of asylum seekers had been developing for some time. Mary Crock, Ben Saul and Azadeh Dastyari observe that Australia's experience of asylum seekers coming by boat had been 'episodic, reflecting disturbances in the region and the opening of people-smuggling routes' (2006:26), and that 'boat people' have arrived in 'fairly well defined phases' (2006:36). The specificity of the governmental and public responses to the different phases of asylum seeker arrivals often corresponded to the dominant economic and political factors of these periods.

A tracing of the phases of these arrivals from the mid 1970s onwards, illustrates the way in which Australian refugee policy was repeatedly influenced by divergent foreign policy and domestic constituency concerns, as well as by cultural conceptions of the nation's identity in terms of an Anglo-Celtic culture vulnerably located in the Asia

Pacific region. However, refugee policy was also influenced from the 1970s by conceptions of a multicultural nation with an increasingly cosmopolitan internationalist identity, and by the moral imperatives of human rights associated with these conceptions (McMaster 2001). This complex mix reflects the changing nature of world events and of Australian society in these decades.

The 1976-1985 phase

The first phase of arrivals was that of Vietnamese people fleeing Vietnam after the fall of the South Vietnamese government during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Crock et al. 2006:36; Viviani 1984; McMaster 2001). In a period which had been coloured by the politics of the Vietnam War and Australia's involvement in support of the regime of South Vietnam, none of these people were placed in immigration detention, and all were granted permanent residency (Crock et al. 2006:29). Although an officially administered refugee programme had been introduced in 1977, and community support and good will encouraged by the then government (LNP), public disquiet was still evident, as media reports of 'invasions' (McMaster 2001:73) from 'the "yellow peril" and "the hordes from the north" ' (McMaster 2001:73) fuelled old fears. At the same time, Don McMaster argues, this period also marks a turning point for the growth in some sections of the Australian community of humanitarian, internationalist and anti-racist values, which had a 'cosmopolitan definition of immigration' (2001:53) that matched the ongoing development of official multiculturalist policies.

The 1985-1995 phase

By 1989, following years of exodus from war torn countries in South-East Asia, an international Comprehensive Plan of Action on Indo-Chinese refugees (CPA) had been adopted by the UNHCR and concerned countries, including Australia, to resolve the situation (Robinson 1998; Towle 2006; Davies 2008). Around approximately the same period in the early 1990s, Australia had 'a major role in the Paris Peace Agreements' (McMaster 2001:75), in negotiations to resolve the situation in Cambodia. Crock et al. observe that although the UN Peace Plan operation in Cambodia, and Australia's role in it, was a significant achievement in terms of international issues (2006:36), it appeared to negatively effect Australia's treatment of Cambodian people seeking asylum in Australia from 1989 (Crock et al. 2006:36. See also McMaster 2001:74-76). They note that people fleeing conflict in Cambodia and persecution by the Khmer Rouge came to

Australia as boat people (Crock et al. 2006:36. See also Viviani 1984, 1996; McMaster 2001). However, when these 'boat people' arrived between 1989 and 1992, they were labelled as 'economic migrants' by the then federal government (ALP), 'on the basis that the conflict in Cambodia was under control' (Crock et al. 2006:36). From this time onwards, Crock et al. observe, the Australia government 'became increasingly hostile to, and obsessed with, boat people' (2006: 36. See also Grewcock 2009).

These authors argue that although these arrivals were small in number with only 654 people arriving between 1989 and 1992, this phase represents the genesis of Australia's policy of mandatory immigration detention (Crock et al.2006:29). In contrast to the treatment of the earlier phases of boat arrivals, these people were placed in Australian immigration detention centres from 1989 onwards (Crock et al 2006). In 1992, legislation was passed which made the detention of unauthorised arrivals mandatory, and limited the role of the courts in reviewing detention decisions (Crock et al. 2006:36). In regard to government discourse at the time, Grewcock points to 'consistent attempts to question the legitimacy of those continuing to flee Indo-China' (2009:121. See also Crock et al. 2006:36; Viviani 1996). In addition, the concept of 'queue jumping' was repeatedly emphasised in governmental discourse, in relation to the actions of asylum seekers arriving without authorised entry documents (Grewcock 2009:121-122). Indeed, Grewcock argues, beginning with the treatment of these Indo-Chinese boat arrival asylum seekers of the late 1980s, a continuing combination of government discourses, policies and practices was to bring about an enduring public perception of asylum seekers as 'objects of suspicion' (2009:130).

Against this background, more boat arrivals began from 1994 to 1997, carrying predominantly Vietnamese asylum seekers who had been resettled in China in the 1980s under the CPA (McMaster 2001:89-90), and further restrictive legislation and forced repatriations ensued. These government actions were accompanied by sensationalist media headlines of refugee invasions, as well as by passionate opposition from Australian refugee, human rights and humanitarian groups (McMaster 2001:92). However, in contrast to the collective action which arose following the government actions of 2001, much smaller numbers of opponents were involved in this period. This was so despite the parallels of draconian legislation and desperate attempts by asylum seekers to assert their human rights. Australian lawyers who were involved as legal

advocates for affected asylum seekers in this earlier period, later commented on this difference. As one explained of the earlier period:

> There weren't many people really that knew what was going on at all. Just a few lawyers … church people … the Refugee Council. People are becoming more aware. … I think Tampa certainly did that. It galvanised a lot of people. It was an awakening for a lot of people about the way that we treat refugees (Interviewee XS).

The 1995-2005 phase

As Crock et al. note, 'the boat people who arrived in Australia towards the end of the 1990s represented a new phase' (2006:37) of asylum seeker arrivals, 'since they came from countries more remote from Australia' (2006:37), such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The issue of asylum seeking had also developed increasing domestic political capital in the mid-late 1990s, with One Nation's presentation of these arrivals as part of an ongoing 'alien' threat to the nation (Grewcock 2009: 262-265). As onshore asylum applicants were again represented as 'taking' the places of more deserving offshore applicants, the 'equation between the unauthorised asylum seeker and the "queue jumper" ' (Grewcock 2009:130), became even more firmly entrenched.

In late 1999, the Australian Parliament enacted broad border protection legislation aimed at 'reducing people smuggling' (Crock and Saul 2002:101). Grewcock argues that at this point, refugee policy became 'inseparable from "border protection" ' (2009:154), and policing operations (2009:154-157). As he observes, 'emotive and misleading language' (2009:154) carried in the media in this period, often came directly from the federal government itself. In a 1999 ministerial media release from the Department of Immigration, for example, in a year in which numbers of asylum seekers arriving by boat totalled 3,721 (Phillips and Spinks 2009:9), came a warning to the Australian public that:

> We are facing the biggest assault to our borders by unauthorised arrivals ever (Ministerial media release quoted in Grewcock 2009:154).

On a similar theme, the public was warned by the Minister that in terms of unauthorised asylum seeker arrivals:

> If it was a national emergency several weeks ago, it's gone up something like 10 points on the Richter scale since then (Minister for Immigration quoted in Grewcock 2009:154).

As Grewcock and numerous other authors observe - in terms of emergencies or crises, this was 'a manufactured crisis, constituted solely within the established border-policing paradigm' (Grewcock 2009:154). Despite the introduction of a distinctive refugee policy in the 1970s in response to the first arrivals of boat people, with which the then government (LNP) had asserted a belief in 'community willingness to assist the dispossessed and displaced from overseas in a sensible and realistic way to seek sanctuary and a new life in Australia' (McMaster 2001:71), the subsequent decades had witnessed the development of a refugee policy which endorsed discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers based on their lack of authorised entrance documents, and by association, their mode of arrival (AIA 1998; HREOC 1998; Taylor S. 1998, 1999, 2000a; AI 2002; Bhagwati 2002; McMaster 2002b; Oxfam CAA 2002; Barnes 2003; HREOC 2004; Leach and Mansouri 2004; AI 2005; Corlett 2005; Glendenning et al. 2004, 2006; McMaster 2006).

DRAMATIC EVENTS

It is within this historical and political context that a number of events in late 2001 and early 2002 received widespread publicity not only nationally but also internationally, and produced divergent 'crises' for Australians - 'a crisis of fear' for the majority of the population, and a 'crisis of conscience' for a minority. In doing so, the events crystallised public opinion on the issue. Protests by asylum seekers in Australian immigration detention centres had already been recorded by the media. For the year 2000, for example, Peter Mares (2002:3-34) has detailed the occurrence of events such as hunger strikes, mass break-outs and riots at Australian immigration detention centres; the ABC '4 Corners' television program about the use of sedatives in immigration deportation proceedings; and public allegations of sexual abuse in Woomera IDC. For the mid 2001 period, Mary Crock and Ben Saul had also noted the 'groundswell of public support for the 50 or so asylum seekers who escaped from Villawood detention centre in July 2001' as signalling 'a new direction in the refugee debate – towards subversion and civil disobedience of laws which are unbearably harsh' (2002: 5). However, one month later, even before the *Tampa* incident, national television footage

of a traumatised child inside the Villawood IDC had brought another dimension to that public awareness.

The image of 'the child' in immigration detention

In Australia, children had been detained with their parents as asylum seekers. For example, the 2004 report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) into the immigration detention of children, records the numbers of children in immigration detention as 1,923 in 2000-2001 and 1,696 in 2001-2002 (2004:61). The report also records the longest period that a child had been detained in Australian immigration detention as being more than five years (2004:70). As Grewcock argues, 'the mass incarceration of thousands of children is arguably the most abusive legacy of the mandatory detention policy' (2009:224).

The harm caused by this policy was made graphically visible to television viewers in Australia one evening in mid August 2001, when the national public broadcast channel showed video footage filmed within one of the immigration detention centres. The footage was of a young child. This child was described by an advocate who had visited the family earlier in the detention centre, as 'an emaciated bundle of bones … a bizarre sight in a First World country' (Rossell 2007:5). In a joint action by a small number of detainees inside the immigration detention centre, and supportive advocates and journalists outside, a video camera had been smuggled into the centre, and a recording made which was then televised by the national broadcaster. A later asylum seeker advocate, who had been influenced by the program, described the experience of watching that footage:

> It was an 'interview' with Mohammed Badriae, father of six year old Shayan, captured shakily on a hand held video camera in stealth, his wife Zahra and baby daughter Shubnam close by. We watched him beg for help … as he cradled a catatonic little boy in his lap. It was a parent's despair, such that we could not look away (Ong 2007:160).

And as she explained further:

> And the biggest shock of all, that this was happening at Villawood Detention Centre, in Sydney, in Australia. We thought Australia could not possibly be host to such a nightmare scenario (Ong 2007:160).

The event of the exposure of this footage, and the reaction of this woman and others with similar responses, was to have a reverberating effect in subsequent years, as it resulted in a sustained campaign which, though informed by an opposition to discriminatory policies, practices and discourse towards asylum seekers in general, was focussed primarily against the immigration detention of children and their families. This was one of a number of campaigns, but it was one which was to be particularly effective over a period of years, in reaching an Australian public which was otherwise overwhelmingly in support of the government's actions.

The Tampa and September 11

By late August 2001, within two weeks of this event, the Australian government had 'provoked' the major international incident of the *Tampa* (Crock et al. 2006:5), which has already been described in this chapter (see Marr and Wilkinson 2003 for greater detail). Within a few weeks of the *Tampa* incident, the world had been shocked by the bombing of the Twin Towers in New York, USA. Many Australian politicians (still in a pre-election period) were quick to draw links 'between the incursions of boat people and the prospect for terrorist attack' (Crock and Saul 2002:2). As Crock and Saul note, 'if the *Tampa* rescuees incited any public sympathy before 11 September, there was a hardening of attitude' (2002:38) following it. In this climate, they note, 'the fugitives were transformed overnight from victims to potential terrorists' (2002:38) and new legislation was passed through parliament 'with little discussion' (2002:2).

Children Overboard

These events were followed by other related dramatic and tragic events in late 2001. In early October 2001, government claims were made of children being thrown overboard by their parents from a boat carrying them to Australia as asylum seekers. These claims were used in a discourse of demonisation, which positioned the asylum seekers as having scant regard for their children's welfare, and as people unlikely to be acceptable to the Australian population. These claims were continued throughout the period leading up to a November 2001 election, despite the fact that they were later proved to be false and for them to have been known to be false by at least one government Minister (SSCCMI 2002).

Siev-X

This event and the claims associated with it, was followed on the 19th October 2001 by the sinking of another boat (which became known as *SIEV-X*) carrying asylum seekers journeying from Indonesia to Australia. 353 men, women and children died as a result (Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Kevin 2004). A subsequent senate inquiry, investigating the role of possible Australian government 'intelligence failure or of negligence in relation to the welfare of the vessel's passengers and crew' (SSCMI 2002:xli), concluded that while it could not find 'grounds for believing that negligence or dereliction of duty was committed' (SSCCMI 2002:xlii), it nevertheless found it 'extraordinary that a major human disaster could occur in the vicinity of a theatre of intensive Australian operations, and remain undetected until three days after the event' (SSCCMI 2002:xlii). The nature of the incident has continued to be contested (Kevin 2004:238-254).

These various events have been described in detail in numerous publications (Mares 2002; Marr and Wilkinson 2003; HREOC 2004; Kevin 2004; Maley 2004; Manne 2004; Everitt 2008; O'Neil 2008; Briskman et al. 2008; Grewcock 2009; Mares and Newman 2007), as have earlier and later incidents involving the protest actions of detainees in Australian immigration detention centres (Mann 2003; Browning 2006). All of the earlier incidents had increased public awareness nationally to some degree, and international media coverage had also been attained, especially around the events at immigration detention centres in remote desert locations. However, the events associated with the *Tampa* were the most politicised and publicised, involving as they did international conventions on rescue at sea, as well as moral, humanitarian and human rights obligations, and being subject, especially in a pre-electoral period, to the range of symbolic constructions. As David Burchell describes the period:

> This was the time, more than any other in recent memory, when where you stood in Australian politics was defined by a single symbolically charged political issue - how you reacted towards the sudden influx of hundreds of foreign nationals into our immigration zones and our detention centres (2005:117).

MAJORITY SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT

In the midst of this turmoil, the popularity of the government and of the Prime Minister soared (Megalogenis 2006:262), and the nation re-elected the government with an

increased majority. Many commentators argue that the actions of the government in relation to the *Tampa* and other asylum seeker related issues in the pre-election period, produced victory for the government from what had earlier seemed to be probable defeat (Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Errington and van Onselen 2007). Other arguments posit more mundane economic issues as a continuing primary concern for most electors (Megalogenis 2006:263-264). What is clear is the majority support for the government's stance in relation to the freshly defined anxieties connecting asylum seekers and 'border protection'. In response to a poll in 2001 (31 August - 2 September, and 9-10 October), for example, there was a 77% strong agreement or agreement with the government policy of preventing boats carrying asylum seekers from entering Australian waters, and an 18-20% strong disagreement or disagreement with the policy (Goot 2002:72). At other times, polls indicated even higher support for the policy (Errington and van Onselen 2007:311). In this regard, Grewcock argues that the *Tampa* event represented a defining moment, as 'border protection' discourse and measures 'took established methods of exclusion to a new level' (2009:152) and placed 'preventing a small number of unauthorised boats from reaching Australian territory at the centre of the government's national security agenda' (2009:152).

Divergent analyses of this support

Different analyses have been made of the majority support of the Australian public for the government actions in this period. Katharine Betts (2001) argues that there had been a growing trend within the Australian population 'to close the door on boat people' (2001:45), and suggests that this reflects the importance of borders in providing 'a strong sense of national community' (2001:34). She points to factors such as the increased role of people smugglers in the movement of asylum seekers and the way in which this feeds suspicion of a manipulation of the refugee system; the shift from Asian source countries to the Middle East and the negative associations made between this factor, a series of criminal events in Australia and the September 11 attack; and a desire by Australians to think of themselves as belonging to a group that has a sense of a common identity and the associated perceived threat to that 'sense of peoplehood' (2001:45).

Wayne Errington and Peter van Onselen suggest that 'perceptions of the way in which asylum seekers had arrived' (2007:305) affected the attitudes of the Australian population 'just as much as from where they came' (2007:305). They observe that 'throughout 2001, concerns about queue jumping, reports of the thousands of dollars paid by asylum seekers to people smugglers, the burning of passports and riots in immigration detention centres brought to a head public opposition to boat people' (2007:305). In addition, they note, the spectre of terrorism in this period, following the September 11 bombing in the United States, brought together many of these concerns and fears.

In turn, Adrienne Millbank situates the events of the Tampa as a 'direct provocation' (2003:26) to the Australian government, through 'the determination of a large number of boat people to force their way illegally into the country' (2003:26). She argues that Australia's national interest has been guided over decades by policy principles that make 'managed migration and a coherent refugee policy … incompatible with irregular asylum-driven migration' (2003:26). Within this system, she observes, 'being seen to be in control of entry has been a political imperative' (2003:26). In her analysis, asylum seekers represent an aggressive threat to the Australian system of managed migration and to the national interest, and the response of the government and the majority population has been an appropriate defence of that national interest as it has been historically defined.

In contrast, other analyses emphasise the political construction and electoral manipulation of the *Tampa* incident and associated events of the period (Crock and Saul 2002:36; Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Kevin 2004; Grewcock 2009). Grewcock points for example, to the government's 'carefully devised media strategy' (2009:164). As he explains, 'the jamming of the *Tampa*'s satellite phone and the no-fly zone imposed … prevented journalists gaining physical access. … Instead, they were expected to rely on carefully vetted information released by the defence minister' (2009:164). This media censorship was extended to attempt to prevent visual images of the refugees from becoming public (2009:164). Indeed, defence personnel were instructed to ensure 'that there were no personalising or humanising images taken' (Grewcock 2009:164). In a subsequent Senate Committee inquiry, it became evident that this censorship extended to any 'imagery that could conceivably garner sympathy or cause misgivings about the

aggressive new border protection regime' (SSCCM1 2002:25). Grewcock argues that this regime of media censorship ensured that 'the legitimacy of the refugees was under sustained attack' (2009:165), and other authors note that government statements at this time concerning the boat people were often 'crafted to avoid the language of refugee protection' (Crock and Saul 2002:49).

Several authors have noted the correlation between official and media representations of the period (Grewcock 2009:265-266; Pickering 2001; Manning 2004). Crock and Saul observe that at the time of the *Tampa* events, the Australian government (in pre-election mode), was quick to draw links 'between the incursions of boat people and the prospect for terrorist attack' (2002:2). In this climate, they note, 'The fugitives were transformed overnight from victims to potential terrorists' (2002:38). Grewcock argues that these governmental representations were then 'very much reflected by the media, which in turn helped set the terms of public discourse and the frameworks of interpretation around themes that the government was keen to promote' (2009:265). In relation to asylum seekers, he observes, 'there was an almost unchallenged orthodoxy that unauthorised boat arrivals represented a serious threat to Australia's borders' (2009:265),[6] and 'The concept of the alien was a constant undercurrent within this orthodoxy' (2009:265-266).[7]

For William Maley, amongst others, public reaction to Australian treatment of asylum seekers, has much to do with the 'fog of half-truths and misinformation' (2004:162) which masked 'the reality of the government's treatment of refugees' (2004:162).[8] Research by Anne Pedersen, Susan Watt and Susan Hansen supports this view. Examining what they describe as 'commonly endorsed beliefs about asylum seekers' (2006:107), their findings indicate that negative attitudes toward asylum seekers are strongly correlated with such beliefs (2006:108). Yet, in factual terms, they argue,

[6] An analysis of 'letters to the editor' in two city newspapers (the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Daily Telegraph*) following the *Tampa* events, showed that 'both newspapers' columns were filled for the next two months with an outpouring of fear about the refugee "onslaught" ' (Manning 2004:36).

[7] Research by Poynting et al. (2004) shows that media representations of refugees also intersected with 'a highly racialised framing of current events, around crime and terrorism, on a local, national and international level' (2004:14).

[8] In addition, Maley argues, in specific references by government ministers to claims 'that boat people could be either terrorists, or inferior beings … one finds the apotheosis of demonisation' (2004:148).

‘these beliefs are inaccurate’ (2006:107). In research seeking the origins of these beliefs, their findings indicate that ‘These same false beliefs were identified in public statements made by politicians’ (2006:120). Although the authors stress that they do not argue for a causal relationship, they observe that negative attitudes toward asylum seekers were ‘significantly linked to the acceptance of false information’ (2006:120), which in turn was ‘linked to public comments made by our political leaders’ (2006:120. [9, 10]

In turn, content analysis by Natascha Klocker and Kevin Dunn (2003) of government and media representations of asylum seekers in 2001 and 2002, showed that 90% of government representations were negative (2003:75) and of the newspapers surveyed, 76% were negative (2003:85). [11] Klocker argues that the explanatory framework for popular perceptions of asylum seekers as ‘a “burdensome”, “threatening” and “illegal” “Other” ’ (2004;13) are to be found in such governmental discourse (2004:13), noting an ‘hierarchical pattern of influence’ (2004:13) from government via the media to the populace (2004:13). [12] Such negative representations of asylum seekers in the official governmental discourse (Klocker and Dunn 2003; Maley 2004) and their replication in Australian media (Pickering 2001a; Manne 2004), ensured that the issue became an increasingly emotive one for the Australian public. As Diprose notes of the *Tampa* event and the asylum seekers it carried as rescued people:

> These strangers entered our lounge rooms already marked as a threat to the integrity of our borders and modes of belonging, both nationally and personally (2005:385).

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[9] See also Klocker and Dunn (2003), Augoustinos and Quinn (2003), and Saxton (2003) on governmental and media discourse.

[10] As Pedersen et al. note, ‘politicians making statements in their official capacity are expected to have more information at hand and to be better briefed than members of the general public’ (2006:108. See also van Dijk 2000 on the influential nature of political discourse).

[11] See Klocker (2004:13) in regard to statements by the Minister for Immigration Phillip Ruddock concerning asylum seekers making a ‘lifestyle choice’, ‘misrepresenting their identity’ , ‘abusing the refugee process’; ‘holding the Australian people to ransom’ with a ‘deliberate campaign of criminal activity’ . Similarly, see Klocker (2004:13) in regard to statements by the Minister that asylum seekers are ‘not fleeing persecution’ ; that they are ‘unlawful ‘; that they ‘force children to sew their lips together’ ; and that they ‘abuse our compassion’ and ‘flout our laws’ .

[12] For other analysis of government and media discourse in this period, see Klocker 2002; Saxton 2003; Augoustinos and Quinn 2003; Mares 2002; Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Lygo 2004; Kevin 2004; Every 2006, 2008; Every and Augoustinos 2007, 2008; and Grewcock 2009.

In addition, Marr and Wilkinson point out, 'the problem for boat people was always the boat: the symbol of Australia's old fears of invasion' (2003:38). Such historical cultural fears produce a vulnerability within a local population to further manipulation of those fears. Even though the numbers of asylum seeker arrivals by boat equal only a small percentage of total asylum seeker arrivals in Australia each year, let alone of total immigration entrance numbers, repeated polls have shown that Australians hugely overestimate the number of boat people arrivals (Marr and Wilkinson 2003:37. See also AIA 2009). In Australia, these fears, and the ease with which they can be magnified out of proportion to the actual numbers of arrivals involved, have made asylum seekers an easy target for political opportunism. Many governments and opposition parties in industrialised states and in less developed regions have found asylum seekers and refugees to be useful scapegoats for their country's ills. In Australia, a combination of historical cultural fears, political opportunism and media hyperbole meant that the arrival in late 2001 of 438 asylum seekers who had been rescued at sea, could provide a situation which could be represented by the government and media, and accepted by the majority of the population, as a national security crisis.

The public response reflected the symbolically and emotionally charged nature of the issue. As David Burchell describes, 'the detainees were either a threat to our national sovereignty or a challenge to the nation's conscience' (2005:117). A history of official exclusionary and discriminatory policies, especially in relation to the racial make-up of the society; a tradition of bureaucratic control of immigration policies; decades of official negative rhetoric and discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers; a decades long political construction of a cultural divide between nationalist and cosmopolitan orientations; official censorship and misinformation on events concerning asylum seekers - all of these aspects constitute good reasons why a majority of the population would support government actions against asylum seekers. But not everyone in the population did so.

MINORITY CIVIL SOCIETY OPPOSITION

At the same time that majority support grew for the government's actions in dealing with the *Tampa* event and other events involving asylum seekers, a myriad of groups supportive of asylum seekers and refugees sprang up across the nation to contest the

policy, and brought a new energy to the pre-existing advocacy and activism in this area. As mentioned earlier, this opposition constituted a minority of Australian public opinion, but one fuelled by a crisis of conscience around the events of the early 2000s and previous years.

As Tavan records in regard to the popular ideologies of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of race in the early Australian colonial settlement and in the White Australia policy, there have always been individual, organisational and institutional dissident views (2005:15-16, 40-41, 45-46, 76-77, 114-116), as well as organised decades-long national campaigns for reform (Tavan 2005: 121-128; IRG 1960). Within these dissident views, humanitarian and religious philosophies have consistently played a strong role in arguments for humane policies (Tavan 2005: 40-41), as has recognition of changes in international relations and Australia's place in the world (Tavan 2005:66-67, 115-116). By the 1950s and 60s, especially amongst younger people, there was also an increasing awareness of issues of rights - universal human rights and minority rights (Tavan 2005:114-116).

In regard to community support for refugee populations, James Jupp notes the Good Neighbour Movement in which religious and other community organisations played a major role primarily in the 1950s and 1960s in welcoming refugee populations (Jupp 2002:180); Claudia Tazreiter records church and community support for the needs of specific waves of asylum seekers and displaced peoples (Tazreiter 2004:146-148) and McMaster argues that the Indo-Chinese refugee crisis of the late 1970s marked a turning point in the growth within some sections of the Australian community of a 'cosmopolitan definition of immigration' (2001:53). In turn, in regard to support for asylum seeker populations affected since 1989 by Australia's discriminatory policies towards undocumented asylum seekers, the archives of organisations such as the Refugee Council of Australia (see RCOA annual newsletters from 1989) record the passionate engagement in the late 1980s and early 1990s by the small number of refugee and human rights organisations, professional advocates such as lawyers, church groups and activist groups to assist asylum seekers and to overturn those policies.

I am interested in that relatively larger degree of support that arose for asylum seekers affected by Australia's discriminatory policies, from the late 1990s past the mid years of

the first decade of the 21st century. Specifically in this thesis, I explore this support in the period from late 2001 to late 2006. Although still numerically small in terms of the Australian population, this engagement was nevertheless significantly larger than that of the previous decade. The way in which one advocate involved in the earlier protest action described that earlier engagement, was that:

> There was a deep sense of aloneness. … We felt like we were a very small network of people. … I can count on one hand almost the number of organisations interested in and working on refugee issues! (Interviewee YL).

In comparison, she explained, in terms of the later engagement with the issue:

> What was very striking to me was to … find a huge body of people who were concerned, and the mushrooming of individual organisations. … There's a much greater awareness (Interviewee YL).

DISCUSSION

In the statement which opened this chapter, Prime Minister Howard noted the 'flow of humanity' (quoted in Grewcock 2009:167), which has followed the flow in recent decades, of globalised commerce and trade. The latter has been generally welcomed by States as a dominant feature of globalisation, even though their populations may have exhibited reservations and resistances. The former, i.e. the 'flow of humanity' has generally not been welcomed. Yet, along with people displaced by war and persecution, there are people specifically displaced from their home territories by the effects of a neo-liberal globalisation. In addition, war and displacement are themselves sometimes the result of such dislocations of populations.

In recent decades, States have become increasingly unable to isolate their territories and populations from the uncertainties and varied impacts of globalisation. In local studies such as that of Natasha Klocker (2004) amongst a section of the population strongly opposed to asylum seekers, a perception of unmet material needs, and fear and uncertainty about the future on the part of the participants, was clearly visible. Moreover, as Nancy Viviani and others remind us, this economic and social change has been unevenly distributed throughout the Australian society (Viviani 1996; McKnight 2005; Megalogenis 2006). Other sections of Australian society have indeed benefited from more fluid and unconstrained economies and social relations. These realities, and

the losses entailed for some, have not necessarily been recognised adequately by the society.

Community retreats to ideologies of homogeneity and tradition provide symbolic reassurance for some sections of populations in such periods.[13] I agree with various authors in this regard, that the negative discourse and discriminatory actions towards an 'out-group' such as asylum seekers provided a political opportunity for electoral reassurance by substituting 'wrong, but soft targets' (as cited in McMaster 2001:155), in place of actual redress of issues of increasing economic inequality within Australian society.

Sections of a population who perceive themselves as struggling with social uncertainty and financial insecurity may not unsurprisingly look for symbolic reassurances in more closed communitarian identities. In situations of variable economic and social conditions, when some sections of society perceive themselves as progressing and others perceive themselves to be left out and left behind, political campaigns in which sections of society are pitted against each other in a 'them' and 'us' approach, are likely to prove attractive, even when they may also be manipulative. That such campaigns may focus around discriminating against others who are even more disadvantaged, may not lessen their attraction and value for those concerned with acknowledging their own situation, and may indeed lead to perceptions of a competition of unmet needs.

There is detailed evidence available of the fostering of false beliefs such as this in regard to attitudes toward asylum seekers (Pedersen et al. 2006). There is also detailed evidence available of misinformation given to the public by government ministers and officials (Maley 2004), as well as a preponderance of negative stereotyping of asylum seekers (Klocker and Dunn 2003). In addition, discriminatory government policies had for decades treated asylum seekers as criminals and violators of Australian borders, who should be accorded little sympathy (Grewcock 2009). Even for those sections of the population not involved in Australia's culture war phenomenon, the authority of

[13] It has been noted for example, that the social conservatism of the Howard government and the attention that the Prime Minister paid to the symbolic concerns of those disadvantaged by rapid economic change, may have sufficed to create an experience for many in the electorate of being 'comfortable and relaxed' (Howard 1996), at the same time that the government continued to pursue economic rationalist means and ends.

government discourse and actions against asylum seekers provided a delegitimation of the latter's position and credibility. For those for whom a 'them' and 'us' mentality, as a distrust between 'elite' Australians and 'ordinary' Australians functioned, this was even more likely to be so.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have examined the effect on Australia's immigration and refugee policies of historical, geographical, racial and cultural influences. I have also observed the political utilisation of issues concerning asylum seekers in more recent decades, and their reinforcement of those dominant models of the Australian nation state. The chapter has specifically examined the locus of events in 2001 and 2002 concerning asylum seeker issues, around which political electoral campaigns were mounted which utilised these dominant constructions. At the same time, counter campaigns were engaged in by some sections of the Australian population. Within these campaigns, different ideas of the nation state and its international and domestic responsibilities were engaged with, specifically in relation to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, but also more broadly in relation to concepts of human rights and humanity. This thesis is concerned with elucidating the motivations, actions, discourse and outcomes of the latter campaign.

In a period of often uncritical media reproduction of government representations of asylum seekers; the placement of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres in geographically remote locations; and government censorship which imposed restrictions on journalists' access to asylum seekers and led to an increasing reliance on official reporting of events concerning asylum seekers; it was not easy for the Australian public to obtain full and factual information. Allied to decades of negative governmental and media discourse on asylum seekers, there was initially (in the 2001 period), little alternative factual information available for the majority of the population. This was to be one of the significant challenges for opponents of the policies, in addition to the challenge of changing public attitudes to asylum seekers and of bringing change to the policies themselves. Another serious obstacle confronting any attempt to change public attitudes was a common denigration of positive attitudes towards asylum seekers, which followed the decades-long cultural construction of such attitudes as part of an 'elite' opinion alienated from 'ordinary' Australians. This thesis is an exploration of the

engagement of a minority of Australians with these challenges. The following chapters review the theoretical literature utilised in this exploration.

Chapter 2:
Review of refugee studies literature

INTRODUCTION

The literature of documentation and analysis of the flows of asylum seekers and refugees and the responses of sovereign States which they seek to enter, is the first body of literature to which I have turned for information and insight. This literature is vast and encompasses local, national and global studies of particular groups and flows of people, periods of time, and political, economic and social influences. It also encompasses a large body of theoretical analysis and prediction. It therefore provides a valuable repository of knowledge from which to begin to situate my research. I begin this chapter by examining the literature on historical, political and economic influences on refugee movements and State responses. I then examine literature which focuses on consequences for the citizenry of receiving States of exclusionary and discriminatory policies towards asylum seekers and refugees, and also literature which documents occasions of citizen support for asylum seekers and refugees. The chapter concludes with an examination of aspects of the literature of rights and responsibilities, especially as it concerns the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants versus the sovereign rights of receiving States.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASYLUM AND REFUGEE REGIME

As Claudia Tazreiter observes, 'The persecution of individuals and groups on political, religious or cultural grounds has persisted in various waves throughout human history … [as] has the preparedness of host countries to receive those fleeing persecution' (Tazreiter 2004:2). In analysing such protection of asylum seekers and refugees within an international nation-state system, refugee studies scholars such as Gil Loescher (2001) and Emma Haddad (2008) provide valuable analyses of historical refugee movements and international responses from the early twentieth century onwards. Haddad traces refugee movements from the late 19th century, and their immersion within the international creation and development of modern states (Haddad 2008), and Loescher analyses the development of national and international refugee policies within

the broader contexts of changing global political and security environments (Loescher 2001. See also Loescher and Scanlan 1986; and Loescher 1993). Both of these analyses situate varied refugee flows and international responses over time, firmly within the context of ever shifting modes of international relations. From both authors, we gain a clear concept of 'the refugee space … as a continuous site of intergovernmental activity' (Haddad 2008:110) and international and domestic politics. It is only within such a context, both authors claim, that past and current refugee movements and international responses can be adequately understood and engaged with.

As well as analyses of historical refugee movements and international and domestic responses to these movements (Loesher 1993; Haddad 2008; Nyers 2006; Gibney 2004; Tazreiter 2004; Neuman 2004), numerous individual and institutional authors have documented the parlous state of the international system of asylum in recent decades, and the consequences this has had for individual asylum seekers and refugees (Jean 1997; Hathaway 1997; Goodwin-Gill 1999; Rutinwa 2002; Crisp and Dessalegne 2002; Crisp 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2008; Loescher 1993, 2001, 2003; Loescher and Milner 2003; Boswell 2003; Lacroix 2004; Pugh 2004; Gibney 2004; Kumin 2004; Feller 2007; Agier 2008, 2011). Reports by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that at the end of 2008, there were 'some 42 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide' (UNHCR 2009:2). These numbers included '15.2 million refugees, 827,000 asylum seekers (pending cases) and 26 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)' (UNHCR 2009:2). As described by a former High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, ' "The threat to asylum" … "has taken on a global character" ' (Ogata quoted in Crisp 2003a:4).

Analyses of the historical, political and economic changes in asylum needs and in the level of international assistance offered for such needs, provide a picture of an international refugee protection regime under serious pressure. In 2003, Jeff Crisp of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service of the UNHCR argued that, 'the past three decades have witnessed a declining willingness on the part of states to admit refugees onto their territory, to allow them to remain there, and to provide them with the rights to which they are entitled under international refugee law' (Crisp 2003a:4). As he notes, analyses of the international political and economic changes that have led to this situation, illustrate the complexity of realising a task that was set in process in the early

part of twentieth century. That task was to ensure that the international community could respond to refugee movements in a manner which protected 'the rights of people who had been displaced by persecution or armed conflict' (Crisp 2003a:3). However, analyses of the challenges which have been faced and continue to be faced in maintaining adherence to such an ideal, illustrate complex shifts through time in global ideologies, in types of armed conflict, in the size and nature of refugee flows, and in the political and economic experiences of host and donor states (Loescher 2001, Gibney 2004).

In terms of the actions of developing countries, Crisp observes that in the 1960s and 1970s, many refugee crises had followed 'anti-colonial struggles and wars of national liberation' (2003a:5). In this period, these refugee flows were primarily accommodated by nearby states which had shared similar colonial experiences; were still relatively prosperous in the early years of independence; and were able to provide for refugee influxes without too much strain. In addition, the opposition of the ideologies of communism and capitalism provided ideological incentives for Western donor States to financially assist such processes. As well as providing an important humanitarian gesture, Crisp argues that this enabled them 'to establish friendly relations with developing countries' (2003a:5), and to 'contain the threat of communist expansion' (2003a:5). However, the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s marked a pivotal point of change for this international ethos (Loescher 2001; Tazreiter 2004), and later refugee situations provided less political capital for Western democracies. During the following period therefore, this level of international assistance began to decline, and host countries were 'left to cope with the environmental and economic impact of the influx' (Crisp 2003a:5).

Crisp observes that during the next two decades, 'the political and economic underpinnings of asylum that existed in the 1960s and 1970s' (crisp 2003a:5) became 'progressively dismantled' (Crisp 2003a:5). In terms of the actions of western long-industrialised countries, he argues that although these countries played a leading role in the establishment and development of the international refugee regime, in recent decades they have 'led the effort to challenge the principles on which that regime is based' (Crisp 2003a:7. See also Gibney 2004). Huge increases in numbers of asylum seekers and refugees have played a role in this shift, as refugee movements increased

significantly in the 1980s and 1990s due to violent ethnic and civil conflicts in various parts of the world (Gibney 2004:4; Ogata 2005). In addition, an increasingly defensive response by Western countries has been observed, as economic disparities have continued to grow between 'the world's richest and poorest countries' (Gibney 2004:4), and 'regular' and 'irregular' migrants have increasingly sought to move from less advantaged to more advantaged countries.

This flow of people accompanies the ongoing process of globalisation in this same period, as an unequal shift of economic resources and opportunities around the world has led to increasing patterns of dislocation, deprivation and environmental degradation (Chimni 2000), as well as to desires for better opportunities (Tazreiter 2004). However, while the global flow of money and trade has been welcomed by states as an inherent and beneficial aspect of globalisation, the accompanying movement of people has not been so well received, even though as argued by the present High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, 'it is an illusion to believe that goods, capital, services and information can move increasingly freely across state borders without a simultaneous expansion in the scale and scope of human mobility' (Guterres quoted in Crisp 2008:3). The resultant situation as described by Michel Agier (2008), is one of global and local landscapes of enforced distance between the 'unwanted' who are walled in from the outside, and the 'priviliged' who are walled in from the inside (2008:59-62). [14]

Restrictive policies

Numerous authors have documented the increasingly restrictive policies which have been developed by Western States [15] in recent decades in order to prevent and deter entry to this movement of people (Gibney 2004; Feller 2007; Loescher and Scanlan 1986). However, as Crisp observes, 'such measures have had only a limited success in meeting their intended objectives' (Crisp and Dessalegne 2002:2), and evidence suggests such controls have rather had the effect of diverting these flows to new destinations and into more dangerous and illegal forms of movement (Green and Grewcock 2002. See also Pickering and Weber 2006 on the pressure for movements

[14] In Giorgio Agamben's formulation, 'bare life' is contrasted with the rights of citizens (1998:131-135).

[15] I use the term 'Western States' in a similar sense to authors who use the term 'Northern States' to indicate industrial countries with developed democracies.

into ever deeper illegality and criminality in order to seek refuge). Significantly, these policies impact not only upon intending 'irregular' migrants, but also upon asylum seekers and refugees, as these mixed populations increasingly move alongside each other, and encounter risk to safety and life (Crisp 2008:4-5. See also Lee 2007 on the risks of asylum seekers and migrants becoming victims of trafficking).

The response of UNHCR

The United Nations agency UNHCR, was originally formulated as dedicated to the assistance of refugees and asylum seekers (Loescher 2001, 2003). At the same time, Loescher notes in an analysis of its trajectory, it was also created 'to promote regional and international stability and to serve the interests of governments' (Loescher 2001:2). Consequently, he argues, 'The UNHCR often walks a tightrope, maintaining a perilous balance between the protection of refugees and the … interests of states' (Loescher 2001:2). It has been observed that until the 1990s, the UNHCR 'rarely made any reference to the issue of international migration in its policy documents and public statements' (Crisp 2008:1). From the early 1990s onwards however, this position became challenged by a number of factors including the previously mentioned rise in numbers of people wishing to seek asylum; the corresponding increase of legislative and practical obstacles developed within Western countries to diminish that possibility (Gibney 2004:2), and the accompanying increase in 'people smuggling' and 'human trafficking' industries (Pickering and Weber 2006; Lee 2007), as well as the numerous and growing intersections of refugee and migration flows.

Crisp observes that while the UNHCR continued to make the distinction between refugees fleeing persecution and people fleeing for reasons unrelated to persecution, it also 'became increasingly engaged in the broader migration discourse' (Crisp 2008:1-2), developing a '10 Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration' (Crisp 2008:4), and encouraging state support for a rights-based approach to the issue of international migration. In a 2007 UNHCR discussion paper for example, it was noted that while 'UNHCR is not a migration organisation … there are numerous points at which issues of refugee protection and international migration intersect' (Crisp 2008:4). In this regard UNHCR is engaged in a difficult balancing act between maintaining its original protective mandate for refugees, and at the same time acknowledging and

responding to the growing human rights problems associated with 'the movement of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants as part of a single (and often unwanted) phenomenon' (Crisp 2008:8).

A new political salience – asylum seekers and refugees as scapegoats

Crisp argues that as a result of the challenges of recent decades, a new asylum paradigm has emerged, which asserts that the movement of refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants can be effectively ' "managed"…. in an orderly, predictable and organised manner' (Crisp 2003a:3). At the same time, from its political role in bolstering a moral right for capitalism versus communism - with the end of the Cold War - the refugee issue has also achieved 'a new degree of political salience' (Crisp 2003a:6) as governments and opposition parties in both industrialised states and in less developed regions have sought to use asylum seekers and refugees as scapegoats for 'their country's ills' (Crisp 2003a:6). [16] As Crisp observes, the 'sad conclusion is that the word "asylum" … now has overwhelmingly negative connotations in the minds of policy makers, the public and the media, especially in the more prosperous parts of the world' (Crisp 2008:2). The consequences of this situation for asylum seekers and refugees have been documented in numerous reports (Jean 1997; Hathaway 1997; Goodwin-Gill 1999; Rutinwa 2002; Crisp and Dessalegne 2002; Crisp 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2008; Loescher 2001, 2003; Loescher and Milner 2003; Boswell 2003; Lacroix 2004; Pugh 2004; Gibney 2004; Kumin 2004; Feller 2007; Agier 2008, 2011). In the case of Western States, Gibney argues, while great importance is still attached to the principle of asylum, 'enormous efforts are made to ensure that refugees (and others with less pressing claims) never reach the territory of the state where they could receive protection' (Gibney 2004:2). This has placed disproportionately increased refugee burdens on poorer states (Gibney 2004:4), producing an international situation in which 'large sums are spent on keeping small numbers of refugees out, and small sums on protecting large numbers of refugees in distant camps' (Crisp quoted in Moorehead 2005:35).

[16] High Commissioner Guterres, for example, has noted that 'the debate about mobility and migration is not always a rational one' (Guterres quoted in Crisp 2008:3). Indeed, he argues, 'Electoral opportunism, political populism and the sensationalist media have combined to poison the debate on this issue, promoting a sense of fear, intolerance and rejection' (Guterres quoted in Crisp 2008:3).

Asylum seekers and refugees - victims or agents?

This produces a situation in which large numbers of people remain forced from their own countries, but unable to return safely or to be accepted elsewhere. Humanitarian agencies attempt to provide adequate protection and care for these populations (Barnett and Weiss 2008). However, when emergency situations extend and become protracted, acknowledgement of the agency of these 'protected' populations may become lessened, and representations of them as passive victims may become dominant. While the principles and pragmatism of humanitarianism can constitute life-lines for those affected by displacement and danger, authors such as Peter Nyers (2006) and Agier (2008, 2011) raise important questions about the status of those populations in long-term situations in which they are protected, but also isolated and controlled in the process. They argue rather for the potential of political agency of people within such populations. At the same time, for those who leave such protection, or who have never experienced it in their flight to safety, the increasingly restrictive asylum policies of many countries mean that, for many who are turned away, using 'irregular channels of smuggling and trafficking has become their only means of escape' (Lee 2007:7). When these channels fail, consequences increasingly include loss of liberty, safety, and life (Green and Grewcock 2002; Grewcock 2003, 2007, 2009; Pickering and Weber 2006).

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CITIZENRY OF RECEIVING STATES

Authors such as Tazreiter (2004) and Sanjugta Vas Dev (2008) also point to the consequences of such restrictive asylum policies for the well being of the citizenry of states. As they argue, the issue of how restrictive asylum and refugee policies affect 'host communities, and more specifically state-civil relations within these communities' (Vas Dev 2008:3) is an area which needs to be better explored. Several other authors have documented the fears and concerns of citizens towards increased numbers of asylum seekers (Gibney 2004; Tazreiter 2004; Castles 1990; Crisp 2000; Rutinwa 2002). These concerns have included perceptions of asylum seekers and refugees as 'competitors for jobs, housing and social amenities, and as a threat to security and life-styles' (Castles 1990:15. See also Crisp 2000 and Rutinwa 2002 regarding some African states). Hostility can also be observed towards perceived misuse of the asylum protection system, especially in periods of high local and national unemployment and

economic hardship (Gibney 2004:97). Such public attitudes and accompanying political discourse have been the basis for significant changes in domestic legislation which have occurred in countries such as Germany (Gibney 2004:85-106; Tazreiter 2004:85-123), the United Kingdom (Gibney 2004:107-131), the United States of America (Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Gibney 2004:132-165) and Australia (Gibney 2004:166-193;Tazreiter 2004:125-160), where entry rights of asylum seekers have become dramatically restricted.

At the same time, opposite responses have also occurred within states, with support and assistance towards asylum seekers and refugees being enacted by sections of the citizenry of those countries, even at personal cost. As Vas Dev argues, 'when the implications of restrictive asylum policies for host societies have been examined, it has largely been limited to the study of racism and xenophobia against refugees' (Vas Dev 2008:4). However, she observes, a less examined, but growing area of interest for refugee scholars are 'those elements within civil society – individuals, organisations and movements – that have come out in support of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees and have contested their government's policies of restriction' (Vas Dev 2008:5). Vas Dev points to a literature which contends that 'anti-refugee … measures are being actively challenged and resisted by refugees … and their allies' (Lowry and Nyers 2003a quoted in Vas Dev 2008:5). See also Vas Dev's references to Johnston and Allotey 2003; Kaneko 2003; Ellis 2004 and Lester 2005). What is the nature then of this literature, and what is its import for practical outcomes for asylum seekers and refugees, for refugee studies literature, and for the direction of my exploration of the Australian pro-asylum seeker advocacy and activism?

In a special issue of the journal *Refuge* in 2003, a number of contributors argued that global restrictive and exclusionary policies towards refugees and migrants are not 'inevitable or irreversible trends' (Lowry and Nyers 2003b). These articles rather document ways in which in particular countries, restrictive immigration and refugee policies 'are being actively contested, challenged, and, in some cases, overturned' (Lowry and Nyers 2003b) by refugees, migrants and their allies. (For analysis in this same issue of these challenges in Canada, see Wright 2003, and Lowry and Nyers 2003a; for Japan, see Kaneko 2003; for the European Union, see Schwenken 2003).

Cynthia Wright, points to existing transnational campaigns led by refugees, immigrants, undocumented people and allies to 'challenge controls over the right to move freely across borders' (2003:12). She suggests that a 'no borders/no one is illegal' (Wright 2003:9) politic is capturing the political imagination of many anti-globalisation and anti-war activists, and argues that there is a need to bring 'interlocking movements – including anti-racist, labour, aboriginal, immigrant rights, anti-globalisation and anti-war among others' (Wright 2003:6) into closer alliance on this issue. Wright acknowledges that many of the activist groups in Canada with which she is primarily concerned, are typical of grassroots organisations with 'very low or no budget and consequently, no staff' (Wright 2003:9). These activist groups are primarily based in the cities with the largest immigrant populations, and include groups initiated by failed refugee claimants and undocumented migrants, and supported by individuals and by anti-poverty, labour, faith and women's organisations. Wright distinguishes these groups from 'more long standing refugee rights groups or agencies serving immigrants' (Wright 2003:9) which she argues, 'have long emphasised strategies based on lobbying and changes to the law' (Wright 2003:9); which 'may be reluctant to publicly defend those whom the State constructs as "illegals" ' (Wright 2003:9); and which when faced with funding cuts or a conservative political climate, 'may be unwilling – or too burdened by existing demands – to implicate themselves in high profile campaigns' (Wright 2003:9). Though she perceives that the activist organisations embody what is best about a grassroots organising approach, she also acknowledges that 'in the absence of national coordination – and, ultimately, transnational alliances of all kinds – gains will be limited (Wright 2003:3). This is because 'Hard won interim or partial successes … are simply not translated into long-term transformations' (Wright 2003:9).

In a similar vein, Helen Schwenken explores actions initiated by undocumented migrants in Europe, in conjunction with wider organisational support. Schwenken documents the successes and challenges faced by a network of migrant domestic workers' organisations and their supporters. Initiated in the United Kingdom by a Filipino self-help group and a supporting non-government organisation (NGO), the network has extended into other European countries, and has also made effective alliances with organisations such as unions. In the United Kingdom, she notes, its campaign based on workers rights has met with success and has led to the

commencement of a 'regularisation procedure for undocumented migrant domestic workers' (Schwenken 2003:50).

In the same edition, Mai Kaneko documents pro-asylum seeker and migrant action which has grown from support for asylum seekers from local populations. Kaneko analyses the successes of a proactive asylum and refugee rights movement in Japan, following the detention of Afghan asylum seekers living in Japan, and their actions and appeals for assistance. Kaneko argues that what has been 'most remarkable about this movement is that a considerable number of young and mainstream citizens were involved, many participating in such activism for the first time in their lives' (Kaneko 2003). The movement itself, s/he observes, 'has not only succeeded in securing the release of a number of detainees, but has also evolved into a whole new effort to push for the reformation of the Japanese asylum system itself' (Kaneko 2003). In consequence, Kaneko argues, 'Japan, a country that has long practised exclusionary immigration and asylum policy … is finally facing major pressure for change by its citizens claiming that "only a society livable for foreigners is livable for all" ' (Kaneko 2003).

Other authors, geographically dispersed, also analyse pro-asylum seeker and migrant actions in Western democracies, which have grown from relations of solidarity between asylum seekers, migrants and local populations. For example, Vicki Squire observes the growing significance of recent pro-refugee and migrant actions in the United Kingdom, such as the City of Sanctuary movement and the Strangers into Citizens campaign (Squire 2009b). Tazreiter documents the existence of local support initiatives by citizenry in Germany (Tazreiter 2004), and Anne Coombs (2004), Sarah Mares and Louise Newman (2007), Linda Briskman et al. (2008) and Margot O'Neill (2008) document similar actions in Australia.

In this manner, coalitions of citizens, NGOs, religious organisations and unions, acting on issues which are of value to asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants, have developed successful campaigns which have challenged and sometimes changed government policies. Jonathon Ellis documents a successful joint action by Oxfam Great Britain, the UK Refugee Council and the UK Transport and General Workers' Union against discriminatory monetary policies affecting asylum seekers, arguing that

the campaign was fuelled by a passionate view that such discrimination against asylum seekers 'had no place in a civilised society' (Ellis 2004:252). Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei (2005) have similarly documented the successful work of a coalition of refugee women and NGOs in bringing the voices and issues of refugee women to the national and international arenas of decision making (see also Pittaway et al. 2007).

On the United States-Mexican border areas, church, immigrant and citizen coalitions such as No More Deaths, Samaritans, and Humane Borders, struggle to prevent the continuing deaths of undocumented migrants entering United States territory,[17] as do church based and human rights organisations in Europe (PICUM 2002). Additionally, in a number of countries, Sanctuary Movements based around church organisations have attempted over decades to provide protection for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants against deportation to potential dangers in their home countries (Crittenden 1988; Otter and Pine 2004; Tazreiter 2004; Lippert 2005; Garcia 2006, Cook 2010, 2011).[18]

These are only a few examples of pro-asylum seeker, refugee and migrant actions in Western democracies. However, all of these examples are remarkable precisely because they are 'out of step' with the majority trends in public attitudes. Yet, the fact that they are occurring, represents a potential that needs to be further investigated. Recognition of this potential appears to be evident in the 2007 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges. Describing it as 'an unusual gathering', Crisp notes that 'the Dialogue was opened to a wide range of stakeholders – governments, UN organisations, NGOs, civil society representatives and individual experts, all of them participating on an equal basis' (Crisp 2008:3). As Eve Lester observes, some members of society 'have become increasingly aware of and concerned about harsh laws, policies and practices affecting refugees and asylum-seekers and have organised themselves accordingly' (Lester 2005:125). At the same time, she notes, since the end of the Cold War, the international NGO sector concerned with refugee protection 'has grown exponentially' (Lester 2005:125). As a result, NGOs now have responsibilities at local, national and

[17] See for example, the website of No More Deaths: No Mas Muertes at <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/index.php>, accessed 5.11.2009.

[18] See also the website of the New Sanctuary Movement at <http://www.newsanctuarymovement.org>, accessed 18.9.2011.

international levels 'for the quality of their work on the ground, for influencing what goes on in decision-making forums in Geneva and for holding their governmental and inter-governmental colleagues to account in both places' (Lester 2005:139). See also Ferris 2003; Tazreiter 2004; Vas Dev 2008 on NGO involvement in asylum and refugee issues).

The civil society support for asylum seekers and refugees described by Lester, functions at the level of both citizenry acting locally and nationally, and at the level of NGOs acting nationally and internationally (Lester 2005). Tazreiter (2004) and Vas Dev (2008) have explored in detail the role that non-state actors such as established and organised NGOs, have played in Australia in recent years. My focus, while encompassing the spectrum elucidated by Lester, is more specifically focussed on the level of citizen action. Tazreiter argues that local, national and regional particularities are important in shaping asylum advocacy and activism and political and policy environments. As she observes, 'Civil society cannot be expected to display similar characteristics in every setting' (2004:64). It will be informed by 'The distinctiveness of a political system, cultural orientation, and specific social pressures' (2004:64) existing at any given place and time. It is this distinctiveness that I wish to explore in its impact on the social action that I am studying.

THE LITERATURE OF 'RIGHTS'

To engage with this topic however, is to engage not only with refugee studies literature, but with philosophical debates on the nature of rights. In relation to asylum and refugee situations, this particularly involves the nature of universal rights versus the rights of sovereign States (Arendt 1967; Rawls 1972, 1999; Benhabib 2004; Tazreiter 2004; Haddad 2008). On the one hand, theorists such as Michael Walzer argue that 'the right to choose an admissions policy … is not merely a matter of … pursuing national interests' (Walzer 1983:61). Rather, 'Admission and exclusion' (Walzer 1983:62), he argues, 'suggest the deepest meaning of self- determination' (Walzer 1983:62) for a country. This view, variously called partialism, communitarianism, particularism or nationalism is described by refugee studies theorist Gibney as 'an ideal of states as distinct cultural communities' (2004:23) with a right to self determination which justifies 'the interests of citizens over those of refugees in entrance decisions' (Gibney

2004:23). The opposite perspective, variously called impartialism, cosmopolitanism and universalism is, as described by Gibney, 'an ideal of states as cosmopolitan moral agents' (2004:23) in which 'the only legitimate admissions policy is one that takes into equal account the interests (or rights) of refugees and citizens' (Gibney 2004:23).

These theoretical debates have a very real impact on the lives and welfare of asylum seekers and refugees in terms of their influence on public attitudes and the subsequent treatment of asylum seekers and refugees by receiving States. Gibney observes that, 'partialism thus makes a virtue of the contemporary international system in which states have a sovereign right to decide who they will admit for entrance' (Gibney 2004:26). In consequence, he argues, supporters of the partialist perspective have mostly ignored the responsibilities of states to refugees specifically and to foreigners more generally, 'concentrating their attention primarily on the reciprocal duties of citizens … already sharing a state' (Gibney 2004:24). In contrast, for theorists operating within an impartialist rights-based framework, 'current entrance restrictions on immigrants and refugees are a gross violation of human liberty' (Gibney 2004:60. See also Carens 1992a, 1992b; Dummett 1992; Dummett 2001). As Gibney argues, 'in a world where states generally claim the prerogative to include and exclude foreigners as they please, impartialism represents a radical challenge … to well-entrenched state practices' (Gibney 2004:59). In spite of methodological differences within theories of impartialism, he notes, these theorists 'are at one in demanding far more open borders' (Gibney 2004:63) and more equitable redistribution of global resources (Gibney 2004:65). In a detailed analysis, Gibney considers the potentialities and deficiencies of both partialist and impartialist theories (2004:23-84), acknowledging that both perspectives present powerful but conflicting moral claims. In arguing that neither perspective can be ignored, since both resonate as justice claims in contemporary liberal-democratic thinking, he considers that 'an adequate ideal for responding to foreigners in entrance policy' (Gibney 2004:82), must 'find a way of integrating both universal and particular moral claims' (2004:82).

While as argued by Gibney, many explorations of this literature tend to emphasise and favour one aspect or the other of the cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism debate, the two authors whose theoretical explorations on this issue have been most valuable as an informing background to my understandings of this debate, are Gibney, and political

theorist, feminist and philosopher Seyla Benhabib. Gibney and Benhabib both grapple with the inherent contradictions between the principles of moral universalism and the political practicalities of actions of nation states. Though situated at different ends of the spectrum of 'non-ideal' versus 'ideal' theory, both recognise as Gibney expresses it, that 'adequate prescriptions for the responses of states must … possess (both) ethical force … and practical relevance' (2004:15), and that as Benhabib observes, 'there are no easy solutions to the dilemma posed by these dual commitments' (2004:2).

Both authors engage with the range of theoretical arguments around universalistic and particularistic rights claims, and both search for ethical principles which can form the basis of normative guidelines. There are many points of agreement in their arguments, especially in terms of their analysis of the tensions between universalistic and particularistic claims. The differences in their contributions lie in the solutions they propose, and the focus and perspectives from which they approach the issue. For example, in terms of focus, Gibney explores in detail the practical and political difficulties which the issue of asylum and refuge has presented for various Western governments and the consequent failure of political will on the issue. In contrast, Benhabib explores less of the situation of those seeking admittance to claim asylum and refuge, and more of the situation which ensues for those refugees and migrants once they have gained admittance.

Similarly, in terms of perspectives, while Gibney focuses primarily on the political actions of governments of democratic states, Benhabib focuses primarily on the political actions of the citizenry of such democratic States. While Gibney seeks a pragmatic ethical principle that could be agreed upon by constituencies on both sides of the universalistic-communitarian divide, Benhabib seeks to illustrate the potential that exists and has been already utilised for a 'repositioning of the universal … within the local (and) the regional' (2004:23). Although both authors canvas the spectrum of ethical and political perspectives of the situation, Gibney can be positioned at a more realpolitik point on this spectrum and Benhabib at a more ideal theoretical positioning.

The perspectives from which they approach the issue, can be seen to inform the solutions which they develop and advocate. Gibney has explored in detail the interaction of legislative arrangements, historical and cultural formulations, domestic

perceptions, economic factors and foreign affairs issues in the production over past decades of the asylum regimes of western democracies such as Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia. The picture that emerges in his examination is not a heartening one for the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, as economic, cultural, and domestic and international political factors take precedence over such claims. However, it is this reality, he insists, which must be acknowledged and prioritised in any search for improved policies. Gibney's argument, in the light of the failure of the current international situation to meet asylum challenges, is that an ethical code which can be acceptable for the 'realpolitiks' of modern democracies, must be found. The solutions which he develops are therefore pragmatic and minimalist in nature, potentially more likely to find resonance with state executives and political players as well as with publics, and capable of being adopted and implemented quickly by governments.

He proposes the adoption by Western governments of the principle of humanitarianism as a realpolitik solution that can provide practical assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, and still be acceptable to communitarians on an ethical and practical basis. In advocating this principle, he describes it as one which 'holds that states have an obligation to assist refugees when the costs of doing so are low' (2004:231). In terms of the partialist-impartialist divide, he argues, the principle recognises like impartial theories, the 'duties that stem from membership in a single human community' (2004:231). However, he suggests, it is less comprehensive in scope, 'specifying obligations only to those in great need' (2004:231). It is also less onerous in its demands, since the notion of low costs 'suggests that states (or individuals) have room to protect other valued interests or obligations to which they attach significant value' (Gibney 2004:231). Gibney argues that the enactment of this principle provides a realistic alternative to the more onerous demands of theorists of impartialism - by 'both utilitarians, who argue for entrance policies that maximise total utility, and global liberals, who demand a basic right of free movement' (Gibney 2004:233). Furthermore, he suggests, it 'represents a clear and minimal statement of responsibilities in contrast to those partialists who view states as entitled to well-nigh complete discretion in entrance' (2004:233). He therefore argues that humanitarianism is a principle which can realistically and fruitfully be adopted by all as a 'site of "overlapping consensus" on the minimal responsibilities of the states' (2004:235).

In addition, Gibney positions humanitarianism as not only capable of providing an immediate pragmatic solution to the acute problems outlined in the previous chapter, but as also capable of providing the ethical basis for long-term education by States of their publics on the need for asylum. He suggests in this regard that the principle and practice of humanitarianism 'as well as demanding respect for the principle of non-refoulement' (Gibney 2004:230-231), may influence Western countries to increase resettlement programmes (Gibney 2004:231). Over the longer term, he argues, the principle 'also requires more determined efforts by states to create a more favourable national and international environment for refugees by, *inter alia*, promoting positive public attitudes and securing international cooperation on asylum issues' (Gibney 2004:231). Numerous other authors have also referred to the need for states and international institutions to educate publics on the value and ethics of the system of asylum (Loescher 2001; Rutinwa 2002; Tazreiter 2004; Vas Dev 2008). However, the extent to which humanitarianism provides the most effective tool in this regard (as compared for example, to a rights discourse) is a question applicable to my exploration of the Australian situation.

In contrast, Benhabib advocates the recognition and enactment of a cosmopolitan hospitality which, following Emmanuel Kant's philosophy, is conceptualised as a right attached to the action of seeking asylum and refuge, rather than as an action of beneficence of the receiving state. She also advocates ongoing public democratic debate and renegotiation of the relationship of 'the universal in the local' as an integral process accompanying that hospitality. Benhabib argues that universal human rights and popular sovereignty - while opposed in intrinsic ways, nevertheless 'provide two indispensible foundations of the democratic constitutional state' (2004:19). The tensions inherent between the two aspects are obvious, she argues, in that 'universal human rights have a context-transcending appeal, whereas popular and democratic sovereignty must constitute a circumscribed *demos* which acts to govern itself' (2004:19). Yet, she observes, 'modern constitutional democracies are based upon the faith that these two commitments can be used to limit one another' (2004:19) in that they can be renegotiated, rearticulated and resignified. It is in this phenomenon that Benhabib invests hope for the future – hope which is based not only on normative theory, but on historical instances of such processes of social and political renegotiation between

universalistic and particularistic claims. Benhabib calls this phenomenon of renegotiation and resignification one of 'democratic iterations' (2004:19), a concept which she describes as 'complex processes of public argument, deliberation and learning through which universalist rights claims are contested and contextualised, invoked and revoked' (2004:19), not only through legal and political institutions, but also in the public sphere.

Benhabib suggests that the international system 'of peoples and states' (2004:37) is characterised by extensive historical, economic and political interdependencies, to the extent that moral obligations to our fellow human beings transcends the notion of the 'territorially bounded state-centric system' (2004:37). It is to this ongoing social and political project that she primarily turns her attention. While she acknowledges that Kant's argument that 'first entry cannot be denied to those who seek it if this would result in their "destruction" ' (2004:35), has become incorporated into the Refugees Convention as the principle of non-refoulement, [19] in regard to the needs of ongoing social and political interpretation of obligations across borders, she focuses on the process of 'democratic iterations' (2004:21). Contrary to Gibney's formulation of such processes in terms of the duty of democratic governments to educate their publics in refugee and asylum needs, she conceives of this process as one occurring within the citizenry of a country(2004:21). She argues that while the tensions between universalist human rights claims and the claims of sovereign countries, which are inherent in decisions of territorial inclusion and exclusion, can never be eliminated, the affects of those decisions 'can be mitigated through reflexive acts of democratic iteration' by a citizenry which 'critically examines and alters its own practices of exclusion' (2004:21).

Benhabib argues that 'potentially all practices of democratic closure are open to challenge' (2004:17). She suggests that democratic states draw their legitimacy not merely from an act of 'constitution but, equally significantly from the conformity of this act to universal principles of human rights that are in some sense said to precede and antedate the will of the sovereign' (2004:44). ' "We the people" ' (2004:44), she suggests, refers to a particular human community, and yet this people 'establishes itself as a democratic body by acting in the name of the "universal" ' (2004:44). It is this

[19] The principle of non-refoulement lies at the core of asylum and international refugee law (UNHCR 1997).

tension, she argues, that is 'constitutive of democratic legitimacy' (2004:44), in that modern democracies 'act in the name of universal principles which are then circumscribed within a particular civic community' (2004:44). It is these inherent democratic commitments to universal human rights, she considers, which are open to being reactualised and renegotiated within the actual politics of states.

Benhabib argues that liberal democratic states are not holistic cultural and ethical entities. She suggests that an idealised model of an homogenous citizenry 'not only distorts historical facts, but cannot do justice to the normative potential of democratic constitutionalism' (2004:175). Rather, she argues, 'collective identities are formed by strands of competing and contentious narratives in which universalising and particularistic memories compete with one another to create temporary narrative syntheses, which are then subsequently challenged and riven by new divisions and debates' (2004:82-83). She observes that the paradox of democratic legitimacy is that 'every act of self-legislation is also an act of self-constitution' (2004:45), in that those who bind themselves by these laws, are also defining themselves as ' "We, the people" ' (2004:45) through that same act. Yet, she argues, this is not acknowledged when state identity is postulated as a homogenous given entity. She suggests that the challenge is to reconfigure democracy 'without resorting to those illusions' (2004:171). The contradiction between human rights and sovereignty needs to be reconceptualised, she suggests, as 'the inherently conflictual aspects of reflexive collective-identity formation in complex, and increasingly multicultural and multinational, democracies' (2004:65). It is in this process indeed that she sees signs of normative potential for inclusionary state polities.

DISCUSSION

These two authors together present a useful range of perspectives and theoretical argument on which to reflect, when examining the situation with which I am concerned. The focus they bring ranges from the problems that those seeking asylum face in gaining admittance and in adequate processes for claim making for refuge, to the long-term situations they face in foreign countries if they do gain that admittance. The solutions advocated range from those of humanitarianism to those of universal human rights, and from improvements in the situation of asylum and refuge resulting from state

action, to those resulting from action by the citizenry of a state. In addition, the spectrum from non-ideal to ideal theory that is encompassed in these two positions is revealing in itself. As Benhabib notes, polities of migration (and equally polities of asylum) are typically engaged with by states through non-ideal theory. I therefore consider that the rigorous development of an ideal theoretical perspective for aspects of these issues by Benhabib, broadens the opportunities for developing not only alternative theories but also civic polities. In turn, the detailed historical examination by Gibney of the interplay of asylum issues with the polities of Western democracies, provides a reality check from which any new theoretical developments must be measured.

In relation to their specific proposals, it could be argued that a great degree of hope is invested by both authors in their favoured solutions. This is the case even in Gibney's realpolitik formulation of humanitarianism as an ethical principle acceptable to both cosmopolitans and communitarians. As he notes, the principle is one which is acceptable to states precisely because it allows states flexibility in protecting the particularistic claims of their own constituencies. Yet, the extent to which the assistance provided to asylum seekers is judged to be adequate in fulfilling that humanitarian obligation, and the extent to which the costs of doing so are judged to be too high for the state to do so, are both open to the interpretation of the particular state. In the Australian situation I am examining, for example, the principle of humanitarianism has been subject to intense resignification by the state (Every 2006:131-135 and 252-253). While it has been argued that 'Humanitarianism has become the defining mark of immigration and refugee law in Western democracies' (Dauvergne 1999:619), it exists as a fluid concept which is capable of very different constructions (Dauvergne 1999, 2000; Every 2006, 2008; Taylor 2001; Chimni 2000; Darcy 2004; Gosden 2007a).

Benhabib's formulation of the cosmopolitan and inclusionary potential of democratic iterations within the citizenry of a state, is equally questionable. While historically the citizenry of various states have exhibited such potential, there are equally instances of the reverse scenario, as Gibney has pointed out in examples of Australian as well as European citizenry (Gibney 2004). In addition, in regard to her advocacy of the enactment of a Kantian universal right of hospitality, it must be noted that even though that right has been codified in the Refugees Convention as the right to seek asylum and to not be refouled to a persecuting state, the enactment of that right remains open to

manipulation. Gibney has illustrated this in the case of States which may develop increasingly rigorous human rights regimes at the same time as they develop increasingly obstructive and restrictive entry regimes. However, both authors provide avenues of theory and practice to explore in regard to the actions of States and the actions of citizens.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed literature which analyses patterns of global flows of asylum seekers and the responses of Western countries they seek to enter. It has also reviewed literature which analyses changes in those patterns following international political and economic shifts, and changes in the way in which political capital is constructed for government and non-government political parties from the arrival of asylum seekers. From this literature, a better understanding of the impact of international political and economic shifts, and domestic politics on issues of asylum, has been gained. Accompanying this analysis of asylum seeker flows and country responses, is the literature of rights, in terms of human rights and sovereign rights. In this chapter, this literature has been reviewed specifically through the work of Gibney and Benhabib. Their different analyses and formulations provide theoretical possibilities which will be explored in this research, in terms of the incidence of State-initiated or citizen-initiated reform of Australian asylum policies.

While the term 'asylum seeker' has come to have negative connotations for many populations in receiving countries, documentation and analysis of the opposite response of solidarity and support for asylum seekers by sections of local populations, has also been reviewed in the chapter. This thesis follows those studies by examining this phenomenon in the particularity of the Australian situation between 2001 and 2006. In order to adequately explore the supportive action for asylum seekers that occurred, the theoretical literature of collective action and social movements is now engaged with. This is a literature which analyses the way in which individuals come together in social action which attempts to bring change. The next chapter explores this literature for the insights it can provide for the research.

Chapter 3:
Review of collective action literature

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the wide range of literature concerned with collective action and social movement analysis. This is a body of literature which examines and theorises the attempts by individuals to come together in action aimed at bringing change to a social, economic or political situation. It is therefore explicitly concerned with both individual human behaviour and collective efforts at social change. The chapter reviews the historical development of the literature, and the insights of different theoretical streams. It adopts a sociology of knowledge perspective that seeks to situate the particular theories of collective action within the historical and cultural epochs in which they develop.

The purpose of reviewing the various theories is to ascertain which will be the most appropriate in assisting my understanding of the specific social action that I am studying. The chapter documents the process of investigation and decision making by which a particular theory and theorist are finally adopted as an orienting framework for the research. Because of the way in which asylum seeker and refugee flows are part of a global phenomenon, rather than an aspect which can be contained within national political boundaries, I again position my decision within the larger economic and historical framework of the current epoch of globalisation.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

The primary intention of this research has been to gain an understanding of the social action of those who opposed what they perceived as restrictive policies and anti asylum seeker and refugee discourses in Australia in this period. How best to understand how such group action occurs, especially when taken by a minority of a population? Equally, how best to understand why the trajectory of such group action may be successful or unsuccessful in achieving desired and stated ends? The literature of collective action and social movement theory offers insights. Gary Marx and Douglas McAdam identify

the range of aspects of inquiry within the diverse field. It includes societal issues such as social order and social change; subjective issues such as how individuals interpret their actions; structural contexts within which action is occurring; the impact and historical significance of group actions; and issues of societal power and powerlessness, cohesion and dissension. Ultimately, they argue, the field of inquiry covers action as diverse as that ranging from crowds, fads, disasters and panics, to that of organised groups and mass social movements (1994:1). However, they consider that the distinguishing feature of this field of inquiry is its primary focus on the analysis of human behaviour or action, rather than on institutions, abstract group properties, or a single social process (1994:1).

As observed by Eileen Baldry and Tony Vinson, 'Whatever refinements or subtleties of definition can be imposed on the field, social action fundamentally involves groups of people of varying degrees of organisation and clarity of purpose in opposing or promoting different social arrangements' (1991:2-3). Alberto Melucci similarly argues that while the continuum of collective action 'ranges from protest and rebellion by a social group to the formation of a mass movement and a large-scale collective mobilisation'(1996a:2), it always revolves around 'fundamental processes whereby a society maintains and changes its structure' (1996a:2). Additionally, he observes, it always involves the issue of power relationships and the defence or contestation of 'a specific position or form of dominance' (1996a:3).

Collective action is often variously described as social action, collective action and social movements, usually in regard to the degree of the size and complexity of its mobilisations, organisational nature and longevity of action. Marx and McAdam argue however, that this treats the phemonena too separately. They note that while scholarship in the 1960s emphasised the differences in 'attempts to establish a clear dichotomy between supposedly spontaneous forms of collective behavior [20] and rational and organised social movements' (1994:xii), this has led to issues of 'Emergence, cultural elements and subjective meanings [receiving] less attention as emphasis was placed on organisational factors' (1994:xii). They argue that it is problematic to ignore the many instances of collective action that occur outside the settings of formal organisations, or

[20] In the thesis, I have chosen to use the English spelling of words, except in cases where the American spelling is the original form. This is the case with concepts such as 'collective behavior' and 'resource mobilization theories'.

the way in which it demonstrates 'varying degrees of emergence and organisation' (1994:17). I agree with this evaluation, and in this thesis I will be referring to the phenomenon primarily as collective action, unless entering into a specific discussion on the relative claims of those definitions and classifications, or referring to commonly agreed descriptions.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LITERATURE

The literature of collective action has been and remains an evolving field. Through time and place, scholars interested in both the broad phenomenon of group action and in more specific social movements, have analysed examples of concrete collective actions, and have formulated theories as explanations of how people become involved in such actions; what motivates and sustains their involvement; what influences their effectiveness in achieving their stated goals; and of costs or benefits that accrue personally and societally. In addition, in different historical periods and geographical locations, and from different theoretical perspectives, the phenomenon has been variously regarded as dangerous, destructive, pathological, logical, an integral extension of politics in a democratic society, and as carrying significant insights for the future.

In 19th century for example, theoretical attempts were made to understand mass collective actions such as the French revolution. Later, in the early 20th century, the literature was concerned with mass collective actions such as the Russian Revolution, and the nationalist mobilisations in Germany that led to World War 1 and 2. As the 20th century progressed, this literature explored different varieties of mobilisations, such as collective actions for civil, political and personal rights, peace and environmental issues, and the role of these collective actions and social movement actions in societies. More recently, in the late 20th and early 21st century, other mobilisations such as religious, jihadist and anti-globalisation actions have variously been examined, from a range of theoretical approaches.

Steven Buechler points to the changes in perspective of these theoretical approaches as the psychological theoretical frameworks of the 19th century analyses which approached 'crowd behavior' as a pathological social situation, changed to organisational frameworks of analyses which addressed social movement action in the second half of

the 20th century as part of a vibrant democratic politics. By the late 20th century, the dominant strands of research included *Resource Mobilization Theories* which position collective action as a rational political response (Zald 1992: 331) and focus on the strategic-instrumental processes of mobilisation and organisation of political, economic, social and ideological resources for action; *Social Constructionist and Framing theories* which developed in response to perceived explanatory gaps within Resource Mobilisation Theories, especially in regard to social and cultural contexts of social action (Mueller 1992:4), and which have a specific focus on collective action as 'an interactive, symbolically defined and negotiated process' (Buechler 2000:40); *Action Identity Theories* which link micro subjective processes and macro historical forces in the analysis of collective action, contrasting it with conventional political participation and interest group activism by its questioning of the very rules of the sociopolitical game (Pakulski 1991:22); and *New Social Movement Theories* which in common with Social Constructionist Theories, focus on the processes of social construction of collective identity, experience and values, but which also in common with Action Identity Theories, seek an understanding of the historically specific contexts for the emergence of collective action (Buechler 2000:46).

These theories arose as scholars studied the activities of numerous social movements from the 1960s and1970s. In the United States, the emergence of collective action such as the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement and the women's movement led to the development of Resource Mobilisation Theories and later Social Constructionist Theories. In Europe, similar movements, especially the anti-nuclear movement and eco-pax movements, led to the development of Action Identity and New Social Movement Theories. Following on from the insights of 'new values' perspectives developed by Ronald Inglehart (1977), these latter theorists, influenced by 'European traditions of social theory and political philosophy' (Buechler 2000:45), argued that collective action and social movement protests arising in this era reflected new contradictions inherent in their societies (Melucci 1981; Habermas 1981; Offe 1985; Eder 1990), and could be linked theoretically through their various struggles for a more democratic civil society and a more sustainable planetary society.

In addition, recent theoretical analyses have brought renewed attention to the role of emotions in collective action (Goodwin et al. 2000, 2001; Flam and King 2005). Jeff

Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta argue for example, for the need to reverse decades of collective action analyses in which the role of emotions played almost no role unless as an additional instrumental resource to be mobilised and maintained. These authors acknowledge the input of Social Constructionist Theories and New Social Movement Theories in terms of their interest in the way in which participants interpret their environment through 'cultural lenses' (2001:5), and construct a collective identity and experience. However, they argue that few studies have yet adequately recognised the importance of emotions in political change (2001:6). Goodwin et al. suggest that theorists need to grapple with the interaction of emotions and cognitions at all levels. It should not be assumed, they argue, that emotions matter only at the micro level of analysis. Rather, they suggest, emotions are collective as well as individual, and 'permeate large-scale units of social organisation … as well as the interactions of these units with one another' (2001:16). As they observe, emotions are important in the growth and unfolding of collective action and political protest, as well as in their maintenance and decline. In addition, they observe, emotions displayed in protest may 'reshape broader emotional cultures as well as the emotional repertories available to later movements' (2001:22). They therefore argue for the importance of studies of emotion in 'all phases of political action' (2001:16).

From studying the various collective action theories mentioned, I believe that those espoused by New Social Movement Theorists hold the best potential for my research. More than other theories of collective action, I consider that they are well positioned to allow a wide scope of exploration of interactive subjective aspects; of social constructions of collective identity, values and experience (both affective and cognitive), discourse and action; of analysis of the social and political impact of the collective action; and of the relevance of the global nature of the phenomenon for the national and local action. In agreement with Resource Mobilisation Theories, New Social Movement Theories position collective action and social movements as ' "healthy" responses to "pathological" situations' (Pakulski 1991:28). At the same time, they contest what they categorise as Resource Mobilisation Theories' 'narrow notion' (Pakulski 1991:28) of rationality, i.e. that identified with strategic-instrumental orientations. In agreement with Social Constructionist Theories, New Social Movement Theories value the early insights of symbolic interactionist theories and focus on the social construction of collective values and identities. However, they also explore

‘macro’ historical, economic and political structures for the contradictions which may be associated with collective action. In agreement with Action Identity Theories, they position social movements as ‘articulations of new identities and new stakes’ (Pakulski 1991:28) in specific historical conjunctions. At the same time, as Jan Pakulski observes, they reject the Action Identity Theory conception of one central oppositional social movement in each particular epoch, arguing that such a conception would inadequately represent the plurality of contemporary social protest. In addition, Pakulski argues, New Social Movement Theories ‘temper the enthusiasm of action theorists concerning the “creative” and “emancipatory” potential of mass mobilisations’ (1991:28).

Other common themes identified by New Social Movement Theorists in studies of social protest into the 1990s have included the ‘diffuse social base’ (Buechler 2000:46) of the collective actions studied; the ‘preference for organisational forms that are decentralised, egalitarian, participatory … and ad hoc’ (Buechler 2000:48); ‘the role of cultural and symbolic forms of resistance alongside or in place of more conventional political forms of contestation’ (Cohen 1985 quoted in Buechler 2000:47); and the location of struggles within areas of overlap between private and public life, in which ‘everyday life becomes a major arena of political action’ (Buechler 2000:47). In terms of the collective action that I am exploring, there are a number of resonances with these conceptions that can be noted.

In the ‘David versus Goliath’ struggle to bring change to Australia’s official policies, practices and discourse on asylum seekers, opponents have lacked the power and influence to easily counter the legitimacy of the government discourse and actions, and the electoral power of the majority public support for it. Yet, different ways have been found to establish the legitimacy of a counter discourse and reforming vision - often through modelling lived examples of non-hostile interactions and relationships with asylum seekers, as well as through developing a counter discourse focussed on the defence of cultural values long identified with honoured Australian traditions of behaviour. Similarly, in the process of acting on issues perceived as urgent for the safety and wellbeing of the affected asylum seekers, more long established and hierarchically organised groups have of necessity functioned in close interaction with decentralised organisational forms developed in a much more ad hoc manner. The climate of urgency within which the social action I am studying has functioned has therefore resulted in a

complex web of different styles of action and interactions by individuals, ad hoc groups, and larger organisations with each other and with asylum seekers. At the same time that this micro level of interaction and action can be explored, the issue of asylum seekers' attempts to gain protection, and advocates' and activists' attempts to assist them, also functions at a global level, as noted in the previous chapter. The existence of this struggle at a macro-level must therefore also be adequately acknowledged and explored, and the connections at local, national and global levels examined for their potential impact upon each other.

Amongst New Social Movement Theorists, I have chosen the work of Melucci as a major analytical guide (1981, 1984, 1985, 1989, 1992, 1996a). I find his work intellectually stimulating in a number of ways, including the level of analytical rigour in his definition of concepts; the emphasis on the understanding of systemic conflicts in particular periods; the openness to the significance or 'message' of collective action; and the exploration of systemic aspects of both political and cultural factors in collective action. These aspects are particularly apparent in Melucci's interest in the potential dominance of overarching modalities of power which may produce such conflicts, as well as in the intimate detail of the form, style, processes and meanings of conflictual collective action. This combination of an openness to the particular specificities of collective action phenomena and a rigour of analysis of the processes of the construction of collective identity and experience, enables important aspects of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in collective action to be examined, at the same time that the historical, economic, political and social context within which the collective action is located, is also examined for its possible impact upon and interaction with it.

'It is social reality itself' (1996a:3), Melucci observes, which presents us with such variety of collective phenomena and underlying diverse issues and social structures. Numerous other theorists agree, with Marx and McAdam noting that while theories of collective action and social movements combine 'theoretical, empirical, and cross-disciplinary breadth' (1994:4), it is the empirical data that 'force us to confront process and structure, change and stability, conflict and cooperation, and the micro and macro levels of analysis' (1994:4). Indeed, Melucci observes that in terms of analysing contemporary collective actions and social movements, the increasing diffusion of empirical phenomena and their diversity is matched by 'the inadequacy of the analytical

tools available to us'. Within such an environment, he argues that this analytical endeavour 'can only proceed by trial and error' (1996a:3), and he suggests that the capacity of any theory 'to rely exclusively on its own analytical foundations is necessarily limited' (1996a:3). From this, he argues, 'derives the importance of the body of research [over past decades] into cases of social movements and episodes of collective action, which … has enriched theoretical analysis with a large quantity of empirical material relating to actual behaviour in society' (1996a:3). He therefore suggests remaining open to both the new possibilities and particularities which contemporary collective action may exhibit, as well as the theoretical insights and contributions made by previous researchers.

THE PHENOMENON OF GLOBALISATION

Buechler has explored the literature of collective action from a sociology of knowledge perspective. He argues that it can be seen to reflect the shifting influences of particular historical periods and accompanying theoretical frameworks (Buechler 2000). Roberta Garner also argues that collective action and social movement theories must be situated within the historical periods and theoretical understandings specific to them (1996:xvii). As she explains, new theories emerge in response to internal and external needs. While some will be developed 'to solve problems or fill gaps in the existing theories' (1996:42), others emerge 'as the social environment itself changes' (1996:42). If, as these scholars argue, collective action should be interpreted through the lens of the historical period and socio-political environment in which they function, what does the period with which this research is concerned contribute to understandings of such action? For, from the late 1990s, collective social action in western countries has increasingly been explored within this literature against a background of the economic and cultural forces of globalisation (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Della Porta 2007; Touraine 2000, 2002, 2007; McDonald 2006).

In terms of change in the nature and form of collective action, Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani note for example, that in the 1999 edition of their review of social movement theory, analysis was still 'strongly embedded in, and reflective of, the experience of the "new social movements" ' (2006:vii), which they describe as:

> movements which had developed since the late 1960s on issues such as women's rights, gender relations, environmental protection, ethnicity and migration, peace and international solidarity - with a … clear differentiation from the models of working-class or nationalistic collective action that had historically preceded them (2006:vii).

In contrast, they observe, by the time of the second edition six years later, the overall patterns of collective action being displayed were 'significantly different' (2006:vii), especially in terms of 'mobilisations by the dispossessed' (2006:viii) gaining 'increasing attention and visibility'(2006:viii). This change, they argue, appears to be associated with the accumulative impact over some decades, of the phenomenon of globalisation.

Globalisation has been variously defined. It is generally understood as a process of global integration of regional economies, but one which also extends into processes of integration of communications and cultures. According to Jan Pakulski, it involves 'a giant leap in cross-national interdependencies caused by the intensified circulation of … capital, … products, … information … and labour' (2004:10). As he observes of these processes, 'globalisation has both integrative and egalitarian as well as divisive and polarising effects' (2004:11). Which effects are more pronounced? This question he notes, pitches 'globo-sceptics – those who are critical of globalisation as stratifying and divisive – against globo-enthusiasts, who see the increasing interconnectedness as if not an equalising force, then at least a socially benign process' (2004:11).

The literature on globalisation is therefore vast, encompassing positive (Kinley 2009), negative (George 2003) and alternative (McDonald 2006) critiques, and including a wide range of analyses of the effects of this mode of organisation on economics, (Legrain 2002; Stevis and Boswell 2008; Kinley 2009), politics (see case studies in Cullen and Murray 2008; Agnew 2009; Giddens 2009), communication (Castells 2000), human rights (George 2003; Gibney 2003; Kinley 2009), society and culture (Appaduri 1996; Bauman 1998; Geertz 1998; Giddens 2001, 2002; Hutton and Giddens 2000, 2001), planetary well-being (Beder 2000); complex inequality (Pakulski 2004), migration (Legrain 2006; Munck 2009) and refugee protection (Chimni 2000). The literature on the influences of globalisation on collective action and social movements also emerges via a number of different analytical approaches. Firstly, as in analyses of globalisation in general, there are those which focus on deleterious or advantageous

aspects. Relatedly, there are different paradigms of globalisation on which analysis is based. Accompanying this is a tension around the application of existing theoretical frameworks or the adoption of emerging alternative theoretical frameworks.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Especially from the late 1990s, it is argued, distinctive shifts in collective action and social movement action have become more visible as issues of national and global economic inequality increasingly re-emerged as crucial issues of contest. Della Porta and Diani note that growing global economic interdependence has meant 'the transfer of production … to countries with lower wages; a strengthening of multinational corporations; and especially the internationalisation of financial markets' (2006:41). These factors, they argue, engendered the movement of large numbers of people from developing to developed countries, and have transformed the division of international labour by shifting industrialisation from developed to developing countries. As a result, they argue:

> In the world's North, it has brought unemployment and … an increase in job insecurity and unprotected working conditions … In the South, too, the neoliberalist policies imposed by major international economic organisations have forced developing countries to make substantial cuts in social spending (2006:41-42).

Indeed by 2006, they observed that a wide variety of democratic campaigns had emerged around the world, which could best be described as being part of a global justice consciousness, and could be associated with the term 'global justice movement(s)' (Della Porta and Diani 2006:vii). This wave of mobilisations for a 'globalisation from below' (2006:2), they argue, seemed to have the potential for 'a global, generalised challenge, combining themes typical of class movements with themes typical of new social movements, like ecology or gender equality' (2006:2). At the same time, they note, the actions exhibited aspects which made it difficult to associate the term global justice movement with a conception of a unitary and homogenous collective actor (Della Porta and Diani 2006:2). Though connected by a resistance to a perceived negative impact of neoliberal globalisation, the issues with which the collective actions were involved were heterogeneous and 'not necessarily connected to each other' (2006:2). They addressed a range of issues 'from child labor's

exploitation by global brands to deforestation, from human rights in developing countries to military interventions by Western powers' (2006:2). In addition, Della Porta and Diani observe, the collective actions themselves appeared in 'a myriad of forms' (2006:2), ranging from 'individual utterances of dissent and individual behaviour to mass collective events' (2006:2), and involved a wide variety of repertories of action and objectives.

In a 2007 edited volume, Della Porta reapproached the issue by way of comparative research on contemporary global justice movements in Europe and the United States of America, this time identifying them as 'a new cycle of protest' (2007:1). She notes that social movement theorists began in the 1960s to identify post-materialistic values in the emergence of demands for individual freedoms, based not on appeals to issues such as class but rather on issues concerning values and identities (2007:21. See also Inglehart 1977, 1990; Abramson and Inglehart 1995; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The innovation in the movements which have emerged in the last decade or so around a concern for global justice, she argues, is that there is again a strong engagement with issues of economic inequality. As she observes, the global justice movements involve issues for some of the poorest groups of people, both in Third World countries and First World countries. In the former, these have involved issues such as Third World Debt and global poverty. In the latter, they have often been centred around groups such as the unemployed and migrants without basic rights (2007:21). In addition, as Mario Pianta and Raffaele Marchetti argue, these movements address 'global issues with cross-border mobilisations' (Pianta and Marchetti 2007:29).

These conclusions on the emergence of a 'globalisation from below' are echoed in research by Arjun Appadurai in his examination of grassroots urban housing movements in India, which though deeply rooted in local needs and actions, also utilise horizontal global links with similar movements in other countries in order to assist in resolution of these needs, as well as vertical global links with powerful international organisations such as the World Bank (Appadurai 1996, 2000, 2002). Documentation of these aspects is also evident in research studies of what are variously described as transnational social movements (Smith et al. 1997), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998) and global social movements (Cohen and Rai 2000). These studies explore the increasing 'mobilisation of transnational resources in national

conflicts' (Smith et al. 1997: x) and the corresponding role of not only local and national non-government organisations, but also international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in promoting 'institutional and policy changes in the international order' (Smith et al. 1997: xiii). As noted by these and other scholars, 'Without a transnational framework – a global space or forum – the possibilities for opposition and protest are seriously weakened' (Cohen and Rai 2000:16) in a globalised world. Indeed, Kevin McDonald observes that this has clearly been an important factor in the growth in the number of International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) that has occurred over the past two decades (McDonald 2006:19. See also Appadurai 2002; Gibney 2003:4; Cohen and Rai 2000).

However, McDonald cautions, there must be concern if this theoretical approach towards transnational collective action represents these global movements as essentially 'extensions of older forms of "social movement" that we are largely familiar with' (2006:19). If viewed from such a perspective, he argues, globalisation is represented as involving 'new types of alliances between old types of actors' (2006:19), i.e. as merely a 'scale shift' (Tarrow 2003), where national level patterns of action and organisation extend out to new international contexts. The problem with this approach, he argues, is that it leads to a focus on movements that most resemble those we are already familiar with, while reducing the possibilities of perceiving and engaging with what may be new and unfamiliar forms of social movement action.

McDonald argues that there are other forms of collective action occurring on a global scale which do not resonate so readily with established theoretical perspectives. He points to a diverse range of contemporary collective actions such as Anti-roads campaigns in Britain, Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets events in the United States, the 'new humanitarianism' in France, the indigenous Zappista movement in Mexico, healing movements such as Falun Gong, and Islamic religious movements. From his research with such collective actors, he contends that profound differences are apparent in emergent social action, not only in terms of the 'relationships between individual and collective, or a shift from hierarchies to networks' (2006:vi), but also in terms of 'ways of being in the world, of experiencing one's own and the other's embodied subjectivity' (2006:vi).

These forms of social action are, he observes, characterised by a ' "personalisation" of commitment' (2006:74) and an orientation to the other, in which the awareness of the social actors is that what is happening to those whom they are seeking to assist, could 'just as easily happen to them as well' (2006:74). Also central to this social action, he argues, is an understanding of space 'where we encounter the other as a person, not as a citizen of a given country' (2006:78).The 'grammar of action' of these groups, he argues, is often not about creating a group, but about creating an event (2006:65); not about building a collective identity for an action constituency, but about recognising a shared experience with other human beings (2006:74); not about the claims of a particular group, but about evoking memory, feeling, hope, and imagination (2006:57); not about building organisational structures, but about 'defending values' (Aguiton 1996 quoted in McDonald 2006:79).

McDonald argues that the focus of the collective action and social movements which he has observed, has shifted to cultural flows and communication, and to efforts to provide ways of becoming a self that can be open to the experience of the other. He points to contemporary social actions that are better understood in terms of personal experience than organisation building and collective identity, and to forms of practice and communication which are more embodied and sensual than deliberative and representational (2006:4). These forms require, he argues, an 'urgent need to rethink our understandings of action' (2006:4). They also, he observes, open new ways of thinking about globalisation.

Alain Touraine argues similarly for a new paradigm of analysis in place of earlier economic, political and social explorations of collective action (2007). Touraine has long been interested in attempts to identify conflicts which could be considered as central 'for the shaping of historicity' (1981:29), i.e. the overall system of meaning which sets dominant rules in a given society. The most important factors to be found in contemporary contestations, he argues, are the concepts of the subject and of rights. The rights at issue, he identifies as personal and cultural rights, but also as more concrete rights, i.e. 'the right to work, housing, and to live in security' (2001:64). In this regard, he identifies similar aspects of struggle to those raised by scholars such as Appadurai, Della Porta and Diani, and others. At the same time, in his focus on the centrality of the

role of subjectivity and identity, his understandings resonate with those of theorists such as McDonald.

Touraine suggests that we have come to the 'decomposition of "the social" ' (2007:16) in that social organisation, 'threatened from "above" by what we call globalisation, can no longer find resources for its recovery within itself' (2007:16). He argues that it is rather from ' "below", in an increasingly radical and passionate appeal to the individual' (2007:16) that hope is to be found. In relation to what he perceives to be negative effects of neo-liberal globalisation on areas of personal, social and economic life, Touraine suggests that 'salvation must come from the dominated and those who support them' (2001:33). In France, he observes, such an emergence has taken place in recent decades in the form of social actions by marginalised sections of the society around issues of human rights in personal, cultural, social and economic spheres of life. These collective actions, include those which appeared in the late 1990s in France, namely the *beur* movement and associated antiracist activism (2001:51-54); collective action including involvement by groups such as the Front Homosexuel d'Action Revolutionnaire for supportive policies for people with AIDs (2001:54-56); and the *sans* movements (2001:57-58) - *sans logis, sans-papiers, sans-travail* (the homeless, the 'paperless' and the jobless) [21]. Touraine argues that distinctive aspects of these collective actions include high levels of personal commitment; a raison d'etre which is 'the defence of very specific rights and the search for concrete solutions' (2001:63); and central references to 'the rights of the subject, and to the rights of minorities as well as those of the majority' (2001:64).

However, he also observes that for any sustained political action to result, the social actors must 'have something to defend' (2001:33) *and* 'speak in the name of society as a whole' (2001:33). It is this regard, he considers, that the *sans papiers* movement produced so significant an example, in terms of the widespread support that it was able to mobilise as 'the defence of the rights of the few came to be associated with the defence of the rights of all' (2001:62). Touraine argues that in forms of collective action in the emerging global world, 'it is the "individual's self-construction as an actor" ' (Touraine 2002 quoted in McDonald 2006:14) that is central. It is also, he argues, the

[21] Among these, he argues, it is the *sans papiers* movement which has most successfully brought the issue of human rights to the fore of the struggle.

centrality of the issue of the rights of the subject, and the struggle for the rights of minorities as well as those of the majority, that makes these contemporary 'social movements so important' (2001:64). In that they collectively defend personal rights as well as cultural and social rights, he argues, they confront issues which are 'bound up with … major forms of domination' (2001:70) in a global society.

Touraine's analysis therefore involves both the relationship of collective action with its potential for democratising and egalitarian effects on civic life, politics and legislation, *and* the process by which any individual self-constructs her/himself as a social actor. A world is being created, he argues, 'which is positively oriented towards the creation of Subjects but which is equally subordinated to the logic of economic, social and political forces'(2002:398). The conflict between these two orientations, he observes, 'is as central today as the class conflict was in industrial society' (2002:398). At the same time, he points out, in a world where the expression *one world* has become a reality and we are 'keenly all aware of our interdependence' (2002:398), the capacity to act as 'a Subject … gives a major importance to the recognition of the other and to the consciousness of alterity' (2002:396-7).

Melucci's analysis of contemporary collective action reinforces this dual perspective. Melucci died in 2000, soon after collective actions such as the anti-globalisation actions began to make their presence felt more strongly. However, his research for over twenty years previously, remains pertinent in terms of his analysis of struggles between what he calls the 'centre' and the 'periphery' of global economic and cultural dominance; between modernising influences and state practices; and between civic actions for democratising politics, and political and social conditions which he argues facilitate the emergence of communitarian, fundamentalist and terrorist tendencies in collective action. Writing in 1996, Melucci observes a world system which is 'entirely interdependent and has reached its boundaries both geographically and in temporal terms' (1996a:190). He argues that analysis of contemporary movements must take 'a systemic global point of view, and it cannot be applied in a mechanistic way to the national or state level' (1996a:191). The collective action protests seem to exist, he observes, 'at different stages of history simultaneously' (1996a:191), being located in the structures and cultures of particular nation states, at the same time as they are inextricably inserted in a global system with its own structural and cultural models

(1996a:191). Indeed, he argues, through their actions, contemporary collective actions reveal precisely these multiple level links between the dilemmas of existing in a globally interdependent system while interacting with the specific political and social definitions of the problem at local and national levels (1996a:191).

Melucci has therefore suggested as 'working' analytical notions for contemporary social actions, the concepts of 'complex society' and 'information society' (1996a:90). He has also advanced hypotheses which he suggests may serve as analytical tools for empirical phenomena which may not fit within the framework of old ones (1996a:91). The first of these hypotheses concerns the capacity of complex systems to increasingly put 'the individual at the centre of its focus' (1996a:91). As does Touraine, Melucci argues that 'the achievements of modernity' (1996a:91) have simultaneously turned the individual 'into the terminal point of the processes of regulation' (1996a:91) and 'into a subject of action' (1996a:91). The second hypothesis which is also in accord with Touraine's arguments, concerns 'new inequalities' (1996a:93) which have arisen where global and national disparities concern not only material resources but also the life chances of individuals and groups, as differences in access to opportunities are affected by 'potent forces' (1996a:93) which exclude entire social groups and parts of the world. He observes that in a global society undergoing transformation, there is a critical weakness in terms of the inadequacy of national and global political systems for the kinds of problems and issues to be faced (1996a:193). This produces, he argues, an enormous 'hiatus between the changes in the social field and the actual capacity for representing them at the political level, [as well as] for producing new definitions of human needs and human rights' (1996a:193). It is this absence, he argues, that contemporary social movements and specifically global justice movements express in calls for democracy.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Accompanying these theoretical perspectives are the analytical research decisions which flow from them for my research. As mentioned earlier, one of the debates which has arisen for social movement theorists in the last decade is the extent to which past collective action and social movement theoretical approaches can adequately explore these more recent forms of action. Can they be adequately studied through a range of established collective action theories, in terms of their seeming combination of

economic themes from earlier class mobilisations and cultural themes typical of the later 'new social movements' ? (Della Porta and Diani 2006:2) In addition, can they be adequately studied as extensions in size and scope from the local or national sphere of collective action mobilisations into a supranational realm? Or as McDonald argues, do particularities in contemporary collective action as compared to the types of collective action which preceded them, require very different approaches to analysis? In a 2006 overview of social movement theory, Della Porta and Diani raise these questions, noting the very different collective action context in process compared to that existent five years earlier.

In their 2006 decision, Della Porta and Diani adopt what they call 'a "minimalist" solution' (2006:viii) to this dilemma, using a wide range of established collective action and social movement theoretical approaches, and modifying them where necessary to account for the new phenomena which they observe. They therefore address themselves to four major aspects which, as they observe, have variously 'inspired the analysis of grassroots political action and cultural resistance since the 1960s' (2006:5). These areas of study include the relationship between structural change and transformations in patterns of social conflict; the role of cultural representations in social conflict; the process through which values, interests and ideas get turned into collective action; and the manner in which particular social, political and cultural contexts affect the trajectory of social movement action (2006:5-6). In addition, they note, studying contemporary forms of action illustrates well 'what doing "social movement analysis" actually means' (2006:2), i.e. following an analytic focus on 'individuals, organisations or events' (2006:2), in which theoretical and empirical analysis is combined interactively, and in which the best instances of analysis try to capture the interdependence between the foci of analysis.

In my readings of contemporary collective action phenomena, I perceive a range of types and styles of collective action. Some appear more purposively 'instrumental' in nature, and may therefore be most appropriately investigated by established collective action and social movement theories such as Resource Mobilization Theories and Political Opportunity Theories. Here I would note that no one theoretical approach can ever fully explicate the 'wholeness' of collective action phenomena, and researchers using these theories, for example, may also use them in combination with other theories

such as Social Constructivism and Symbolic Interactionism.[22] Other collective actions demonstrate aspects which resonate more obviously with phenomena identified by theorists such as McDonald in terms of 'expressive' collective action. Though they may be appropriately investigated by established collective action theories such as Social Constructivism and New Social Movement Theories, they may also require completely new approaches. As Goodwin et al. have suggested in regard to the study of emotions in politics, they are but 'the entering wedge' (2001:24) for many aspects of protest that remain to be explored. These include 'Gendered styles, roles, expectations, and self definitions' (2001:24); the embodied nature of protest (2001:24); the sense of 'place' (2001:24) in terms of a 'physical orientation to the surrounding world' (2001:24); and the sense of 'self' (2001:24).

At the same time, contemporary collective action is situated within a period of vastly faster and increased flows of finance, images, technologies, ideas, and people (Appadurai 1996). A number of theorists argue in connection with claims of 'newness' of contemporary issues and phenomena, that aspects identified as new in contemporary collective actions have their counterparts in earlier collective actions (Keck and Sikkink 1998:39. See also earlier debates on 'new' social movements). However, I concur in this regard with Buechler and a number of other scholars that collective actions are most appropriately studied within the context of the specific historical social structures in which they are situated (Buechler 2000:50-51; Garner 1996). Even when established theories appear adequate to the task of exploration of particular styles of contemporary collective action, the temporal context within which they operate may produce its own variations on earlier themes, as structural, technological and cultural changes alter 'the moral universe in which we live' (Haskell 1985:356), 'changing how people think' (Keck and Sikkink 1998:43) and 'supplying them with new ways to act' (Keck and Sikkink 1998:43. See also Appadurai 1996:2-11 on the role of the imagination in the contemporary world).

Certainly, I argue that all investigations of contemporary collective action need to be informed by the identifications made by many theorists of the impact of structural and cultural processes of globalisation on global, regional and national disparities of

[22] As Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink observe, 'we can think about the strategic activity of actors in an intersubjectively structured political universe' (1998:5).

material resources and life chances; the identifications made of the disjunctures of contemporary life and the impact of this on individual subjectivity and resultant forms of collective action; the identification of what is variously called 'another globalisation', 'alternative globalisation' or 'globalisation from below'; and the rapid spread of transnational and global networks of action which have developed in recent decades. I therefore choose to follow a path similar to that identified by Della Porta and Diani, and advocated by Melucci, i.e. of maintaining an openness to the explanatory power of a wide range of established collective action and social movement theories, whilst also maintaining an awareness of the new issues and new phenomena identified by theorists who have contributed to this debate, as well as an openness to other issues and phenomena which I may identify in the process of my research.

To what extent will Melucci's and Touraine's observations on the way in which individual subjectivity has been increasingly impacted upon (Melucci 1996a:91. Touraine 2002), be relevant in terms of the collective action I am studying? To what extent will McDonald's observations on an increasing ' "personalisation" of commitment' (2006:74) in contemporary collective action, and an orientation to the other in terms of recognising a shared experience with other human beings rather than the boundaries of a particular group, be relevant to an understanding of this collective action? Similarly, how relevant to this particular local and national collective action, are Touraine's arguments concerning the centrality of the issue of the rights of the subject and the rights of minorities in contemporary protest (Touraine 2001:64-70). In addition, in terms of the potential impact of globalisation on national policies and discourses on asylum seeker movements, to what extent, if at all, does awareness of the globally interdependent nature of these issues and of alternative constructions of globalisation manifest in this arena of collective action?

In an article published in 2000, Melucci argues with co-author Leonardo Avritzer that contemporary political systems in democratic societies are 'in deep crisis' (2000:508), and that political systems which may have been adequate in earlier decades, are now incapable of representing the pluralism and complexity of current society. Melucci and Avritzer suggest that 'If democracy is to keep its legitimacy, it needs to assume a different form in complex, pluralistic societies' (2000:521). Melucci has argued earlier that in complex societies, there is a need for a greater role to be played by civil society.

As he observes, 'facile discourse, promoted through the simplistic slogans generalised by the media, is by definition easier than critical discourse based on reasons and arguments. But there is also a need for meaningfulness, values, solidarity and equity' (1996a:282). This situation, he argues, assigns a crucial role to the organisation of information as a primary resource and source of power in complex societies (1992:75, 1996a; 282), and a correspondingly crucial role for collective actions and social movements as carriers of that information.

In the 2000 publication, this message is argued even more strongly in terms of the need for effective public presentation of informational and moral claims and their introduction into public culture, as an antidote to ineffective democratic political systems. For Melucci, there is a critical role to be played in this regard in the form of public spaces which permit the articulation of the demands of civil society and which render the power relations of complex societies more visible. This critical function of public spaces is, he argues, indispensible for democracy (1989:230). This argument is resonant with that of Benhabib, mentioned in the previous chapter, and further reinforces the significance of inquiry into the role of this factor in this particular collective action.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing the literature of collective action and social movement theories, I have chosen the work of Melucci as a major analytical guide for this research. Certainly, no one theorist can be completely appropriate for guiding the research studies of others, and I may find, especially in areas which may require a more instrumental analysis of political processes and political opportunity structures, that this theoretical approach will not always be the most appropriate for the task before me. The trajectories by which collective action results in social and political change, or fails to achieve that objective, have been a central concern of a wide range of collective action and social movement theorists (Blumer 1939; Heberle 1951; Smelser 1962; Zald and Ash 1966; McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978), and this has produced a richness of analysis. Different theoretical strands have developed different areas of expertise in investigations of collective action. Although I find Melucci's approach to the study of collective action illuminating, I therefore also recognise the value of other theoretical perspectives as

well. In advance of what I will encounter on empirical investigation, I remain open to the utilisation of a range of collective action theoretical possibilities, at the same time as I proceed with what I consider to be valuable insights gained from the study of Melucci's body of work. As with the theorists in the previous chapter, I therefore propose to hold this input in mind as an orienting framework as I explore the supportive collective action that took place on behalf of asylum seekers in the period of my study. The following chapter details the research methodologies and methods used in the thesis.

Chapter 4:
Methodology and method

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the methodologies and methods of ethnographic research which are used in this thesis. It documents the particular research perspective which accompanies ethnographic methodologies, i.e. one which seeks to examine human behaviour from an 'insider perspective'. This perspective seeks to produce a descriptive and interpretive text which is not only about the actions of the participants in the research, but also about the meanings of those actions for those participants. In addition, current ethnographic research seeks to examine the influence of the social environment within which the action occurs, upon the action; and the nature of the interactions between the researcher and the research participants upon the research process and findings.

The qualitative research paradigms which inform this ethnographic inquiry are those of social constructivism and critical theory. Collectively, these research paradigms acknowledge the existence of multiple social perceptions and experienced realities, at the same time that they recognise the constraining nature of historical and structural factors such as social inequity and injustice. The project utilises the research methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing as well as critical engagement with literature and theory in exploring both of these aspects. The chapter provides information on why these particular paradigms, methodologies and methods have been chosen, and the specific ways in which they have been utilised in the research.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

One of the tensions within anthropology and sociology studies is between exploring the subjective dimension of meaning making which individuals or groups bring to their actions, and exploring the wider historical, economic, political and social structures within which particular human action is situated. The two dimensions are inextricably intertwined, with structural aspects facilitating or constraining individual and group

behaviour, and individuals and groups acting upon their structural environment. Yet, the scope of particular studies may not be able to do sufficient justice to both aspects. Therefore, being explicit about the focus of the research, and about the dimensions which have and have not been deeply explored, can best aid an understanding of the interaction of both aspects.

The primary intention of this study has been to produce an understanding of the social action of those who opposed the policy, from the perspective or perspectives of the participants engaged in the social action. Such a perspective or perspectives can illuminate the motivations, emotions, strategies and actions of advocates in engaging in social action. This could be described as the subjective or micro-level perspective of the social action. The other intention of the study has been to comprehend that social action within a macro-level perspective of structural aspects which have impacted upon the development and maintenance of the policy, and which have in turn been impacted upon by the advocates' social action. The primary research labour of this thesis has been engaged with elucidating and analysing the former, through ethnographic methodologies. The comprehension of the macro-level perspective has been accessed to a larger degree through analysis of literature and documents in the public arena, but since advocacy actions have been purposely directed at a number of these structural aspects, understandings of these connections between structural aspects, policy and practice have also been facilitated through the ethnographic methodologies.

ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography can be defined as the production of a descriptive text not only of a particular environment and of human actions within that, but also, as much as possible, of the meanings of the environment and actions for those particular social actors. Clifford Geertz argues that it needs to be understood in the active sense of what is being *done* in producing ethnography. He argues that in understanding that, a start can be made towards understanding what such an analysis 'amounts to as a form of knowledge' (Geertz 1975:6). While from one point of view, 'doing ethnography' could be described in terms of its various methods, Geertz argues that it is not the techniques and procedures that define it. Rather, he suggests 'What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in … "thick description" ' (Geertz 1975:6).

Ethnography for Geertz, is therefore not only the description of actions, but more importantly, the elucidation of the meaning of the actions as understood by the participants and expressed to the ethnographer. As James Spradley explains, 'The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organise their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live' (1979:5).

In early anthropological research, ethnographies were exploratory cultural enterprises that were situated within a colonial worldview; undertaken by people in particular gendered, racial and class locations; and resulted in 'classic realist ethnographic text' (Denzin 1997: xiii). Norman Denzin notes the words of Bronislaw Malinowski, a founder of the ethnographic methodology, in describing the process: 'Find out the typical ways of thinking and feeling, corresponding to the institutions and culture of a given community and formulate the results in the most convincing way' (cited in Denzin 1997:xv-xvi). In early sociological studies, similar understandings guided ethnographic research in urban settings (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:1-2), where the city was conceived of as 'a social laboratory' (Vidich and Lyman 1994:33). Since these beginnings, Denzin notes, 'The ethnographic project has changed because the world that ethnography confronts has changed' (Denzin1997:xii).

Malinowski's definition of ethnography, Denzin argues, is 'no longer workable' (1997: xvi). Not only are there altered understandings of the subjectivity and objectivity of the ethnographer, but we also live in a postmodern cultural economy of blurred boundaries and identities (Denzin 1997: xii). Recent understandings of ethnography therefore include not only the collision of the ethnographer's subjectivity with 'cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and age' (Denzin 1997: xiv), but also fundamental issues concerning the dialogic and equitable nature of the ethnographic project. Ethnography is therefore more appropriately described in Denzin's words, as 'that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about' (1997: xi).

Ethnography has traditionally involved the research methods of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, and as mentioned, these methods form the basis of my research exploration. Within such perspectives, Denzin argues, 'life and method are inextricably intertwined' (2004:449). Patricia Adler and Peter Adler have described the act of observation, for example, as that of gathering impressions of the surrounding world 'through all relevant human faculties' (1994:378). As they note, one of the features of ethnographic participant observation as a research tool, was traditionally thought to be that of non-interventionism (1994:378). However, critical research has destabilised assumptions of objectivity in observation (Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2003). These critiques encourage reflexivity and disclosure on the part of the researcher, situated as she is within a particular social setting of relationships, dialogue and activities, both within and outside of the research; and permeated by a gendered, class, age, racial and ethnic positioning in the world. As Barbara Tedlock observes, an important shift within ethnographic research has been from 'participant observation' to 'the observation of participation' (Tedlock 2000:464).

Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln's (2004) discussion of qualitative research inquiry paradigms such as positivism, post positivism, critical theory, and constructivism, illuminates some of the fundamental shifts that have occurred over time in the nature of ethnographic research. Within their designation of inquiry paradigms, my research is informed by the latter two paradigms. It is primarily influenced by the insights of social constructivism in terms of the existence within society of multiple realities, which, within the constraints of structural entities, are still 'socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature' (Guba and Lincoln 2004:26). It is also influenced by the insights of critical theory into the constraining nature of historically and empirically locatable entities of inequity and injustice. Within a constructivist paradigm, the aim of inquiry is understanding of the content and meaning of competing constructions of bodies of knowledge (Guba and Lincoln 2004:30), which can then be examined and compared in a dialectical context. Within a critical theory paradigm, the aim of inquiry is 'the critique and transformation' (Guba and Lincoln 2004:30) of inequitable social structures and entities that the inquiry is concerned with. Within both of these research paradigms, advocacy and activism on the part of the researcher, are explicitly situated. In my research, while I follow the constructivist paradigm of the experiential existence of multiple constructions of reality, I am also critically aware of the location of these

constructions within empirical and historically situated entities and structures. I seek in the research to delineate the former, the latter, and the relationship between them.

REFLEXIVITY

In terms of my multiple personal location as activist, advocate and researcher, it has been essential that I engage in a continuing process of reflection upon the extent to which the role of activist/advocate impacts upon the role of researcher, and vice versa. As Denzin has remarked of current ethnography, 'self-reflexivity in ethnography is no longer a luxury' (1997: xiii). A positioning of the self within an activist/advocacy location implies a passionate commitment to certain aims and outcomes and a possibly diminished perspective of other positions. This location has both the potential to open some avenues for the research exploration, in terms of predisposing contributions from those favourably inclined to the advocacy, whilst also possibly closing other avenues for exploration, from those opposed to it. Both of these aspects must therefore be acknowledged in terms of the range and type of data collected from different perspectives, and from which the results of the research analysis can be critically and validly argued. All of these are matters which need to be explored in terms of the research process and the research findings.

For such positionings, feminist literature has provided valuable insights. From an enabling research perspective, much feminist literature provides an example of the way in which the experiential location of a researcher can be utilised as a source of insight and a point of cross-referencing for accuracy. At the same time, other feminist literature has illuminated the narrowness of such points of vision where 'other' is excluded and the experience of the self is reified. As a starting point in my own exploration of my position as advocate/activist and researcher, I adopt from Elspeth Probyn, the concept of experience as 'epistemologically productive' (1993:20). While the experiential can block, conceal and distort perception and perspective, it can also provide moments of recognition and dissonance from which critical perspectives can grow. This approach can be used to recognise the location of the researcher as part of the social environment, and insist that it be both examined critically and put to work theoretically (1993:21). I therefore acknowledge my positioning in my role as researcher, as a personally involved, morally and politically engaged ethnographer, and not a 'neutral observer'.

AN ITERATIVE ANALYTICAL PROCESS

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson observe that in regard to research design, ethnographers 'typically employ a relatively open-ended approach' (2007:3). Beginning with an interest in some particular area of social life, and the 'foreshadowing' of issues, their orientation is essentially an exploratory one where 'the initial interests and questions that motivated the research will be refined, and perhaps even transformed, over the course of the research' (2007:3). In ethnographic research, this may take a considerable amount of time. Eventually, through this process, Hammersley and Atkinson note, 'the inquiry will become progressively more clearly focused on a specific set of research questions, and this will then allow the strategic collection of data to pursue answers to those questions more effectively, and to test these against evidence' (2007:3-4).

The development of my research project aligns with this observation. The process has been an iterative one over a considerable period of time (Eisenhardt 1989). It began with initial interest in an area of concern and proceeded through a continuous reviewing of varied, relevant literature; the development and refinement of the research focus, research methodology and research methods; continuous reflection on the research project; data collection through participant observation which then informed the subsequent interview research methods; the circulation of preliminary observations (to the community being studied) in the form of visual representation and textual interpretation; data collection through in-depth interviewing; the development of continuous 'analytic notes and memoranda … ideas and hunches' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:158); the development of additional survey research methods which were not subsequently used in the project, but which again informed later participant observation and interviewing; and data analysis and theorising with constant comparison between all of these elements, in regard to elucidating and examining emergent patterns. The research has also been informed in a continuous manner by reflexivity on my location as researcher and activist/advocate.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

Participant observation

Participant observation is a qualitative data collection technique. Its academic history is commonly documented as originating in early 20th century anthropological and sociological studies (Denzin and Lincoln 2000;Vidich and Lyman 2000). It was later utilised within a range of research paradigms including grounded theory and naturalistic inquiry, and in recent times has been adopted as a method within educational and health research studies, cultural studies, human geography, and organisational studies (Atkinson and Hamersley 1994:257). As a research method, the name describes what is expected of the researcher utilising it, namely participation in the social world which is to be observed.

There have been a number of analyses which have described and examined in detail the particularities of this method (McCall and Simmons 1969; Pelto and Pelto 1978; Spradley 1980; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Werner and Schoepfle 1986; Jorgensen 1989). In addition, examples of the end product of the method are found in ethnographic texts. An examination of some of the classic ethnographic anthropological and sociological texts from the early 20th century onwards illustrates the various ways in which the usage of, and ideas about the method have both changed and remained constant (For some examples of classic ethnographies and shifts over time, see Malinowski 1922; Evans Pritchard 1940; Firth 1957; Levi-Strauss 1976; Boaz 1966; Benedict 1959; Mead 1961; Park1967; Wirth 1956; Whyte 1993; Clifford 1988; Rosaldo 1980; Behar 1996; Goffman 1961; Becker 1963; Strathern 1972). [23]

Critical analyses of the way in which anthropologists and sociologists have used the method in research practice and textual representation, have been the subject of passionate discussion within these disciplines and others (Rabinow 1977; Geertz 1975 and 1983; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Stocking 1983 and 1989; Freeman 1983; van Maanen 1988; Rosaldo 1989; Denzin 1989 and 1997; Hammersley 1992; Obeyesekere 1992; Wolf 1992; Jackson 1998; Hooks 2004). Accompanying this body of literature, is the literature of qualitative research paradigms such as grounded theory which utilise the method of participant observation in specific

[23] The dates of some of these publications are from later editions.

ways (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In addition, participant observation is a topic for general texts on qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman 1995; Babbie 2001; Patton 2002; Denzin 1978; Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000, 2003).

The particularities of participant observation as a research method are informed by an attempt by the researcher to understand the meanings, for the social group being studied, of the culture and behaviours which are being lived by members of the group. The method has been described by Alex Stewart as the researcher's 'own inquiring experience, in joint, emergent exploration with … actors or insiders' (Stewart 1998:6). In one sense, we are all continually acting as participant-observers in our daily lives, as we mentally take note of our surroundings or reflect on our experience of a given situation (Babbie 2001:275; Adler and Adler 1994; Spradley 1980; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). However, when applied as a research method, participant observation involves a particular conscious application by the researcher to the observation of participation in the chosen area of study. It is argued that such an activity requires the attainment by the researcher as participant observer, of an 'insider/outsider' shift (Spradley1980:56-7).

Spradley's 1980 discussion provides an analysis of features which distinguish the participant observer role in research from the behaviour of an ordinary participant (1980:54-58). One feature is the maintenance by researchers of a 'dual purpose', i.e. to both participate *and* to observe themselves and others in those acts of participation. Secondly, researchers need to develop a level of explicit awareness of cultural rules and features that for other participants may remain at an implicit, tacit level. Thirdly, they need to bring a 'wide-angle lens' (1980:56) to their observation, 'taking in a much broader spectrum of information' (1980:56). Fourthly, Spradley suggests, they will find that they experience being both an insider and an outsider, sometimes consecutively, sometimes simultaneously. Fifthly, as they participate in the routine activities of the group being studied, they will need to engage in introspection to more fully understand their experiences. And finally, they will need to keep a record of what they see and experience.

The research continuum of this double activity of participation and observation has been well described by Patton (1990 and 2002). See also Marshall and Rossman 1989, and

Adler and Adler 1994). At one end of the continuum, the participation aspect for the researcher is emphasised. At the other end, it is the observation work which is emphasised. As Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman explain, 'At one extreme is the full participant, who goes about ordinary life in a role or set of roles ascribed by the setting. At the other is the complete observer, who engages not at all in social interaction. … And, of course, all possible complementary mixes along the continuum' (1989:79).

In a detailed analysis of the roles which these different positionings provide, Spradley notes that the highest level of involvement, which he describes as that of the 'complete participant', occurs when a researcher studies a situation in which they are already ordinary participants (1980:61). In this situation, the researcher begins as a complete participant, learning the tacit cultural rules for the group of which she is a participant. Later, in the role of participant observer, she begins to make systematic observations and to place the activities of the group within a broader lens. In contrast, in Spradley's definition of the researcher as an 'active participant', research 'begins with observations, but as knowledge of what others do grows … the active participant seeks to … more fully learn the cultural rules for behaviour' (1980:60). 'Moderate participation' is said to occur 'when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation' (1980:60). In 'passive participation', the ethnographer is present at the scene of action 'but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent' (Spradey 1980:59). If the passive participant occupies any role in the social situation, it will only be that of "bystander", "spectator" or "loiterer" (1980:59). In addition, researchers may begin research from one point on the spectrum and later move to another (Patton 1990:206).

In terms of gaining understanding of the nuances of meaning for a particular group, a high degree of participation of the participant observer is usually correlated by theorists with the attainment of that objective. The end goal of this immersion within the culture being studied, is that of 'generating insight'(Stewart 1998:4) which leads to contextualised explanation of social phenomena. For Marshall and Rossman, participant observation is 'a special form of observation' (1989:79), which 'demands firsthand involvement in the social world chosen for study' (1989:79), and which 'allows the

researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do' (1989:79). For Joyceen Boyle (1991:277), it indicates that 'the researcher is directly involved in the informant's life, observing and talking with people as he or she learns their view of reality'. Put simply, Earl Babbie argues, ' "Being there" is a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs' (1998:303) in their rich complexity. Within these perspectives, participant observation is less a research method and more a way of 'being-in-the-world' (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994:249).

At the same time, criticisms of the participant observation method and its commonly resultant end-product in ethnography, have come from a variety of sources such as positivism, feminism, and postmodern critiques. Important ethical issues to be considered in the use of participant observation as a research method also involve the disclosure to research participants of the nature of the research being undertaken, and the provision of confidentiality for research participants. (For discussions of ethical issues in participant observation see Patton 2002:269-273, and 2002:310-317; Marshall and Rossman 1995:59-77; and Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2003:135-143. For a discussion of the history and shifts in issues of ethical concern in qualitative research, see Christians 2000).

From a positivistic viewpoint, participant observation has usually been regarded as non-scientific (Jorgensen1989:7). Included within this critical envelope is explicit criticism of a 'too close for comfort' relationship between the researcher as participant observer and the people or issue being studied. From this perspective, a lessening of research objectivity is argued to result (Schwartz and Schwartz 1969). Additional criticism involves what is regarded as a reluctance on the part of participant observer researchers to fully define and delineate in advance, the pathways and patterns of their research. More commonly however, as Danny Jorgensen notes, the method of participant observation has come to be viewed from a positivistic critical perspective as 'useful during the preliminary stages of scientific inquiry for exploration and description … but not otherwise useful for the ultimate scientific goal of explanatory theorising' (Jorgensen 1989:7).

These criticisms have been addressed by ethnographers on many occasions (for an overview of these arguments, see Stewart 1998). The discussion by George Spindler and

Louise Spindler (1992) is useful, for example, for the detailed criteria they provide for the production of rigorous ethnographic research. These authors outline an ethnographic research process in which the participant observation method forms a central ingredient. They argue that although ethnographic data are qualitative, this does not equate with being inexact or ambiguous. Rather, there is a continued checking of the data through repetitive observations, and a cross-checking with additional research data and with comparative and historical material. As Spindler and Spindler (1992:68) explain the ethnographic research process:

> As a rule, the specific problem, with related hypotheses is developed as the participant observation fieldwork proceeds. The ethnographer knows something interesting is going on out there and tries to relate to it. Eventually, the observations begin to fall into categories and be governed by models … The model or frame of reference in anthropological ethnography is usually broad enough to encompass a wide range of phenomena. The important criterion is that the ethnographer should proceed in the initial stages of investigation with as open a mind as possible. … Soon, one begins to formulate hypotheses, more often resembling serious hunches than formal hypotheses, that are explored and tested by continued, repetitive observation and data elicitation.

Within this enterprise, the research technique of participant observation remains 'the guts of the ethnographic approach' (Spindler and Spindler 1992:63).

In contrast to earlier critiques, criticism of participant observation methodology from feminist, critical and postmodern perspectives concern issues of researcher power and authorisation. Here, one of the major issues for consideration concerns the researcher as self-styled 'expert', presenting one seemingly definitive and authoritative version of a studied situation as encompassing the whole of the experience of those involved. Rather, as these critiques have demonstrated, the researcher's version constitutes one part of a multifaceted truth, and correspondingly requires to be transparently shown as such, and situated within the particularity of its reference points (Hooks 2004; Denzin 2004; Rosaldo 1989).

Within feminist, critical and postmodern approaches to qualitative research, what is regarded within positivist approaches as a negative aspect of the participant observation modality, i.e. utilisation of the subjective experiences of the researcher in the process of doing research, becomes a positive, even desirable aspect of qualitative research.

Awareness of the subjective experience and value orientation of the researcher in her interaction with other participants becomes one of the bases for research which strives to be conscious of issues of power and bias in interaction and representation. Human action occurs within particular situational contexts, and observation includes the exploration of these contexts through the lived experience of the participant observer researcher, as well as through more traditional data collection (Ellis and Bochner 2000).

In this endeavour, the participant observation method provides a research method which has been basic to my research project. In this regard, I concur with Spindler and Spindler that 'the *validity* of ethnographic observation is based on observation *in situ* that lasts long enough to permit the ethnographer to see things happen not once but repeatedly' (1992:65). Using this research method, I have followed their dictum that 'we must observe these happenings often enough so that finally we learn nothing significant by their reoccurrence. … Then one should observe still longer, to be sure that one's sense of that point in time is not premature nor the result of fatigue' (1992:65).

In-depth interviewing

This qualitative research method is commonly used in conjunction with that of participant observation in ethnographic research. It provides a complementary method (to participant observation) for researchers attempting to access the social and personal context of people's behaviour. As Irving Seidman explains, 'A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience'(1998:4). These double entities of behaviour and meaning are thus explored in joint participant observation and in-depth interviewing research projects. Like observation, interviewing is, Seidman argues, 'a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience' (1998:2).

In-depth interviewing is not the only interview method widely used in research. Survey and focus group interview methods are also common research interview methods, and interviewing formats and styles can cover a wide range of practices ranging from 'tightly structured, survey interviews with preset, standardized, normally closed questions' (Seidman 1998:9) to 'open-ended, apparently unstructured, anthropological

interviews that might be seen almost, according to Spradley (1979) as friendly conversation' (Seidman 1998:9). However, it is the latter that are more commonly used in ethnographic research, and in my research I have used the modified form of in-depth face-to-face, one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. In an in-depth unstructured or semi-structured qualitative interview, the researcher is seeking an understanding of 'the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman 1998:3). The focus of the interaction is therefore on asking participants to reconstruct their 'experience within the topic under study' (Seidman 1998:9). As Seidman explains, this entails for participants, a process of an ordering and a selection from a vast array of memories and events, to those which are to them the most pivotal and explanatory. Placed within the 'structure' of a topic issue which forms a background to the discussion, this format facilitates what could best be described as 'purposeful conversation'. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson observe, while unstructured and semi-structured interviews are obviously 'closer in character to conversations than are survey interviews' (2007:117), interviews are 'never *simply* conversations' (2007:117). The nature of the research project being undertaken (shared with the interviewee in the informed consent form), and the formality of an arranged interview, indicate a research agenda and a purposeful positioning of the interviewer as facilitator of the interview, regardless of the seemingly egalitarian nature of the interaction.

At the same time, the dialogic nature of an in-depth interview can make of that interaction, not only an "I and Thou" interaction, but also a "We" interaction (Seidman 1998:80). The dynamics of the interaction of researcher and interviewee participant and the relationship within that interaction, can therefore be of significance in its effect on the process of a participant's selection and reconstruction of meaning. [24] It is therefore essential to remember that in-depth unstructured or semi-structured interviewing is both a research method and a social interaction (Oakley 1981; Seidman 1998:79). This has particular significance in the situation in which the researcher is also a 'complete participant' observer and in my case, a fellow advocate, in terms of the potential of pre-existing zones of shared knowledge and identity, and the effect of this on the interview environment and the interaction of researcher and interviewees.

[24] As shown many years ago in Werner Heisenberg's quantum physics work on the uncertainty principle, the observer affects the environment of the observed. In this case, it is similarly evident that the interviewer can affect the interviewee and vice-versa.

THE PRACTICALITIES OF USING THESE METHODS

Doing participant observation

As mentioned earlier, long before I was engaged in this issue as a researcher, I was involved as an advocate and activist. Debra King (1999) conceptualises social activism as activity aimed at bringing about social change, and she explores the range of skills, knowledge, effort and time required for this activity. Boyer (2001) does similarly in his examination of the role of social activism on 'doing democracy'. However, both of these models of social activism include roles which would often, within the collective action I am studying, also be considered to be the role of community advocates.[25] Through the participant observation research, the distinctions made by participants in the collective action between community advocacy and activist work, became more explicit. For many of the supporters of asylum seekers, the two roles were complementary and intertwined, functioning as primary and secondary foci on different occasions, and with each role necessarily informing the other. For others, distinctions made between the two roles involved a definite preference in self-identification as one rather than the other. Most commonly, as observed through my participant observation, this preference was made in favour of both external and internal representations of self as an advocate rather than an activist.[26] The reverse scenario was also evident.

In part, the former and more common occurrence appeared to be related to desires to present a less confronting and more accepted humanitarian and humane, rather than political, representation of self to the wider society. In part, it appeared to be related to internal tensions which placed the well being of asylum seekers, and a pragmatic rather than ideological orientation at the centre of action. In part also, it appeared to relate to a perception of the community activist work as something rather dated belonging to earlier decades, and out of place in the Australia of the early 21st century. The latter

[25] I use the term community advocate here to distinguish the role from that of a professional advocate such as legal or medical practitioners, or an NGO advocate. All of these roles functioned on behalf of asylum seekers. In the thesis, when the term advocate is not used specifically in relation to professional or NGO advocacy, the role of community advocate is intended.

[26] Though I had observed and reflected on this aspect for some time, it was brought home most strongly to me when a collective action participant who could be described as a career activist and whose activism spanned some decades across many issues, introduced himself to a group of supporters of asylum seekers, as an advocate.

preference in self-identification as an activist tended to be associated with a critique of power imbalances in personal interactions between asylum seekers and some advocates; a critique of an associated evangelicalism in the desire to assist asylum seekers, which could become patronising and disempowering; and in despair at a diminished political and systemic engagement.

At a general level within the collective action entity, advocacy was conceptualised as action which stayed within the confines of accepted pathways of bringing about social change, while activism was associated with actions which stepped beyond that point, as for example, into civil disobedience. The term advocate was also specifically associated with the more humanitarian work of practical, moral and emotional support for asylum seekers, sometimes as individuals, sometimes as groups; and with work advocating and lobbying for asylum seekers with government, bureaucracy, and influential members of the public. In contrast, the term activist was associated with the organisation of and participation in protest actions, as well as with action focused on more systemic levels of political and social change, and on other more publicly visible endeavours to raise public awareness.

My own involvement was a mixture of participation in activist protests and awareness raising activities, and advocacy support work with a number of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres. Especially after having being involved in the 'close up and personal' nature of this advocacy for a number of years, I had a desire to situate my involvement within a broader reflective and analytical framework, within which I hoped I could gain a better understanding of the issue. Both before beginning the research and after beginning the research, I remained involved in both advocacy and activist work, continuing this active engagement until 2007. From that period until late 2008, I experienced varying symptoms of 'burn-out' as an advocate. This period also coincided with a period of low productivity as a researcher. A 'time-out' period in early 2008, enabled me to later return to the research project with renewed energy. I was now no longer functioning so much as an 'active' advocate and activist, but rather as a less active 'sympathiser'. This different role, and the period of time which had passed, provided a distancing from my earlier actively engaged period. While bringing its own issues of personal regret at not sustaining the former role, it also provided an improved personal space of reflexivity, energy and focus which has assisted the research analysis.

Whilst previously, the advocacy and activist focus had always been the primary focus for me even while engaged in the research project, the situation was now reversed. According to Spradley's designation, I had been situated as a researcher as a 'complete participant' observer (Spradley 1980:61), and since this 'complete participant' role was that of an advocate and activist at a time of great suffering and urgency for numerous asylum seekers, my primary focus was on the 'complete participant' aspect, as compared to the observer aspect. The logistic and moral demands of the former role over-shadowed the latter role to the point where the 'observation' was often acquired in the anthropological sense of 'osmosis' through immersion, rather than from the systematic recording role of an observer.

However, observation, as mentioned earlier, does not occur only when we consciously apply ourselves to that process. The above situation does not mean that I observed nothing or had no impressions of that experience. One of the aspects of anthropological and sociological field research that has always been held to be significant, is the heightened awareness that accompanies a person who is suddenly immersed in an environment that is alien to them. This scenario would have applied to almost every visitor to an immigration detention centre in this period, even for those who had worked previously in harsh environments such as prison environments. The shock, when they visited Australian immigration detention centres, or communicated with asylum seekers and refugees living without adequate support in the community, ensured that their impressions of these places and events remained vividly imprinted in their minds and bodies. Seeing men, women and children detained because of their mode of arrival to seek asylum, and imprisoned within layers of high razor wire fences, was so alien to what one could usually expect to see in Australia, that it provided a similar environment of strangeness and heightened awareness for those who visited. Interacting with people traumatised from long periods of indefinite incarceration, who were fearful for the future safety of themselves and their families, and fearful for their lives if deported, was a far cry from the usual 'normality' of life for myself and many others who became supporters.

Conversely, within such an environment, 'ordinary' interactions which mirrored something of a normal social interaction, such as sitting around a table, eating and

drinking and chatting, also appeared strange in its contrast to the background environment. Nor was the shock of being outside of 'normality', contained within the confines of interactions with the asylum seekers. For many advocates and activists, an equal shock lay in the response of the majority of fellow Australians to this situation. In public discourse, in newspapers, and sometimes in private interactions with family and friends, this process of shock and alienation was repeated, and the vividness of accounts of the period by supporters of asylum seekers are illustrative of this experience (Mares and Newman 2007).

Moreover, in the process of activism and advocacy, one is continually observing situations large and small for ways in which old strategies can be better implemented and new strategies developed which may be more successful. This continuous process of evaluation accompanied much of the ongoing advocacy and activism, and led to the fluidity and diversity which became a feature of the social action. Within such social action, the role of observation is pivotal, whether as a conscious or unconscious mode of being. Such observations constitute a continual awareness of the environment in which one is functioning, and of the opportunities or obstacles which develop in that environment, in relation to the advocacy and activism.

Involvement as an advocate and activist can have a number of foci. For me, initially these included the act of 'bearing witness' to the situation; action aimed at support for asylum seekers; action aimed at reform of Australian policies discriminatory of asylum seekers; and communicative and strategising networking with other advocates and activists. My involvement as an ethnographic researcher also included a number of foci, such as observation of the interplay of the events in terms of the various oppositional forces involved; observation of the strategising, networking and actions of the various actors; observation of a range of advocacy and activist perspectives through informal and formal conversations; observation of the cultures which had developed around opposition to the policies; and interpretation and analysis of the above observations.

Participant observation as a researcher

After I began the research project, my involvement with all of the above foci continued. What changed, as my research focus became clearer, was my level of awareness, not only of the issues and actions which I and other advocates were engaged in, but also of

the socio-political milieu in which this was occurring in Australia and internationally, and the connections between the two. While I still experienced my involvement in the participant activism and advocacy in an immediate and personal manner, I also began to increasingly reflect on the place of that involvement and those activities and events, within an overall system of national and global governance, economics and citizenship. Partly, this was a result of the reading which I undertook for the research, but primarily it resulted from the development of my research focus. The most important difference for me was that now, I sought to situate what I experienced and observed within the framework of the research focus I had set myself to explore. This focus involved the way in which the advocacy and activism functioned as a social collective engaged in attempting to bring change to Australian asylum seeker policies and practices. It also involved the broader global human issues which framed it. This research focus became a filter through which I observed my own various experiences and observations, and those of people around me. While my actions and observations continued in the role of advocate and activist, I also began to bring my research frame of reference to my observations, if not always to my spontaneous actions. In this manner, a participant observer role began to inform my research project in many significant ways.

Though my actions, and the reflections and observations that informed them were those of an advocate and activist, my research frame added additional observations and reflections focused around understandings from refugee studies and collective action and social movement literature. In regard to the advocacy and activism within which I was immersed, I also reflected on the diversity of actions; the varied locations of the social actors, the resources available to the various actors, the strategising and networking of the various actors, and on the interactions of all these aspects. This is not to say that other activists and advocates were not similarly or more incisively reflective, especially those with more background knowledge to inform their reflections; with more acquired skills in collective action; and with more networking, strategic and other capacity resources with which to influence outcomes. But for me, the theoretical frame of reference provided an additional perspective through which to observe events. This perspective began to inform my understanding of the type, location, resources, strategising and networking of various activist and advocacy groups, as well as the nature of the task being engaged in, and the power and obstacles faced in that engagement. It also informed my later selection of interviewees.

Over time, these observations and resultant knowledge increased my understanding of particular aspects of the social action. This involved the networking between those detained and those outside of detention, with all of the committant difficulties of communication. It also involved complex networking across sectors of activist/advocacy involvement; across and between professional disciplines; and across professional and lay arenas of advocacy. The intense cross-fertilisation of information, the strategising and the joint actions that I observed, were aspects which I would later come to analyse as a significant feature of the particularity of this social collective.

Doing in-depth interviews

As Seidman notes, using in-depth interviewing as a research method is a 'labor intensive' project (Seidman 1998:6). The researcher has to 'conceptualise the project, establish access and make contact with participants, interview them, (*and*) transcribe the data' (Seidman 1998:5-6), before beginning the research project of analyzing the data and sharing what has been learnt. Periods of between one to two hours may need to be allocated for the interviews. The location of the interviews is more likely to be at a place which is familiar and comfortable for the interviewee, and therefore likely to involve travel for the researcher. Finally, the transcriptions of recorded interviews of periods of between one to two hours, are likely to be lengthy. The interviews must then be analysed for thematic patterns, and interpreted. In addition, reflexivity must be engaged in regard to the influence of the interviewer and the interactions between the interviewer and the interviewees.

Conceptualising the interview project

Having chosen the in-depth interview format as the most appropriate interview method for the research, the selection of potential interviewees was informed by the available data on the population of advocates and activists, and by the participant observation research already commenced. In terms of the advocacy and activist groups existing in the early 2000s, a number of groups listed membership in the tens of thousands (Gosden 2006:12-13), and some others in the thousands.[27] In addition, there were multiple other

[27] The highest numbers recorded were for groups such as Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) with 90 groups across Australia and a supporter list of approximately 15,000 people (RAR 2005), and A Just Australia which listed 11,500 individual supporters, 70 patrons, and 120 organisational supporters

large and small groups and organisations, both those newly formed and those long engaged in the issue. From participant observation research, it was also apparent that a number of the supporters of asylum seekers were members of more than one of these groups and organisations. [28]

Some survey information was available on the pro-asylum seeker advocate and activist population. From a 2004 survey for example, Margaret Reynolds had noted that:

> There is no single identikit for the type of individual who has become an advocate for the well being of asylum seekers in Australia. They are young and old, rich and poor, professional and unskilled, retired and unemployed. … A wide diversity of occupations is reflected in their backgrounds, scientists, nurses, psychologists, farmers, fruit growers, teachers, public servants, lawyers and doctors have all indicated their commitment … (Reynolds 2004).

The most common motivations reported in her study were of 'empathy with refugees … the desire to demonstrate prosocial values … anger at the treatment of refugees … an inner obligation to act … and the violation of values of justice and compassion' (Raab 2005:18-19). The majority of her respondents had been 'alerted to the harsh reality of Australia's arbitrary detention policies when the Norwegian ship "Tampa" was refused permission to land asylum seekers rescued off the northwestern coast of Australia in 2001' (Reynolds 2004). In addition, while some had 'knowledge and experience of detention policy before the Tampa Controversy' (Reynolds 2004), others became aware through the extensive media coverage of the event (Reynolds 2004). Reynolds observed that their responses demonstrated, the untold story of the 'many Australians who … rejected official detention policy to offer friendship and practical support to people in detention' (Reynolds 2004).

(RCOA 2011f). Other newly formed groups such as Chilout also listed thousands of supporters (Chilout 2002), and in its 2004 report, the advocacy/ communications group Project SafeCom listed 5000 data base contacts and 10,000 general other e-list readers (Project SafeCom 2004). In 2002, of the long established groups, organisations such as the peak refugee advocacy group Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) listed some 180 organisational and individual members (RCOA 2002-2003:1).

[28] The numbers of all of these groups varied during the period studied in this thesis. It is therefore impossible to accurately calculate the numbers involved in active support for asylum seekers and in action opposed to relevant government policies. An indication of the strength of support and sympathy for asylum seekers was evidenced in an event in 2006, when supporters obtained 100,000 signatures for a petition opposing increasingly harsh government legislation (RAC 2006). However, this number of signatories likely included less active 'sympathizers' as well as those more 'active supporters' involved in advocacy and activism.

In addition, articles by advocates and activists provided detailed observations on particular sections of the pro-asylum seeker population of supporters, and on the networks and nature of 'the wider refugee movement' (Coombs 2004:134). Later surveys would provide more detailed data.[29] However, although I began the selection process before later data (Raab 2005; Surawski et al. 2008) was available, I already had knowledge of the pro-asylum seeker advocacy and activist population from participant observation research, and had already begun the process of categorization of this population into sectors of involvement. The selection of the potential interviewee population developed from the focus of the research, which was to understand the activism and advocacy which had arisen. To this end, a way was sought by which to represent the diversity within that population as adequately as the limits of the thesis allowed.

When I began to consider a selection process for interviewees, I already knew from participant observation at local, interstate and national events and from familiarity as an

[29] From later surveys which statistically analysed survey respondent data such as age, gender, educational levels, etc., the majority of respondents were female Australian citizens with degree or postgraduate qualifications (Raab 2005; Surawski et al. 2008). Although the ages of respondents in Christine Raab's survey 'ranged from 18-72 years' (Raab 2005:28), the mean calculation of the respondents' age was over 40 years (Raab 2005:28). Similarly, in the later 2006 survey by Nadia Surawski et al., the majority of respondents were female, highly educated, and with an average age of 46 years (Surawski et al. 2008:20). In Raab's survey, respondents 'identified themselves as "internationalists" and expressed pro-refugee and anti-prejudicial values' (2005:56). In the survey by Surawski et al, respondents self identified a 'left-wing' political viewpoint (2008:20).

Raab's respondents were reported as being 'highly homogenous' (2005:53) in their 'pro-refugee attitudes, affective responses of anger, sadness, and guilt to the situation of refugees, and their sense of obligation to "do something" in the face of injustice' (2005:53). From the Surawski et al. study, insight is gained into respondents' perceptions of their relationships with the asylum seekers they supported. The majority reported that these relationships were either 'very close or quite close' (Surawski et al. 2008:20). At the same time, their relationships with family and friends were affected, because of their involvement in an issue which was a polarising one for the Australian population, and these relationships changed in both negative and positive ways (2008:22). Partly because of the close relationships with the asylum seekers as well as the critical life and death nature of their situations, most rated their involvement as 'more stressful than their previous social justice involvement' (2008:21). Approximately three-quarters of them were involved in a voluntary capacity, and also supported financial costs associated with that involvement (2008:23).

In terms of the responses exhibited by the population of advocates and activists, additional data is suggested by Reynolds' survey to include individuals' own experience of personal tragedy as part of their desire to 'try to alleviate the suffering of others' (Reynolds 2004). From examination of census data, David Burchell also suggests a 'range of factors that disposed people to being more sympathetic than average towards the claims of asylum seekers' (2005:118), including higher educational levels than average, 'strong religious principles' (2005:118), and 'membership of an arts or cultural association' (2005:118).

advocate with local and national email networks, that the social action being undertaken was nationwide. I also knew that it was extremely varied in terms of size, format, focus and style of action. With that knowledge, I considered that a spread of interviewees across that diversity would be required in order to gain an adequate understanding of the social action. I therefore began a process of categorization and mapping of the groups involved, in order to select interviewees on that basis. Following the completion of this, the resultant selection was made with a consideration to accommodate as much as possible, the geographical diversity and the diversity existent in the sector categorizations I had determined (see diagrammatic representation of sectors in Appendix B)

Mapping the social action

Decisions on the categorization of individuals and groups into sectors were made in regard to similarities such as commonalities of association and action, as well as the self-identifications used by the individuals and groups (see a more detailed description of this process in Appendix A). In some instances, geographical location was a unifying point for particular groups, as for example in the *rural/regional groups* associated under the title Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR). Similarly associated under a geographical categorization were small *suburban/ urban advocacy groups* in a number of cities. Other groups had formed around a core professional location, in which the social action exhibited was oriented around a particular professional skill base and ethics. Examples of such groups included numerous large and small medical and legal groups across Australia, as well as groups originating from academic, journalistic, educational and other professional locations. All of these groups were included within the categorization of *Professional Groups*.

Another categorization concerned the stated focus of groups' social action. A number of groups had identified themselves in terms of the specific social action they focused on. For example, the group Children Out Of Detention had formed with a particular focus on bringing change to the situation of children in detention. The group Spare Rooms for Refugees is similarly self evident. A diversity of groups which self-identified with a particular type of social action or advocacy focus, were therefore classified within the category of *Groups With A Specific Focus*.

The classification of *Agencies* was used to distinguish groups which provided a range of welfare services for asylum seekers. Similarly, the work of lobbying and advocacy distinguished many groups which were classified as *Advocacy NGOs*.[30] In addition, the presence of church based groups was very evident in the pro-asylum seeker advocacy community. In some cases, advocates were part of a religious order. In other cases, they held positions in church organisations. In other instances they were members of a church based social justice group. I classified all of these under the category of *Religious Groups*.

Within a classification of *Political Groups*, I included those elected national parliamentary organisations which advocated for asylum seekers, and sub-groups located within elected national parliamentary organisations, which advocated for asylum seekers. Maintaining a political focus as a criterion for inclusion in this category, I also included groups which self-identified a primarily political agenda and focus to their social action.

A category for the social action of *Unions* was included in the diagrammatic representation, as were categories for *Individuals* and for *Refugees' Groups*. The latter provided an important critical perspective. It was because of the situation and activism of asylum seekers that advocates and activists had become aware of the issue and continued to engage in it. How then did asylum seekers themselves assess the activism and advocacy that was taken on their behalf? Nothing could be more pertinent in an evaluation of the style, scope and success of supporters' social action than the perspective of asylum seekers and refugees themselves.

A visual representation of 'the whole'

From a document which I developed and circulated within the collective action community with lists of groups and sector categories, I constructed a diagrammatic representation of the pro-asylum seeker support population (see Appendix B). From comments, corrections and additions, this continued to evolve and to serve as a visual representation of what the collective action participants called the 'refugee movement'.

[30] However, while some of these groups focused primarily on one or the other of these capacities, others were engaged in both capacities, and much cross-fertilisation and joint action took place between the two categories of sectors.

However, though initially I had hoped that, as well as providing the basis for the selection process for interviews, the mapping exercise might be able to visually capture the detailed nature of internal movement and interaction within the social collective, I now realised with the further input of data on the fluidity of group involvement, that I could not adequately represent this fluidity visually within my chosen research methods and methodologies. Over time, groups could change in terms of size, advocacy focus and style; could move from an 'outsider' to an 'insider' position in term of lobbying capacity, and vice versa; could become more conservative or more radical depending on the involvement of particular individuals within the sectors and groups; and could metamorphose from one diagrammatic sector category to another.

For example, some groups which began as small groups of a few people had grown and developed to the point where they had become significant agencies dispensing services to the same capacity as pre-existent welfare and refugee agencies, or had developed to become prominent NGOs. Some groups exhibited multi-category identifications, and the interaction between advocates and activists across sector categories was intense. [31] Through the continuing process of the participant observation research, the fluidity of the formation, reformation, development, internal change, development and growth as well as cessation of some of the various groups, brought the realisation that the diagrammatic representation I had developed, while showing aspects of the movement, could not adequately represent that internal fluidity which was a significant aspect of the social collective. Computer software programs are available which could have dealt with this visual complexity, but the time necessary for gaining expertise and for focusing on the visual explication of that aspect, would have detracted from my research exploration of other aspects. I therefore proceeded no further with the mapping exercise, but continued to utilise its potential for the interview selection process.

Selection of potential interviewees

The project required interviews being conducted across the range of sector categories I had determined in order to represent that diversity of involvement, and it required coverage of geographical specificities and differences. Not only is the Australian

[31] Such cross-sector interactions included for example, alliances between groups such Labor for Refugees and Unions, in coalition with refugee advocacy and activist organisations and church groups (Tattersall 2010:175-176).

continent large to an extent which often has a limiting effect on national communication, but the government actions which affected asylum seekers also impacted differently in different Australian states. I therefore began by selecting activist and advocate interviewees who were positioned across the range of sectors, but who were more geographically accessible to me in my home location in Sydney, New South Wales. I later extended this process of selection and interviewing across the range of sector categories, to locations which were more geographically distant to me, i.e., in other Australian states including Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory.[32] In all, 94 interviews were conducted. Within the format of the 94 interviews, 97 people were interviewed (see Appendix C for more detailed information). The first interviews began in late 2004 and the majority were conducted in 2005 and 2006. Additional interviews and some repeat interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2009.[33]

Anonymity was provided for interviewees (see Appendix D), and in the writing of the thesis, substitute coded initials have been used for interviewees' comments. Personal demographic data was not requested from the interviewees since the selection process was organised on the basis of their sector and geographical location. However, 55 of the interviewees were female; 42 were male; and ages ranged from young adults to retirees. Of their geographical locations, 34 were from NSW, 24 from Victoria, 19 from South Australia, 10 from Western Australia, 5 from Queensland, 4 from Tasmania and 1 from the ACT. In terms of my categorization of their primary sector involvement, 18 were located in *Professional Groups*, 15 in *Advocacy NGOs*, 13 in *Political Groups*, 11 in *Agencies*, 10 in geographical group locations in either *Rural/Regional Groups* or *Suburban/Urban Groups*, 10 in *Religious Groups*, 9 in *Groups with a Special Focus*, 5 in *Refugees' Groups*, 4 in the *Individuals* category, and 2 in the *Unions* category.

[32] Because of the number of groups involved and the geographical dispersion across Australia, the interviewees were situated mostly in or near capital cities of Australia, though the advocacy of some of these interviewees occurred in rural and regional areas (see Appendix C for more detailed information on the interview process and Appendix D for informed consent procedures).

[33] In one case, a change of staff had occurred in a senior management role in a peak advocacy NGO during this later period. In other cases, additional issues of concern which had come to my attention through the iterative research process, were followed up with individual advocates.

However, many of the interviewees [34] moved across roles in a number of sectors, and their category identification was often a fluid or multifaceted entity.

My positioning as an interviewer

Many of the potential interviewees, I knew quite well from shared advocacy and activist work. With other interviewees, I knew of their involvement from email networks and websites, and a number of them also knew of my advocacy work and my research. With others again, where neither of those situations existed, there still remained a shared zone of commitment and knowledge. From my own positioning as an advocate and activist, I therefore occupied an 'insider' position with interviewees, which provided a degree of shared understanding in regard to the focus of many interviewees as advocates and activists. In this position, a degree of shared knowledge of issues and events, as well as passionate commitment to a reformed policy could be supposed.

In this regard, I consider that a degree of trust existed between interviewees and myself, because of my positioning and history of involvement as an advocate, that may not have existed otherwise. In one case of a spontaneously arranged interview while travelling interstate for pre-organised interview sessions, an advocate who expressed a rather disparaging view of the contribution of academics to assist asylum seekers and refugees, was still agreeable to the interview with me because of my advocacy work, and because she perceived my research project as a contribution to a documentation of the period. As she put it, the research was my way of contributing to the whole endeavour, i.e. "This is what you are doing. All of us are adding to the basket, or the scales that will be tipped one way or another" (Interviewee QK).

[34] The profile of interviewees across the sectors conformed with earlier observational data (Coombs 2004; Gosden 2005a, 2005b, 2006), and with earlier and later survey data (Reynolds 2994; Raab 2005; Surawski at el. 2008). There was a spread across the interviewee sample of people who had been previously involved in the issue and people who were newly involved; of those with professional involvement and those with voluntary involvement in the issue; of those focused primarily on humanitarian and social assistance for asylum seekers, and those focused primarily on politics and policy. However, in conformity with the findings of my own participant observation and with the later profile of respondents to Raab (2005) and Surawski et al. (2008), some sectors had much higher numbers of participants who were female and middle aged or older. These sectors especially included the rural and urban geographical support groups, and a number of the groups which had been initiated with a 'special focus'. At the same time, in sectors such as that of Political Groups, the gender imbalance was more likely to be in the opposite direction.

As noted earlier, in-depth interviewing is both a research method and a social interaction. [35] I consider that my positioning as an advocate and activist was a significant factor in the social relationships constituted within the in-depth interview environment, and one which in many but not all cases, resulted in what could be best described as a "We" relationship and a conversational interview discourse. At the same time, the earlier constraints noted (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:117) still pertained, and the style of interview discourse that was realised is most accurately described as 'purposeful conversation'. [36]

CONCLUSION

From these interviews, narratives emerged of engagement and action, motivation and meaning, emotion and relationship, self identity and national identity, and an identity conceived and formed through recognition of the common humanity that united the interviewees with the asylum seekers they supported. In terms of the collective action, interviewees discussed strategies and outcomes, conflicts and cooperation, networking, and multiple sector alliances and combined actions, as well as the constraints and opportunities of the political and social environment of the period. The remaining chapters of the thesis are concerned with the documentation, analysis and interpretation of these narratives.

This chapter has detailed the methodologies and methods used in the research. It has also illustrated the reasons why these particular methodologies and methods were chosen, in seeking an 'insider perspective' from the social actors involved, on the collective action which was engaged with on behalf of asylum seekers. With the

[35] Seidman notes that from a phenomenological perspective, 'one person's intersubjective understanding of another depends upon creating an "I-Thou" relationship' (1998:79). A relationship in which 'the sense of "Thou-ness" is mutual – becomes a "We" relationship' (1998:80). Seidman's concept of an ideal relationship between interviewee and interviewee in an in-depth interview situation is one in which 'an "I-Thou" relationship verges on but does not become a "We" relationship' (1998:80). He argues that in the case of a full "We" relationship, the interviewer would become an equal participant and the resulting discourse would be a conversation, not an interview. In an "I-Thou" relationship, however, 'the interviewer keeps enough distance to allow the participant to fashion his or her responses as independently as possible' (1998:80).

[36] The advantages of such an interview relationship lie in the increased openness and access which can be accorded to the interviewer, in terms of the areas of reflection and meaning making of the interviewee. The disadvantages of such a relationship are described by Seidman in terms of 'the question of whose experience is being related and whose meaning is being made' (1998:80). In addition, the trust and openness accorded in such a relationship constitute an additional realm of responsibility for the interviewer, in which extra care must be taken to not compromise or abuse the relationship.

participant observation research over a number of years, ninety four interviews, and numerous informal conversations with other advocates around similar issues, I have provided a particular sampling of the whole. This still cannot do justice to the multiplicity and diversity of those who have engaged in social action around this issue, but I would hope that it has complied with Seidman's (1998:44) injunction to the researcher:

> The researcher's task is to present the experience of the people he or she interviews in compelling enough detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects.

The following chapter begins to explore the research data in terms of the specific motivations to action articulated by the research participants, and the meanings and values that they attached to their action.

Chapter 5:
Motivation for Action - 'Something was crook!'

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins the empirical findings section of the thesis based on data and analysis from participant observation and in-depth interviews. While later chapters explore more of the detail of the individual and collective action subsequently undertaken, this chapter follows the sequence of interviewees' narratives in exploring the beginnings of their involvement and the significance of that involvement for them. As such, it primarily engages with the emotional and motivational aspects which emerged in interviewees' narratives of their early involvement. It documents the range of motivations for action articulated by research participants, and the ways in which these motivations variously arose. It also documents a process of conscientisation which often produced an embodied emotional and cognitive 'liberation-into-action', within which no other option but action was perceived to be acceptable.

It explores the perceptions of research participants that the policies which they opposed, violated values and principles which were intimately connected for them with their sense of personal, national and human identity. It also explores the way in which as a result, they came to a deep understanding of personal responsibility which infused their accompanying action. As the title of the chapter indicates, a perception that something was deeply wrong about the way that asylum seekers were being treated by the Australian government, was at the core of these experiences and narratives.

Issues concerned with motivation for social action and particularly for collective action, have long been of concern for collective action theorists. As examined in an earlier chapter, theoretical and exploratory foci have shifted over time and have emphasised different aspects. However, as many theorists emphasise, the most important aspect in any exploration of collective action or of individual social action, is close attention to the experience of the social actors themselves, as well as to the external environment within which the action is situated. The chapter therefore explores and documents that reality as communicated in the interaction between myself and interviewees.

MOTIVATION TO ACTION

The phrase in the title of the chapter, 'Something was crook!', was spoken by an interviewee describing his response to the treatment of asylum seekers in one of Australia's remote immigration detention centres. The phrase is an old Australian idiom which means that something is 'Not right!'. It typifies the understanding expressed by all of the interviewees about the treatment of asylum seekers under Australian government policies and practices. It also suggests something of the way in which they considered traditional Australian values and sociality to have been breached.

Although interviewees had been specifically chosen for their varied sector and geographical locations, the narratives which they told and the meanings which they attached to their particular social action, were often repeated across those locations.[37] The interview topic list (see Appendices) was available to interviewees to comment on at any time during the interview. However, the majority of the interviews began with my asking 'Can you tell me about your involvement in the issue?'. What often followed was a narrative by the interviewee which located their involvement from their first awareness of the issue through to their present involvement or discontinued involvement. Despite my not having specifically requested interviewees to speak about the beginning of their involvement, that so many interviewees did so, points, I suggest, to the strength of those experiences and their importance for them in their own life narratives. As many of them noted of these experiences, and of the awareness that followed, 'It was life changing!'

Themes which emerged from those narratives of the beginnings of involvement, especially for those who were first time advocates or activists, often coalesced around factors such as precipitating events; the questioning of government discourse, and of 'conversion' type experiences that propelled people unexpectedly into action. For those who had been previously involved in social justice advocacy and activism, motivation for involvement was more of a continuation of a previous orientation, and the step into

[37] Although this research involved interviews with more people across more geographical areas and sectors, the findings on motivation and emotion are remarkably similar to those of Sonia Tascon. Significantly, I had presented these research findings (Gosden 2005b) before reading Tascon's 2005 thesis. The similarities highlighted in the independent findings, therefore indicate the extent to which these aspects were located at the core of the experience of the social action participants.

active involvement in this issue less of a departure from normality. Despite this, sustained involvement with the issue would still prove in many cases to be qualitatively different than previous social justice involvements. From both beginnings, themes would emerge of personal and professional involvement, of emotions and motivations, of relationships with asylum seekers as well as with other advocates and activists, and of personal learnings.

BECOMING AWARE

As a commonality, what all of those interviewed spoke of recognising, were other human beings in great distress and need. This recognition had come about in different ways. As noted above, for some it was a continuation of previous and ongoing involvement in this issue over many years. For many who had not been previously involved in this issue, it had come through the publicity that the issue attracted in a dramatic pre-election period. This had especially occurred through the viewing of media images of asylum seekers. For others, it had come through meeting asylum seekers in person, or through hearing of such an interaction from someone whom they respected. For others again, regular professional involvement had brought about an initial contact which was then expanded from increased knowledge of the issue.

However, even when people may have been previously involved in other social justice issues or political issues, it was from an entry point of an often sudden experience of awareness or of a sudden increase in awareness, that the majority of respondents began their own narrative of involvement. For some, the experience had been surprising in terms of the depth of their own emotional, cognitive and embodied response. It had also been shocking in terms of its shattering of previously held beliefs. The depth of the experience was accompanied by the depth of the catalyst that it provided for involvement and action. I have therefore called these experiences 'precipitating events', in terms of the way in which they often led to subsequent action.

Becoming aware through the viewing of media images

For a number of interviewees new to the issue, these precipitating events involved the viewing of images on television, mainly from news and current affairs programs. Many

spoke of the viewing of these images as pivotal moments in their awareness and subsequent involvement. One interviewee described such an event. As he explained:

> One of the people who was coming for that dinner said, "Oh, you need to turn on Channel 2. It has a program tonight … 4 Corners … about what's going on at Woomera". And this program came on about the Woomera Detention Centre - and we started to see on the TV, this group of us sitting there, the terrible things that appeared to have happened at Woomera. It became obvious to me that the government was behaving badly, and people were being treated really badly because they came from the Middle East. That was the first moment we had any inkling that there was something wrong at Woomera (Interviewee WV).

It was to be from this single event that this particular interviewee was to invest years of his personal and professional life in intense preoccupation with the issue. Similarly, television images such as those of asylum seekers on the vessel *Tampa*, and on other boats carrying asylum seekers; and of children, women and men in Australian immigration detention centres or being taken to them, were often described by interviewees in terms of their affective and transforming impact. As the accounts above and below illustrate, the disparity between the viewer's perception of the suffering of the asylum seekers in these images, and an expectation of how such people should be treated in Australia, could spark a deeply informing reaction, regardless of whether the viewer had been previously interested in the situation.

Another interviewee described such an experience in terms of the riveting nature of an awareness suddenly and unexpectedly realised. As she recalled:

> I hadn't been functioning during 2000 and 2001. So I'd only just vaguely picked up on the *Tampa* affair and so on. But in early 2002, there was a program on either Lateline or SBS. This was my turning point. I saw it late at night. I just sort of opened my eyes back into the world. … I saw the horror of the anguish and desperation of the people in Curtin, a horror that I had never seen in my life before. I was shocked. I was catapulted into the fact that we didn't know this was happening in Australia. I think that was the big driving force. How come we didn't know? I was shocked to my boostraps. It was like my awareness came from ground up. My awareness just lifted about 20 levels in one instant (Interviewee QW).

Interestingly, such television viewings were often as much a matter of chance as a deliberate searching for information. Yet their impact would continue to reverberate for those who were affected by them, and could lead to active and influential involvement

on the issue. As one interviewee, in describing her embodied reaction to such imagery, and the energy for action that it released, explained:

> It is probably one of the least expected things that has happened to my husband and I. My husband had the TV on. He was watching 4 Corners, and I was doing something else. … And he said, 'I think you might want to see this'. So I sat down, and what I saw on that 4 Corners program, I cannot describe how I felt. Truly, I was shocked. I was horrified. I was angry. I was beside myself. I didn't expect it to arouse such strong feelings in me. And so we sat riveted to the end of the program. And of course that was the story of Shayan Badrie, the little seven year old who had been so traumatised in detention that he had become catatonic … I was not even clear in my mind what I was going to do. All I knew was I had to do something (Interviewee QS).

The final words of this speaker, i.e. that she 'had to do something', were to be words commonly heard from those interviewed. Just as there was physical, emotional and cognitive distress experienced around the issue, there was also an energy for action that arose from that initial point of awareness and distress.

Becoming aware through connections with others

For some other interviewees, awareness followed their hearing about the issue from someone else who was already deeply involved. This aspect of connectedness through the actions of others was noted by an interviewee as permeating the nature of involvement and growth of action on the issue. As she described it:

> When you ask people how they started, they say, 'My friend came (*to the detention centre*) and I came with them, and then kept coming'. I think it's a very human person to person story, and that's how it's spread (Interviewee QF. My insertion in italics).

In this regard, a role modelling and mentoring effect often operated through the connections made with other advocates and activists. There could also be an overlapping of concern on this issue with that of other contentious issues of the period, so that a commonality of outlook on human rights and social justice issues could operate to bring people together. The interviewee below described the beginning of her awareness and involvement in just such a manner. As she noted:

> I was at a peace rally about the involvement in Iraq. I heard a lady … speak about her 'Afghani son' as she called him and how she had been visiting him *(in*

> *detention)*. She told his story … and I said to her at the end of the rally "Could I help in some way?" And that was the beginning of my involvement (Interviewee QK. My insertion in italics).

Becoming aware through knowledge of desperate welfare needs

For some others, involvement followed becoming aware not only of the previously mentioned situations, but also the situations of asylum seekers and refugees living in the Australian community on Temporary Protection Visa and Bridging Visa regimes without adequate material assistance and rights (Barnes 2003; Leach and Mansouri 2004; Phillips and Manning 2004; McNevin2005). This awareness was initially more likely for individuals and groups already involved in welfare assistance work or church based community assistance, or for those who were aware of the legislation which affected these asylum seekers and refugees. As the interviewee below explained:

> It was the agency that saw the families homeless on the streets without English, and asked, "What are you doing here?", and managed to find out the story and then became involved in their support. There was no helping agency, so it was left to the rest of the community to respond to that need (Interviewee WQ).

Perceptions of the injustice as well as the suffering of the situation provided motivation for involvement. As another interviewee involved with this group noted:

> My motivation, as soon as I read the conditions of the TPV - was being absolutely appalled at the fact that these people had been found to be refugees, but not allowed to apply for family reunion and limited in Centrelink access (Interviewee XT).

Becoming aware through questioning

For some, a questioning of the government discourse, actions and policies on asylum seekers followed from the awareness that these and other such events provided. For others, it was a seemingly incongruent government discourse which had first alerted their interest, and had then led them to make contact with asylum seekers in order to ascertain the truth of the matter for themselves. As one interviewee described this process in his own involvement:

> It's as simple as *Tampa*. I'm philosophically Liberal. I still am, but I started to smell a rat. I said, 'No. There has to be something more. This can't be the way it seems. There's something funny here'. They were saying they were terrorists, and I said, "I can't believe that". So I went and visited Villawood, and it was just so

> obvious that these people were destitute. So that's how I got involved, and it just grew from there (Interviewee QC).

Another interviewee recounted a similar experience of perceiving a disjunction between the seemingly desperate actions of asylum seekers in Australian immigration detention centres, and the Australian government's response to these actions. Like the interviewee above, he described a scenario in which the more he investigated the issue, the more involved he became. As he explained:

> I had no particular reason to be interested or involved in onshore refugee issues, other than when I became aware because of the protest in Port Hedland in 2000, where a Chinese guy … jumped off the roof and crippled himself. He'd been several years in detention. The government's response to that … was declaring 'This government will not respond to attention seeking behaviour'. And I sort of thought, 'Gee. What's going on here? There's got to be more to it than this'. The alarm bells started ringing, so I started looking into it. Then I learnt about detention without charge or trial, and I was shocked that the legislation had been passed in 1992 at a time when I was politically active as a student, and didn't know about it. No one talked about it. It wasn't in the media at the time. I know enough about history to know that's like a principle about 800 years old that started with the Magna Carta. And I thought, 'This is serious' (Interviewee XQ).

The experience of the interviewee above, captures well the impact of the protest actions of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres in gaining the attention of some Australians. When these protest actions of asylum seekers attracted media attention, they subverted the silence imposed on them by the remoteness of their geographical locations and the government constraints on their communications. Awareness of these actions was often described as pivotal in alerting some of those who became committed advocates and activists as a consequence. Indeed, interviewees repeatedly noted the influence of asylum seekers' actions on their own awareness, motivation and involvement. As one interviewee described:

> The blood, the cutting, the screaming, the slamming, the putting indoors, the rebellion happening in Curtin! And the self harm that was happening! And the first reports from the people talking, telling, desperately trying to have their story told! It was profoundly transforming (Interviewee QW).

The actions of asylum seekers were therefore influential not only in regard to the beginnings of awareness and involvement, but also in terms of deepening the involvement of supporters, since they communicated the depth of desperation and urgency of the situation. As another interviewee explained, her response to such actions

occurred at a point where she already had a degree of knowledge of the issue. But, as she recalled, the actions of asylum seekers themselves had made a defining difference to her perception of the issue:

> The break-out from Woomera and Port Hedland detention centre … that was probably the turning point for me. Before those break-outs, it seemed like such an outrage, but I think when people take action from that position of desperation and necessity, I really want to support that (Interviewee WI).

Becoming aware through professional involvement

For some interviewees also, awareness had followed a professional, institutional or occupational involvement. Awareness could often arise within the routine work of an employment, as one medical practitioner indicated:

> I was asked to do an assessment … and from that those of us involved in that case became aware of what was going on in the detention centres, and it escalated from there (Interviewee QD).

Such involvement could also lead into unexpected and expanded areas of advocacy, as ethical concerns led professionals to speak publicly against current government policies and practices. As this same clinician explained:

> It stretches the boundaries of what you would normally do as a clinician or researcher, because by definition it's at that intersection of politics and advocacy, and having to look at government policy and comment on it. For the medical profession, if any policy harms people, we have an obligation to speak out (Interviewee QD).

In a similar manner, people engaged in a wide range of legal, welfare, refugee, informational, educational, academic, social justice, human rights, pastoral, public service, political and other areas could also come into engagement and awareness with the issue in their routine employment. As a legal professional described his entry into awareness and action in just such a manner, he recalled that:

> I was living a quiet, typical, commercial barrister kind of life when I got involved in the *Tampa* case. And that was my really alarming introduction to what we were doing to refugees. I was aware at some level before, but I had swallowed hook, line and sinker the message of the government. I had thought they were guilty of some offence. And it came as a great shock to me to realise that I had swallowed this message, and the truth was radically different (Interviewee WA).

CONSCIENTISATION [38]

What was often voiced by those interviewed, was the dramatic personal change that such awareness and involvement had brought to their lives. For some first time advocates and activists, the strength of the shift into advocacy and activism could indeed almost be likened to a 'conversion experience' [39], suddenly altering their world view and catapulting them into uncharted, unexpected territory, with all the new energy that can accompany that. Something of the agitation and energy of that experience is evident in interviewees' descriptions. For example, as one woman recalled:

> I remember going to bed really, really angry. I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned all night. I was up at 5.30 in the morning. … All I knew was I had to do something. … And through the next few weeks, the formation of Chilout would gradually crystallise from that. … It just completely took us over. It was just amazing. And knowing myself, I didn't want to wait till that feeling went away. … So I didn't stop. We didn't allow ourselves to stop. … We were all working like crazed people. It was like something had taken us over (Interviewee QS).

Even for those who had been previously involved in social justice issues, the type of engagement could prove to be qualitatively different. In words suggestive of a profound and not easily described experience, another interviewee expressed the sense of moral imperative that had become associated for her with the issue:

> It really was a life-changing moment in terms of a shift between an academic sense of injustice and a personal commitment to actually being involved in some way. … In my lifetime, it's the first time I've been activated into working so directly and so completely towards something (Interviewee QN).

As noted earlier, even when knowledge of the situation already existed, a particular event could tip the balance from a state of sympathy and concern into such a state of deeply committed active involvement. This shift from a state of concern to one of moral imperative reappeared constantly in interviewees' accounts. As echoed in an earlier statement that 'I had to so something!', so was there a commonly expressed personal

[38] As defined by Paulo Freire, conscientization refers to 'the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality' (Freire 1972:51).

[39] I use the term 'conversion experience' here as a metaphor for an experience in which major aspects of a person's belief system or way of viewing the world, can undergo radical and sudden change

imperative to not be silent and inactive. In this regard, the words of one interviewee could speak for many:

> Like so many of the people here – post *Tampa*, it was like, 'Well, I can't be silent anymore'. I guess ironically, for the government, there were certainly a lot of people who were aware of the issue before but who were not in a position to be galvanised. Maybe it just takes that extra little bit of outrage to get people going 'Oh my God. We just really can't do nothing!' (Interviewee XW).

Non-hostile encounters with 'the other'

How best to understand the intensity and embodied nature of these experiences? I have found the work of contemporary philosophers such as Diprose (2002, 2003, 2005, 2009) and Raimond Gaita (1999) valuable in illuminating some of the phenomenological aspects which interviewees have referred to. The nature of similarly powerful, deeply affective and embodied experiences has been a matter of reflection for them in regard to this and other social justice issues. Diprose, for example, situates the encounter with, and non-hostile movement toward 'the other', as being fundamental to human subjectivity and sociality, and explores the way in which perception, emotion, embodied experiences and cognition are intricately intertwined. As she reminds us, in Freidrich Nietzshe's and Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical understandings of subjectivity and sociality, what makes us think, and especially think in ways critical of existing ideas, is what is 'affective' i.e. emotive. As she explains, 'Nietzsche … suggests a connection between affectivity and thinking. Affects of the self (which for him is a body) make me think' (Diprose 2002:125). In other words, something may affect me so much that I would say that 'Something gets under my skin. Something disturbs me' (Diprose 2002:125). Within this ontological understanding, it is from this embodied 'disturbance' of affectivity, that thought and action arise.

Similarly, she argues, the response of moving toward an 'other' in a non-hostile openness is resonant with Levinas's concept of 'a giving of myself that I do not choose' (Levinas quoted in Diprose 2002:141), where the other's alterity 'transports me beyond myself … into modes of living and paths of thinking beyond what I think I am and beyond what I think I know.' (Diprose 2002:141). In the direction of this response and action, Diprose argues, lies a possibility of a common world of humanity. At the same

time, it also involves the potential disturbance of complacency (Diprose 2002:141), as opposed to 'a forgetting' and a return to the refuge of the ego (Diprose 2002:137).

Such disturbance of affectivity and subjectivity is clearly evident in the descriptions by interviewees of their own responses (see also Reynolds 2004; Tascon 2005). In terms of emotions discussed by those advocates and activists whom I have interviewed, a range of emotional experiences including empathy, distress, shock, disbelief, disorientation, horror, shame, guilt, anger, outrage, grief, sadness and love have been mentioned, as have the embodied nature of the experience, and the almost automatic movement from those experiences into action. In turn, the disturbance of affectivity and subjectivity for interviewees, which came from the asylum seekers as 'other', was often likened by them to a call for help. As one interviewee described it:

> Seeing that terror. That call for help. How could you sleep ever? (Interviewee QW).

And as another interviewee described the experience, it was one, 'where that bit of common humanity within you is stirred so strongly' (Interviewee QS). As she explained:

> I now firmly believe that when that part of you is touched, anyone can be outraged by anything against another human being that is just so horrendous (Interviewee QS).

Diprose observes that within the ontological understandings of Nietzsche and Levinas, that which disturbs subjectivity is always related to an 'other's alterity' (2002:136). It is this alterity of the other, she notes, that 'makes me think in a direction that may not be altogether different from what I thought initially, but different all the same' (2002:125). As Diprose reflects, 'I could respond … by forgetting the other. … But there is a moral dimension to my responsibility.' (2002:137). Rather, she argues, following Levinas, 'the disturbing experience of the other's alterity urges me not to turn my back.' (2002:137) on that call from an 'other'.

As mentioned previously, interviewees' responses to the realised suffering and horror were often voiced in terms of action. Narratives voiced by interviewees, for example, repeatedly included statements such as 'I had to do something!'. For Diprose such a

response is that of a 'radical generosity' which is disturbed by the experience of 'the other', and which moves toward that 'other' in a non-hostile openness. In Diprose's model of subjectivity and sociality, that movement toward the other in openness, is 'the primordial condition of personal, interpersonal, and communal existence' (2002:5). It is also this bond that is brought to mind in the phrase 'a common humanity' and in Gaita's exposition on the phenomenon.

Gaita suggests that our sense of a common humanity is connected with a sense of the inalienable preciousness of each human being (Gaita 1999:4). In this regard, he argues that this recognition of 'the preciousness of other people is connected with their power to affect us in ways we cannot fathom and against which we can protect ourselves only at the cost of becoming shallow.' (1999:26-27). It is this power of human beings to affect one another, he argues, that is partly what gives us the 'sense of human individuality, which we express when we say that human beings are unique and irreplaceable.' (1999:27).

In addition, Gaita explores the phenomenon of a common humanity in terms of those who may for various reasons become 'morally invisible' to others. He notes for example the concern of Simone Weil for the way in which 'human beings may become "things" to other human beings' (Weil quoted in Gaita 1999:272). In terms of the recent asylum seeker issue in Australia, in the period that I am studying, such a contrast - between the response suggested by Gaita through a sense of a common humanity, and the response in which 'human beings may become "things" to other human beings' (Weil quoted in Gaita 1999:272) - was perhaps nowhere more apparent than in differing reactions to one of the television images mentioned earlier.

This was the image of a six and a half year old child in one of Australia's immigration detention centres. The image had been recorded within the detention centre using a video camera that had been smuggled in by advocates. The child lay ill in his father's arms as the family spoke of their son's 'medical decline and mental regression' (Everitt 2008:218) within the detention centre, and begged for help for him. A typical response of interviewees who viewed the program, was voiced by one who would become deeply involved as a result of it:

> Shocked … horrified … angry. I was beside myself (Interviewee QS).

In contrast, the Minister for Immigration, responding to questions following the television program, would repeatedly speak of the child as 'it' (Everitt 2008:221).

In terms of the argument Gaita has made for a sense of common humanity, his explication of the non-recognition of 'the inalienable preciousness of each human being' (1999:4), is that 'when we treat their presence merely as a natural obstacle, we say quite naturally that we are oblivious to their humanity' (1999:273). The conditions which would cause 'the extinction or radical attenuation of such responses' (1999:273), he describes as dehumanising. In terms of the practices documented in Australian immigration detention centres, this description appears apt, and a typical response of interviewees was one of distress and horror at the Minister's words on this occasion, and with the government discourse on the issue in general.

The phenomenon of response to a call for help

The contrast to dehumanising behaviour, Gaita argues, is 'when someone says in reply to a question about why she helped an injured person, "What else could I do?" ' (1999:275). In such circumstances, he suggests, 'action that has become necessary – "I must help, I can't walk past" – is the expression of full responsiveness to the reality of another human being in need.' (1999:276). It is that reality, he argues – of 'a human being in need, become compulsively present to the will' (1999:276) – that is 'expressed in those modalities of necessity' (1999:276).

This phenomenon appears from historical documentations of the actions of one human being assisting another, to be particularly activated in situations of very real risk to the life and well being of the one who is responded to (Oliner and Oliner 1988; Taylor C. 1999). That is certainly the case in this instance. As advocates and activists came to deeper involvement on the issue, they gained ever more knowledge of the dangers facing this asylum seeker population. Repeatedly, interviewees expressed the understanding that once they knew what was happening, their resulting actions were automatic and inevitable. The knowledge once known, could not be unknown. What might have been thought to be the case, had been unraveled and laid bare – a disturbing experience which left complacency behind. It was, one recalled, 'my political

awakening - the end of my naivete' (Interviewee XS). Indeed, the knowing and the witnessing of what had been and was still happening, appeared to exist as if in a different world from that previously inhabited. The 'knower' seemingly entered a different domain of personal responsibility for 'righting' the situation. As another expressed it:

> Until yesterday, I was just an ordinary mum, going about my business. But no more! (Interviewee QS).

In literature, this expression by 'helpers' of the inevitability of their response to the call for help that they perceived, has occasioned much debate and research. The response that Gaita refers to, i.e. 'I must help. I can't walk past' (1999:276), has been variously referred to as 'heroic altruism' (Oliner and Oliner 1988; Oliner et al. 1992), 'radical generosity' (Levinas as quoted in Diprose 2002:141), 'corporeal generosity' (Diprose 2002), 'sympathy' (Taylor C. 1999), and 'love' (Gaita 1999:20). The research by Samuel Oliner and Pearl Oliner (1988) is one of the largest and most significant studies of such a response in an extreme situation. Oliner and Oliner studied the actions of 'rescuers' of Jewish people in the Second World War, and interviewed hundreds of persons so identified (1988:1-2). Though these 'rescuers' risked death for themselves and families through their actions, a similar pattern repeatedly emerged of their perception of the inevitability of their actions. As Oliner and Oliner note, 'What they did, says this group, was just ordinary' (1988:228). As one of those 'rescuers' explained, 'We just helped people who were in need' (1988:228).

Oliner and Oliner's research explored personal characteristics and external factors that led particular individuals to such action. In regard to the former, their study found that distinguishing characteristics of rescuers included what the researchers describe as a capacity for 'extensive relationships' (1988:249), i.e. a strong sense of attachment to others and a feeling of responsibility for 'the welfare of others, including those outside of their immediate familial or communal circles' (1988:249). These prototype characteristics were found to enable prediction of rescue or non-rescue behaviour for 70% of the respondents in the Oliner and Oliner study (1988:253). At the same time, some people with these characteristics had not acted to assist Jewish people, and some people without these characteristics had acted to assist Jewish people. While the results

of the study demonstrated the influence of these personal orientations in explain rescue behaviour, it suggested that other factors had also influenced decisions and actions.

Oliner and Oliner found that such rescue action also required awareness of the severity of the situation of danger, and that 'personal relations with the victims themselves' (1988:250) or with people who knew them, encouraged early awareness of and empathic responses to such situations. But this again was not necessarily enough. In relation to the external situation, they also reported the significance of catalytic events which challenged the personal characteristics and value orientations of the rescuers (1988:187). For those who were characteristically empathetically oriented, the step into the 'rescue work' often appeared to have required an external event that 'aroused or heightened their empathy' (1988:188). Similarly, for those who were characteristically normocentrically oriented, it had required an external event 'which they interpreted as a normative demand of a highly valued social group' (1988:188). For those who characteristically behaved according to their own overarching principles, usually autonomously derived, it had required an external event 'which they interpreted as violating these principles' (1988:188).

Overall, Oliner and Oliner determined a number of significant factors in relation to the actions of the rescuers, including the personal characteristics mentioned earlier; the way in which relational aspects encouraged early awareness and empathic responses; the importance of an awareness of the severity of danger faced by the victims; and the presence of catalytic external events which heightened this awareness and which challenged aspects which were normative for particular individuals and groups.[40] The situation and the actions of those being studied in this research is markedly different to those studied by Oliner and Oliner in terms of the personal costs of assistance, and in terms of the situation itself. However, the fact that the former did involve issues which impacted upon situations of life and death for a number of asylum seekers, as well as on states of health and sanity for the majority of asylum seekers; the similarity of the way in which statements of a response to that need and suffering are expressed in terms of an automatic response to the one in need; and the references to the significance of pivotal

[40] These included aspects such as empathy for people in pain (including strangers) (1988: 189-199); internalized norms of valued social groups to which they were attached (1988:199-209); and autonomous principles rooted in justice and/or caring (1988:209-220)

events which brought awareness of the severity of need as well as a cathartic propulsion into action, makes it instructive, I suggest, to examine the motivational aspects mentioned by Oliner and Oliner, within my study. My research did not gather psychological data from interviewees, and those areas cannot be examined in this research. However, the challenging of individual and group values, norms and principles can be examined in their narratives. I therefore proceed to explore those aspects identified by Oliner and Oliner, for their relevance for the participants whose actions I am studying.

A VIOLATION OF EMPATHIC TENDENCIES

Mark Davis argues that one of the ways in which empathy can play a significant role in shaping the nature of social interactions is the creation in the observer of responses of empathic concern or personal distress 'that make certain kinds of pro-relationship social behavior more likely' (2004:25). This response is associated with what is commonly described as an ability to 'put oneself in the position of the other', and the behaviour which results from such 'role taking' or 'perspective taking', is normally supportive or helpful behaviour towards that other. From a social psychological approach, he argues that:

> The tendency for humans to see their interests as separate from others, and to act so as to maximise their interests at the expense of others, is widespread and robust. However, the gap between self and other is not unbridgeable. People do not *always* act in ways that maximise their own self interest. We … sometimes offer help at great risk to ourselves (2004:19).

Certainly, this phenomenon of empathic concern in regard to the situation of suffering of the affected asylum seekers, has frequently been cited as an important motivating factor in this particular collective action (Amor and Austin 2003; Reynolds 2004; Tascon 2005, Raab 2005; Mares and Newman 2007), and was voiced repeatedly by interviewees in my research (Gosden 2005b, 2006a, 2007). The suffering of asylum seekers, especially in immigration detention, but also in the community on inadequately provisioned visas, has been detailed empirically in numerous medical, legal, welfare and human rights reports and evidence (Sultan and O'Sullivan 2001; Steel and Silove 2001; Mares et al 2002; Barnes 2003; HREOC 2004; Leach and Mansouri 2004; Steel et al. 2004; McNevin 2005). It has also been graphically described in asylum seekers' and

advocates' accounts (Amor and Austin 2003; Tyler 2003; Mann 2003; Scott and Keneally 2004; Mares and Newman 2007; Briskman et al. 2008; Everitt 2008). In interviewees' narratives, it was often referred to in regard to asylum seekers' suffering in immigration detention; the suffering that had been endured prior to leaving their own countries; and the suffering that could also follow release from immigration detention, when released on inadequately provisioned visas, or with mental health problems. [41]

Davis has defined 'personal distress' as the 'self-oriented response of discomfort and anxiety to another's misfortune' (2004:27), and argues that the responses of both empathic concern and personal distress play an important role in empathic social interactions (2004:27). The former is associated with 'greater helping for another, even if there is some cost to the self.' (2004:29). The latter does not necessarily lead to assistance being provided to those perceived to be suffering, and can indeed lead to a distancing from that suffering in order to avoid the distress occasioned to oneself by it. However, it can also lead to heightened attempts to alleviate the observed suffering, as well as indirectly and not necessarily consciously, one's own distress.

Such personal distress experienced as motivation to action, has already been referred to, and was often expressed by interviewees in terms of strongly embodied experiences. As one tried to explain:

> I had this absolutely irresistible sense that if I was going to stay in Australia I had to do something to try and change what was going on. I couldn't stay and do nothing. I could leave and do nothing. But I couldn't stay and do nothing. And it was almost a physical revulsion at knowing what was actually happening. I really can't explain it because I'm not that way (Interviewee WA).

For interviewees who had witnessed such suffering, empathic concern and personal distress were intimately co-joined. As one young interviewee explained about the children whom he had met in detention:

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[41] As one interviewee noted:

> There is an unravelling of the human spirit that happens when a person is detained for more than six months (Interviewee WQ).

And after years of immigration detention, the suffering did not necessarily end on release. As another interviewee explained:

> Even when the government accepts people as refugees after three or four years in detention, you have taken resilient strong people and broken their spirit, many of them rendered mentally ill, depressed, barely able to function (Interviewee QR).

> I watched a little baby girl grow up in there. I would think about her all the time. I'd be like - I've got to do something for the kids! I have to get that look out of their eyes! (Interviewee YS)

Certainly, the responses of both empathic concern and personal distress are evident in interviewees' narratives of action, often reported as a combined double response to the situation. Additionally, while one or the other aspect may have originally led participants into supportive action for asylum seekers and refugees, the deeper the subsequent involvement, the greater likelihood of the development of that double response.

Predisposing factors which influence the perception of the observed by the observer

Although Davis notes that empathic behaviour is more likely to occur in response to people with whom we share positive affective bonds, he argues that 'nonselfish thought and action also occurs between strangers with no such emotional connection' (2004:19). He proposes a model of a typical empathy episode, which identifies a number of relevant factors. The first of these are factors relating to 'the observed' and 'the observer' which may predispose the observer towards an empathic or non-empathic response. From this, then follow 'processes' such as role-taking by which mechanism empathic outcomes are produced; 'intra-personal outcomes' such as the cognitive, affective and motivational responses produced in the observer; and 'inter-personal outcomes' such as behavioural responses directed to the observed and the situation (2004:21).

Davis explains that in terms of the observer, predisposing factors may be partly the result of personal characteristics (in that individual differences exist in terms of the tendency to engage in empathy-related processes), and partly the result of an individual's 'learning history' (2004:21). Davis does not define the latter, but I interpret it here to include personal histories, experiences and knowledge (which may alter the degree of resonance felt by the observer with the experience of the target). In terms of the 'observed', factors predisposing the observer towards an empathic response may be partly the strength of the situation, i.e. the degree of distress or danger of the situation for the target, and partly the degree of similarity perceived by the observer with the target.

For the issue that I am researching, for example, David Burchell has observed the way in which different sections of the Australian public responded markedly differently to the same media images and stories of the same asylum seekers. So great was this difference, he argues, that:

> Depending on whom you talked to, the detainees were either a threat to our national sovereignty or a challenge to the nation's conscience. We needed either to reach out towards them or steel ourselves against them. Their presence called either for a willed exercise of imagination and sympathy or for the deliberate refusal of such an emotion. (2005:117).

In this regard, the majority of the Australian population seemingly perceived those seeking asylum and entering without authorised papers, as potential terrorists, as illegal, as queue jumpers, and as rich economic migrants. In contrast, the interviewees in this research perceived an exclusion by the Australian government of potential refugees who had traveled at personal risk from countries where human rights abuses were known to be occurring. They also perceived the suffering of these people, and felt compelled to respond to that suffering, both because of the suffering itself, and because they perceived that suffering as being both exacerbated and created by the government and policies of their country.

Why were these perceptions by different sections of the Australian population so different? In a 2005 article, Diprose illustrates specifically the way in which the response of one individual becomes altered by fear of the harm which these asylum seekers may do to her family (2005:385-386). Diprose observes that the potential for harm which is expressed here, follows the repeated representation in government discourse and policies of these asylum seekers as 'threatening'. She argues that the perception of their 'difference' and 'strangeness' as threatening, has therefore already been largely predetermined by these political discourses that mediate it and authoritatively represent it to the population (2005:386).

In this regard, it could be argued that responses which might normally have been empathic in nature, could become hostile when an authoritative discourse repositions the observed as undeserving of such a response. Certainly the evidence of government instructions to Australian Defence Force (ADF) staff to ensure 'that there were no

personalising or humanising images' (Grewcock 2009:164-165) of asylum seekers, appears to support this argument. As a subsequent senate committee reported, this strategy was devised to ensure that 'no imagery that could conceivably garner sympathy or cause misgivings about the aggressive new border protection regime would find its way into the public domain' (SSCCMI 2002:25).

However, despite this censorship, some such images did become public and did provoke the responses of empathic concern and personal distress in some individuals. I suggest that the aspect described by Davis as an individual's 'learning history' is worthy of examination in this regard. In contrast to an acceptance of the representations of asylum seekers in government discourse, one of the findings of this research is the significance reported by interviewees of a felt violation of their personal and national values, principles and identity by the actions and discourse of the government. I suggest that while the experiences of fear, suspicion, and resentment referred to by Diprose (2003, 2005) and Burchell (2005) in the majority population response towards the arrival of the asylum seekers, may have contributed to a more likely acceptance of the negative government representation of the asylum seekers - the experiences of shock, outrage, shame, anger and distress experienced by interviewees at the government actions and discourse, potentially contributed to a more likely position of a questioning and scepticism towards that discourse and policy, and to an increased solidarity with the asylum seekers.

A VIOLATION OF VALUES, PRINCIPLES AND IDENTITY

In speaking of their involvement, a number of interviewees reflected on issues that were of fundamental importance to them as individuals and as Australians. Many spoke of aspects of values and principles which they had traditionally associated with being Australian, and which they saw as being impacted upon by Australian government policy on asylum seekers and refugees.

Values

One interviewee who was a legal professional reflected on an ethic of helping others in trouble – which he associated with a traditional Australian rural life and with 'bush values'. As he explained:

> I grew up in the country … you know, when you had a fire, everyone would go up and help. This time, it was the lawyers' turn to go up and help these poor bugger refugees (Interviewee WV).

Another described what he understood as an ethic of helping people in need:

> There are three philosophies of life people have. One is a purely selfish one, and it's fairly pathological. The second is an exchange system - 'You help me if I help you'. There's another philosophy which says 'If I see you need something, I'll help you, without worrying whether you're going to help me back'. It's about going the extra mile. The third one is what's being denied by the government policy at present (Interviewee WB).

The government policies similarly conflicted with other interviewees' sense of Australian society as being one in which fairness and generosity to those in need, sometimes expressed colloquially as 'helping the under-dog' or 'not kicking someone when they're down', functioned as a basic ideal of sociality. For the following interviewee, government policy towards asylum seekers represented a violation of that kind of sociality. As he observed:

> I think that the Howard government has changed the way Australians view people … asylum seekers. … I think they've turned Australians against them. …These people have been treated abominably. … What John Howard should have done from the start is said 'Now, we're going to look after these people'. And Australians would have said 'Yes. No worries! They can come into our town'. And it would have been so totally different. So I am incensed about that (Interviewee QX).

For another, her disturbance on the issue concerned values which she had previously associated with Australian society in terms of human rights. As she described it, for her, this was especially the case because:

> I was not born in Australia. … It was a very deliberate and conscious choice I made to become Australian, because of all the good things I saw in the country and what it represented. So, I almost felt betrayed. All those things that we profess to be … well, we have to walk our talk! I didn't know that human rights abuses were being perpetuated in there. In my Australia! How dare they! (Interviewee QS).

Identity

An identification with these values as an integral part of an identity associated with being Australian, was an often voiced comment. In addition, what was perceived as a violation of these values, was felt as a violation of the self. As expressed by one young woman:

> This was the most confounding, horrifying human rights thing that had ever happened to me in my country (Interviewee QN).

This same understanding was echoed by many. An experience of shock and disorientation is often apparent in interviewees' comments, as in the following statement, that:

> I thought we were a country where human rights were valued! (Interviewee XS).

This is especially so if interviewees had not previously been actively involved in social justice issues. In this regard, the following statement typifies the response of many to that perceived violation of personal identity in national identity:

> We have lost the moral ground completely. These policies have taken us down a path that no leader should ever take a nation down. And my actions are as much from the anger of that - "You are my government that represents us. You do not speak for me! You do not act for me!" (Interviewee QS).

Personal Principles

For some advocates and activists, previously held political, philosophical, historical, spiritual and human rights understandings and analyses provided an additional prism through which to view the situation. Commitment to principles such as truth, justice, anti-discrimination and human rights, and secular and religious commitments to a common humanity and humanitarianism were all expressed by interviewees as principles of importance.

For some, a respect for truth was at the centre of their concerns and their involvement. The publicity around these events had initially led them to a questioning of the government representations of the situation. In turn, this had led to a subsequent personal search for greater knowledge of the reality of the situation. This often led to

their making personal contact with asylum seekers. Through that had come greater knowledge and involvement, and a subsequent desire to refute misrepresentations of the situation by government and media, and to make the reality of the situation known to other Australians.

For others, issues of justice and injustice were expressed as being at the core of their concerns. One interviewee described the concerns of many, as he explained that:

> I think people who up to that time may not have taken a stand, saw that there was an issue about the law of the sea. There was a whole principle about sea rescue that was undermined by what Australia did in the Tampa instance. There were questions about the rights of individuals that arose in the Tampa crisis - to have access to advice and information about what rights they might have had, which was denied to them. There were questions around imprisonment, civil liberties, and the distance to which Australian law could stretch (Interviewee WM).

In addition, for a number of interviewees, racism was perceived as a prominent underlying feature of the situation. For some, this perception was informed by their own experiences of racism in Australia, while for all, abhorrence was increased by the perceived political use of racism on this issue, and the historical resonances this had with racially discriminatory policies.

For other interviewees, the situation was primarily viewed through a human rights perspective. As the following interviewee noted:

> I've always been aware that the core issue here is human rights, and the problem with human rights is that to chop off anybody's rights actually affects us all (Interviewee WY).

For another, a conception of humanity and human rights as global rather than national entities, was a deeply informing principle. In this regard, he argued:

> The basic issue of human rights is my platform. All of this is a long historical process and a very painful one. In this painful process, we have to find ourselves, where we are on it. I strongly believe that we have to become first human, then nationalists. In this movement, as an unspoken foundation of attitude, this was existing. Being human rather than nationalist (Interviewee WR).

For others again, the situation was informed though a prism of religious and spiritual understandings. One interviewee explicitly explained his motivation on the issue in such terms. As he noted:

> Mine's a faith motivation. … In the end, I think life is predominantly about the way we, as human beings, can interact with each other and interact with our world. It's about the creativity and generativity that we can bring to bear in that world (Interviewee WM).

For others, a similar understanding was expressed in more secular terms:

> It's like the bridging of a common humanity. I think that's one of the reasons why I do this, is that there is a common humanity. At one level we're all the same. There but for the grace of God, go I. I could very well have been born in Sudan, and I wasn't. I was born in Australia. So part of my job as a human being is to share what I have because it belongs to all of us. I wouldn't do the job if I didn't believe that (Interviewee XA).

And as another interviewee explained, it was also a struggle for the future of democracy in Australia. For this interviewee, democracy was not something which could be taken for granted. Her own personal experiences had informed her perceptions too deeply for this to be so. As she explained:

> I'm a child of the Second World War. I know that the Germans weren't cognisant of the incremental lessening of human rights in their society. It snuck up on them. I'm acutely aware that that erosion is happening here, of civil liberties and human rights (Interviewee WQ).

HISTORICAL RESONANCES

As noted earlier in regard to Davis's reference to an individual 'learning history' (2004:21), a number of historical resonances were mentioned by interviewees in regard to previous national and international atrocities and human rights abuses. For some older interviewees, knowledge of the atrocities of the Second World War was deeply informing in terms of the resonances that they perceived in the scapegoating and demonising of asylum seekers. The statements of the following interviewees are reflective of this connection and its influence on their perceptions. One interviewee explained that:

> By the time I was a teenager in the late 50s, we were always reading books about how did Germany let Hitler happen? And I reckon now we know, because we've let a lot of the same things happen in Australia (Interviewee WY).

Another interviewee had often reflected on this historical event, and observed that:

> To me, it was - I had asked myself the question what would I do if I had lived in Germany during the Holocaust? It was a very deep question for me. What do you do when you hear something and you don't act? If there is a neighbour in trouble. So, it was a personal challenge to me. How can I sleep or how can I ignore what is happening? (Interviewee QW).

Others similarly voiced an awareness of the historical, systemic dimension of the situation, and of their own positioning and personal responsibility in that. As the following interviewee noted:

> I resigned from the onshore protection section of DIMIA. … I didn't want to face my grandchildren once they were older in having to answer their questions about locking children up in detention centres. … I didn't want to be part of a system that incarcerated innocent people in that manner. I felt that my conscience wouldn't allow me to be part of a system where that would happen (Interviewee YA).

For some, there were even more personal aspects to these historical resonances. As one interviewee reflected:

> I saw the no-man's land with the coiled razor wire, and I remembered my Jewish grandfather (Interviewee YA).

For others, there were also a number of historical precedents of an 'unknowing' of atrocities, in terms of human rights abuses perpetrated by Australian authorities against Indigenous Australians. Earlier historical abuses had gained little recognition from the wider Australian community (Reynolds 1999), and this had continued to be an issue of contention. The conjunction between these two situations was therefore noted, in terms of the vital importance of 'making known' these current human rights abuses. As one interviewee explained:

> It might be that we've got a role for twenty years, so that when some future Prime Minister stands up and apologises, people can't say like they did about the Aborigines, "It's not my fault. I didn't know", which is a cop out anyway (Interviewee WY).

In addition, for other interviewees, the issue held resonances with what they perceived as human rights abuses which were occurring in different parts of the world during the same period as their involvement in this issue, and in which they considered the Australian government to be complicit. In this regard, one interviewee commented:

> The refugee and asylum seeker stuff was an intense example of many of the other issues rolled into the worst of the worst. If you took the most extreme in anything else, there it was in this little microcosm (Interviewee XH).

And being so perceived, this led to what was described as an inevitable response. As the following interviewee observed:

> I've always had this thing that if I'm not doing something, I'm somehow complicit (Interviewee XL).

A VIOLATION OF VALUED GROUP NORMS

As reported by Oliner and Oliner, group norms functioned as ethical principles for involvement for 52% of the 'rescuers' in their study (1988:199). In the Oliner and Oliner study, these valued social groups were varied, including religious communities, political groups, resistance groups, and local and national communities (1988:199-209). In the action that I am exploring, group norms also functioned in interviewees' involvement. For example, some of the group norms identified by interviewees as influential in their involvement were professional norms, existing as ethical principles for medical and legal practitioners, including pro-bono work as part of that ethic. Many other professional and occupational groups also took similar stands, and interviewees often explained how their professional and occupational ethics could conflict with and outweigh government edicts. For these professionals, acting ethically on the issue in that professional capacity could come to involve not only the practice of the profession, but could also necessitate speaking out publicly against government policies and practices which were considered to violate those norms.

Spiritual and pastoral norms could also function to provide humanitarian norms of compassion. An interviewee who was a Christian pastor described such a norm, and also the philosophical and cultural struggles which sometimes took place on these issues:

> We are called upon to work for a country that is just and peaceful. And we are called upon to uphold the gospel values of hospitality and compassion. I think that this issue has motivated more of your average church members than any other for quite some time. Because that's part of what it means to be a Christian. The bottom line, the unspoken statement is "If you're not prepared to live with compassion, what are you doing here?" (Interviewee WC).

Group norms also existed around the previously mentioned values, principles, and personal and national aspects of identity which were considered to have been violated. Indeed, these aspects functioned as a cohesive point for otherwise disparate groups of individuals within the collective action. To some extent, the profusion of groups based around these previously mentioned personal values and principles, is impossible to adequately represent (see group lists and diagrammatic representation in Appendix B). As individuals became aware and energised for action, they often looked for those who might hold similar views amongst colleagues, peer groups, friends, families and local communities, and in combined action constituted these aspects as group norms in and through their action.

I have described this phenomenon in an earlier publication (Gosden 2006a), as have a number of other authors (Coombs 2004; Reynolds 2004; Fiske 2006; O'Neill 2008; Everitt 2008; Briskman et al. 2008). Although many of these people did look to contribute by adding their energies to established refugee, human rights and church campaigns, many others felt a need to take immediate and direct social action in whatever way they could, and wherever they were situated. In addition, social action which led to personal interaction with asylum seekers in immigration detention centres, or with refugees living in the community with inadequate protection visas, reinforced and heightened the already perceived urgency of the situation. Because of this orientation towards the need for urgency in the social action, groups were often initiated in a 'local' or 'associational' manner, i.e. groups began 'locally' in myriad locations across Australia, in places of residence, work, and in social, religious, political and professional interaction (Gosden 2006a).

The scattered pattern of support groups across the country reflected the way in which much of the new energy for this wave of advocacy and activism, began spontaneously in late 2001 and early 2002, and occurred almost simultaneously in multiple sites across the nation. David Corlett has suggested that in the context of a conflict in which there

was bipartisan political support for a 'hard line' approach towards asylum seekers, it was 'at the level of localised interaction that hope … resides' (2002:358). I agree and argue that the local enactment of these social norms (based around the previously mentioned values and principles) by diverse groups across multiple geographical, professional and personal locations, compensated to a significant degree for the numerically small size of this social collective.

A 'CRISIS OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY'

Diprose has explored the way in which populations respond when governments in democratic countries 'initiate programs that endorse the treatment of persons in ways that are *felt* to be in direct conflict with the normative basis of the moral sensibilities of the citizenry' (2009:3). In ways resonant with Diprose's analysis, interviewees have reported an experience of a violation of both their ideal of Australian society and their internalised identity as an Australian citizen. That this was deeply offensive for them, is evident in their comments. That it touched on aspects at the core of their being, is evident in the immediacy and force of their emotional and embodied responses.

Those values which were of fundamental importance to them were out of step with the policies and practices adopted by their government on this issue. They were also out of step with the majority support for those practices and policies in their society. I argue that in a deeply personal sense, the perceived violation of those values can be understood as having been experienced by interviewees as a threat to the integrity of their own being, as the capacity of socially embodying them was felt to be at risk. In terms of the understandings opened by Diprose's analysis, a 'sense of belonging' to an Australian society which valued those principles and ways of sociality became reduced to 'non-sense' on this issue (2005:390). In addition, what was perceived by interviewees as a 'failure of political responsibility' (2009:1) by their government, precipitated for them 'a crisis of personal responsibility' (2009:1). In such situations, Diprose suggests, 'responsibility cannot rest on blind obedience to the law' (2009:10).

Diprose argues that under such conditions, there is a tendency to 'either fall into step with this revised code of conduct such that personal responsibility … seems to vanish, or public life descends into a blame game' (2009:3). Alternatively, a kind of conscience

may arise based on a 'felt conviction about what is right and wrong "beyond convention" ' (Levinas as quoted in Diprose 2009:20). As she expresses this process:

> the other's suffering is learned as it is felt in the very process by which the responsiveness of somatic reflexivity and self-responsibility arises (2009:17-18).

It is the force of this conviction arising from a 'crisis of personal responsibility' (Diprose 2009:1), I argue, that is so repeatedly expressed in interviewee's comments, as in the one voiced below:

> Oh my God, we just really can't do nothing (Interviewee XW).

CONCLUSION

It is apparent from these and other statements in the interviews, that there was a multiplicity and layering of motivation in interviewees' responses and actions. On an immediate level, motivation centred around the need to assist asylum seekers detained or otherwise badly disadvantaged in Australia, and to oppose those policies and practices in order to lessen or end the injustices that the policies were perceived to create and to sustain. At another level, since the cause of asylum seekers' suffering was perceived to follow directly from the actions of Australian governments, advocates also desired to oppose and publicly distance themselves from the government discourse, policies and practice, and to assure asylum seekers that the government did not speak for all Australians in this matter, and certainly did not speak for them personally. An assertion of identification with particular values and principles which interviewees associated with an Australian identity, and which they perceived to be in conflict with those being modeled by these policies and practices, accompanied the taking of personal responsibility for intervening in the situation, as compared, for example, to delegating that responsibility to others.

In this regard, multiple interwoven aspects were apparent, illustrating desires to act in ways which would support asylum seekers and undo, if possible, some of the harm done to them. Also apparent were the desires of advocates and activists to possibly redeem by their own actions, the values and principles which they regarded as significant for themselves and for their society. In addition, for a number of interviewees, the realisation that these policies and practices had been in existence for some time, and that

they had either not been aware of them, or had not found them objectionable, was shocking and distressing.

A range of interviewees' emotions and motivations therefore centred around aspects such as empathy for the suffering of asylum seekers; shock and outrage at their treatment by the Australian government; distress and shame at the denigration of cherished civil values, and fear at the direction being taken by the Australian government and population. However, the interactions with asylum seekers which these emotions and motivations fuelled, took this engagement to an ever deeper level. The next chapter explores these interactions and their effect on motivation and action.

Chapter 6:
Making contact

INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the narratives of the interviewees. It explores the personal interactions that occurred between asylum seekers and supporters. It further examines the effect of these interactions upon interviewees' engagement in action, and upon the nature of the action itself. The chapter documents and analyses the way in which these interactions often led to relationships of care and solidarity that bridged the socially constructed divide of 'self and other', between the asylum seekers and supportive Australians. These relationships represented a mutual process of the development of trust in a situation of extremity.

The chapter begins an examination (which is continued in the following chapters), of the emotional and strategic significance of these interactions and relationships for the development and maintenance of the collective action. The interactions led to increased knowledge for interviewees of the reality of the asylum seekers' situations. They also led to a grounding of their commitment to action through the medium not only of abstract ideals of justice, but through the personage of real, known human beings. These interactions and relationships heightened the costs and benefits of supporters' engagement in the social action. They also became an important factor in influencing the style of collective action that developed, as the urgency of need of the asylum seekers' situations increasingly informed the discourse and strategies of the collective action.

MAKING PERSONAL CONTACT

One of the significant features of this particular social action has been the amount of personal contact made between asylum seekers and their supporters. It has not only been the case that established refugee, human rights and humanitarian NGOs, and professional and institutional bodies which might normally be concerned with such issues, have had personal contact with asylum seekers in Australian immigration

detention centres and in the community. Those groups have been augmented by Australians acting in a lay capacity as concerned citizens.

These concerned individuals and groups could have simply contributed in various ways to support the well established human rights and refugee NGOs who are normally involved in such issues. While this certainly occurred, there was also an evident desire on the part of many of those who opposed the government policies, to be more directly and personally involved in actions of support and solidarity with asylum seekers. In contrast to the negative discourse and policies of the Australian government which demonised asylum seekers and isolated them in geographically remote immigration detention centres, opponents of the government policies and discourse sought out the company of affected asylum seekers across often huge geographical distances, bureaucratic obstacles and cultural divides in order to provide solidarity and support. One interviewee's reflections on the various stages of her own involvement, illustrates this phenomenon. As she observed:

> The *Tampa* was the pivotal point for me. It really raised awareness to a greater level. … A friend of mine and I joined the refugee group of Amnesty as a result of that. It felt like you were making a stand. You weren't just standing idly by, like the saying that if good people stand by and do nothing, terrible things happen. … I felt like I wasn't being inactive. But I wanted to do more. I wanted to have more and closer contact with people in those situations … so I contacted Rural Australians for Refugees and got names of people in detention to write to (Interviewee GC).

In the above statement, a number of aspects are apparent, which are resonant with the comments of many interviewees. One aspect is that of a felt need to act in a way that signifies and publicly declares opposition to the government policy. As the interviewee describes her action, 'It felt like you were making a stand' (Interviewee XG). In terms of Diprose's analysis, such action can be understood as an embodiment of the force of a felt personal responsibility stirred by the events. In a similar sense, in the interviewee's narrative, 'making a stand', 'being active', 'doing something', and 'speaking out' are contrasted with the alternatives of 'being inactive', 'not doing something' or 'just standing idly by'. In joining the refugee arm of a human rights NGO, she feels that she has declared her position on the issue. At least, she reflects, 'I wasn't being inactive' (Interviewee XG). In such an understanding, to be silent – to not speak out or otherwise show publicly by your actions – would be to be complicit. And yet, declaring her

position in this manner, is not enough to satisfy the urgency of her need for action on the issue. As she notes, 'I wanted to have more and closer contact with people in those situations' (Interviewee XG).

What aspects fuelled this desire, which has been common amongst supporters of asylum seekers, to move closer to the reality of the situation of the asylum seekers? [42] For some who had questioned the government discourse, or who already had some knowledge, it was a desire to investigate the situation more closely for themselves in order to determine the truth of the matter. For others, it was an essential factor in establishing effective partnerships of advocacy and activism with asylum seekers. For others again, the movement towards the asylum seekers can be viewed as a determined rejection of the government discourse, policies and practices. Indeed, it provided a rebuttal of a government discourse which demonised asylum seekers as being 'not like us', by making direct contact and association with those same asylum seekers. In this sense, such actions by advocates and activists made a visibly embodied statement to the affect that the government did not represent the position of all Australians on this issue. The examples of such contact and association ranged from the long queues of advocates and activists who waited for hours outside metropolitan immigration detention centres for entry to visit asylum seekers detained there, to the many public statements made of positive and close relationships with asylum seekers. All of this behaviour role-modelled a solidarity with asylum seekers through direct association which was in complete contrast to that advocated by government discourse, policies and practices.

For many interviewees, following their conscience on this issue was important in their own sense of identity as an individual human being and as an Australian. As explored earlier, the events of the present period were often connected for them with the past and the future, and that future could perhaps still be determined by actions in the present. In a very real sense then, this 'non-hostile movement towards the other' functioned to communicate their desires for the kind of society which would provide symbolic, emotional, social and practical support for asylum seekers. In this regard, the response

[42] In the theoretical work of Luc Boltanski on responses to the suffering of other human beings, this desire for a non-hostile empathetic movement towards the one who is suffering, represents a particular response of sentiment or acting at 'the level of the heart' (1999:81), which he argues is characterised by the embodiment of intensity and urgency (1999:80), both in action and in discourse (1999:79-92).

acted as confirmation of a common humanity which interviewees perceived as being denied by the government discourse, policies and practices, and as confirmation through action of those values of fairness, compassion and justice which they held dear.

In a related sense, action supportive of asylum seekers could also symbolise a personal act of reparation as an Australian citizen for the harm done to them by an Australian government. At another level again, in the manner examined in the previous chapter, such a movement towards asylum seekers was articulated by interviewees as a simple response to urgent humanitarian and human rights needs, i.e. a response to a 'call for help', as exhibited in the suicides and attempted suicides, hunger strikes, lip-sewing and other self-harm actions taken by detainees; and to the mental illness and despair that drove such actions. It was also a similar response to the fact that the magnitude of such needs, especially in a period of political hostility to asylum seekers, were not and could not be met solely by the established humanitarian and human rights Australian NGOs.

'Real people'

When connections were made with asylum seekers, the interactions often tended to create an extra dimension of involvement on the issue. Many interviewees commented on the effect on those Australians who did make such personal contact. As one interviewee explained, this was when people came to knowledge of the reality of the situation:

> After Tampa, people sort of thought "What can I do?" And then they got involved and met refugees, and learned a bit about their stories and the harsh lives that they've led. I think that's where you get attitudinal change. It's actually meeting people, and realising, so that the myths that are perpetuated by our government, and the lies that are told by our government, are dispelled because people are in possession of the truth (Interviewee XS).

As another interviewee noted, it didn't take long on making contact, to realise that the government discourse didn't fit the reality:

> I went and visited Villawood. … They *(the asylum seekers)* had no political ambitions. They had no preconceived ideas about Australia's stance with respect to terrorism or anything like that. … Also, once you start listening to their stories, It's almost impossible to think that a terrorist would take that route to infiltrate our society (Interviewee QC. My insertion in italics)

Often, perception and involvement shifted as the issue became no longer an abstract one, but one concerning real human beings whom one had seen and met. For one interviewee, meeting asylum seekers was indeed the most persuasive of arguments for subsequent action. In his experience:

> The most powerful driver for change has been people visiting Baxter. … When you're talking about people that you know, and about people that you've seen the consequences for … that changes a lot of things. And that's the ultimate driver. … I wanted 51 % of South Australians to visit Baxter, because then it would be closed by public demand (Interviewee WY).

The realisation of the extremity of the situation

Even for those used to visiting prisons in their professional capacity, the reality of asylum seekers' situations in immigration detention centres could make an impact. As a health professional recalled:

> I just couldn't believe how bad it was. I'd never been anywhere worse. It made Yatala seem like a nice place to be, and Yatala's our local prison. … You walk into this place, and I saw children who look like my children. … Just hearing kids called by numbers, calling themselves by numbers, seeing the looks on people's faces. It was the actual physical environment! (Interviewee XI).

The extremity of the situation for those detained, with high rates of mental illness, self-harm and attempted suicides by detainees (Sultan and O'Sullivan 2001); the negative impact on normal development for children in detention (Mares et al. 2002; HREOC 2004); and the lack of adequate accountability and standards in the management of immigration detention (HREOC 2004; Palmer 2005; Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005), was brought vividly to light for those who visited, and especially for those who subsequently became regular visitors or remained in regular contact. As one interviewee explained:

> I've never seen anybody in a more desperate situation. I met a guy who had gone on a hunger strike and had gone blind because he wasn't given proper medical attention. … And I met a guy who had been in detention for so long, he had tried to kill himself. … And we met ex-guards … who showed us video footage of some of the riots in the detention centre – some of that brutality … just watching it, it was terrifying … what people will do to other people … right out in the middle of nowhere, with no contact with reality or the outside world (Interviewee WI).

The geographical isolation of many of the immigration detention centres only emphasised the vulnerability of those held there:

> It was just this prison-like circumstance of people who were given all the authority in the world to do whatever that wanted and no accountability. I don't think I could have grasped it without actually being there. It was the first time that I'd ever seen anybody water cannoned or tear gassed. … We saw people fly off the fence and back with the water cannon. And there were kids at the fence. I had just never seen anything like it before in my life. And we realised as well how isolated people were (Interviewee WI).

A divide became ever more evident between the discriminatory treatment of those asylum seekers who sought refugee status in Australia without official entry authorisation, as compared to the treatment of those determined as refugees in overseas locations and subsequently brought to Australia. A cognitive divide was also experienced by many advocates and activists between the situation of those thus discriminated against, and the relatively priviliged situation of many Australians (Gosden 2007b).

In a similar manner to the effect of making contact with those detained, closer and continued contact brought increased realisations for advocates and activists of the situations of extreme need and despair experienced by those asylum seekers released into the community with inadequate provisions for their material needs. As a medical practitioner working with asylum seekers released from detention on various kinds of visas, recalled: [43]

> I've never been to a detention centre, but the most traumatised people I saw were the people on bridging visas who were let out of the detention centres for mental health issues - already traumatised people who felt like the outcasts of society … because these people risked so much to come, and then to not be believed, to try everything they could, and then give up hope, and then try and kill themselves,

[43] The next most traumatised people with whom she had worked, she added, were those asylum seekers who had been granted TPVs, and released into the community. As she explained:

> There was a constant threat that they were going to be sent back. They'd told their stories so many times, it started to get fuzzy and they became more and more distressed. They were years and years away from their families. Things were happening back home, and their families were dying, and a lot of them were so suicidal. They'd lost hope. They couldn't stand the tension of that whole TPV process any more. They were a very risky group (Interviewee XA).

> and then be let out on this terrible visa - to have to rely completely, one hundred percent, on other people, was just so degrading and demoralising for them. It was a continuity of the refugee experience really. No dignity and respect - none of those things. No hope (Interviewee XA).

For asylum seekers, the contact and the support that followed opened life-lines of practical, moral and emotional support (Amor and Austin 2003; Tyler 2003; Scott and Keneally 2004). They also provided the potential for more effective advocacy and activism with the larger Australian population. These aspects will be explored in more depth in the following chapter.

RELATIONSHIPS OF CARE

Another significant feature of the social action has been the development of personal relationships of care between asylum seekers and supporters. As mentioned earlier, supporters of asylum seekers included a wide range of groups and individuals. Some possessed professional and material resources and skills which were immediately relevant to the needs of the asylum seekers and refugees. Other groups and individuals struggled to find ways in which they could be most useful in assisting those needs. The diversity of ways in which supporters sought to inform themselves and other Australians of the situation; to attempt to change public opinion; to influence politics and policy; and to bring relief to the suffering of asylum seekers and refugees, was as varied as the spectrum of supporters themselves.

Providing emotional and social support to asylum seekers through regular communications by visits, letters or phone calls, was one simple form that this assistance could take. However, even this was often accompanied to various degrees by the humanitarian and strategic work of material and para-legal assistance, the exchange of information, the smuggling in and out of immigration detention centres of information, equipment and supplies, and by joint asylum seeker and advocacy and activist actions. As compared to other more traditional forms of advocacy and activism, was this simple form of human to human contact of value in these situations of extremity? For a number of interviewees who were previously detained as asylum seekers in Australian immigration detention centres, and who were strong advocates themselves for other detained asylum seekers, there was no doubt. As one explained:

> Many of those groups who weren't politically active, they were still doing a great job by visiting and providing help and friendship. They were giving incredible support to delay the serious collapse of detainees. There were seven coping strategies used by detainees. One of them, the most important one, was visitors. It was the most effective way of slowing down the process of mental damage. So, even though these people couldn't get them a visa, they were happy for them to visit (Interviewee YH).

This is reminiscent of what was described by Primo Levi of an episode of such human to human emotional and moral support provided to him at one point in his incarceration in the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz. Without the food that an Italian civilian working in Auschwitz brought to him, Levi may likely not have survived. Yet, in his account, it is not only or even foremost for that material aid, that Levi remembers his supporter (1996:119-122). It is primarily, Levi says, for 'his having constantly reminded me by his presence … that there still existed a just world outside our own' (1996:121). Levi writes that while the humanity of many became buried, 'under an offence received or inflicted on someone else. … Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man' (1996:121-122).

It was from a similar kind of emotional and moral assistance, that some of the most deeply personal relationships were to develop between asylum seekers and their supporters. Nor was this phenomenon limited to 'lay' supporters who could not provide professional level care in areas such as medical, legal and welfare assistance (see Mares and Newman 2007; Briskman et al. 2008; and O'Neill 2008 for examples of deeply affective personal support between professional carers and those suffering discrimination). If those making contact persisted over time in such ongoing support, they not only came to know more of the general situation, but they also came to know particular groups of asylum seekers and individual asylum seekers better. The more that this occurred, the deeper the involvement often became. Although concerned Australians may have initially made contact with asylum seekers from an abstract sense of injustice and solidarity, once they met and came to know asylum seekers personally, the issue became personal as well as political. As one interviewee explained, 'the awareness ramifies' (Interviewee QA).

CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The close relationships that developed between asylum seekers and their supporters can be seen expressed in a number of publications (Amor and Austin 2003; Tyler 2003; Scott 2004; Gordon 2005; ACHSSW 2006; Mares and Newman 2007; Tilbury 2007; Pedersen et al. 2008). This phenomenon was also referred to by many interviewees. Once relationships developed, the situation for supporters was not only that a particular group of men, women and children were discriminated against and victimised by these Australian policies and practices, but that it was happening to people whom you knew personally, might regularly spent time with, and with whom you had likely begun to form friendships. The depth of this personal knowledge of those suffering under the policy, affected the intensity and commitment of the social action which ensued. Those who were suffering were no longer an impersonal 'them' or 'those people'. Rather, they were individual known people. It was 'Achmed', 'Abdul', 'Mohammad', Saeed', 'Layla', 'my friend', 'my friends', or perhaps as relationships deepened even further, 'my son', 'my daughter', 'my sister', 'my brother', and other familial type descriptions of loved ones.

Farida Tilbury (2007) has written of the use of such family tropes in refugee advocacy discourse. She argues that the use of the language of family represents a way in which asylum seekers and advocates have attempted to name the relationships which developed. These were sometimes relationships which went beyond simple 'helping' relationships, beyond relationships arising from values and principles, and beyond relationships of camaraderie based on shared objectives and concerns. Rather, they not uncommonly entered zones of care for the other person. These relationships of care also worked both ways – from advocates and activists to asylum seekers, and from asylum seekers to advocates and activists. While supporters may have initially made contact with asylum seekers from motivations of curiosity, empathy, solidarity, and principle, it was the response that they received when they made contact and the interaction that then occurred, that built the experience of a bridging of the gap between self and other.

In this regard, the response of advocates and activists to the situation of asylum seekers and refugees, and the response of asylum seekers to these same advocates and activists, had complemented one another. In their meeting, a shared entity of empathy and

resistance often became forged. One interviewee, for example, described the significance of the response she received to her original letter to unknown asylum seekers in an immigration detention centre. As she recalled:

> I wrote. I apologized. I said, 'I feel so ashamed at what has happened to you. I want to let you know that not all of us in this country agree with that policy. If you would like a friend, I would be happy to be your friend'. And within perhaps ten days, there was my self addressed envelope back again. I read it and burst into tears. My first impact was, "Here is a human being who has responded to my reaching out to him. And he's grabbed that hand straight away and said, 'Thank you' " (Interviewee QK).

It was in the forging of relationships that began from such responses from both sides of the divide created by government discourse and policies, that ongoing and deepening relationships developed:

> After just a few letters, they said, 'Could we call you Mum?'. And I wrote back and said, 'Yes. I'd be honoured'. And I didn't really understand why that was necessary, but it didn't take long to find out - that culturally, to have a correspondence with a strange woman, even though I'm probably as old as their mum or grandmother - to have a relationships or a friendship with a strange woman, culturally was very difficult for them. But to be a mum or an aunty was acceptable. So very quickly, early in the piece, I became their Australian mum (Interviewee QK).

In regard to such factors, it is apparent in many accounts by asylum seekers and supporters, that such terms functioned culturally to specify appropriate labelling of unexpected relationships of care between relative strangers. Tilbury also argues that the use of such familial type terms 'simultaneously constructs and reproduces ideas about what 'family' should be, while making sense of an otherwise dominant/subordinate relationship between the advocates and refugees' (2007:627). I agree with her that the use of this language functions to make sense of a depth and intensity of relationship which was unusual and unexpected, and which the participants themselves often found difficult to understand and articulate. I also argue that it came to represent internalised cognitive representations of closeness and similarity, as people in these relationships of care amidst situations of extremity, increasingly forged bonds which emphasised the commonalities of a common humanity as compared to the differences of cultural divides (Gosden 2005b).

Why did close relationships become a significant aspect in this social action? I would suggest that one of the main factors was that the incarceration of asylum seekers and the involvement of advocates in personal and professional relationships with them, often stretched over a period of a number of years. Some asylum seekers were detained for more than seven years (Jackson 2005), and many including children were detained for several years (HREOC 2004). Supporters were therefore in communication with, and involved in the lives and well being of particular people as well as groups of people, on a regular basis for lengthy periods of time. These long periods of involvement in the lives of those held in detention or released from detention on inadequately provisioned visas, facilitated the development of close relationships. In addition, the vulnerability of those held in such situations, and the feelings of personal responsibility and shame which were associated for advocates and activists with their government's actions, all created a social and emotional environment which facilitated the development of close friendships.

Thirdly, many supporters reported their initial involvement and their sustained involvement as following on from the activism of the asylum seekers themselves. The agency of the asylum seekers in their attempts to communicate with the Australian population was therefore an essential factor in this dynamic, as was their positive response to the non-hostile movements of these small numbers of Australians towards them. The development of these relationships was a mutual process of the development of trust in a situation of extremity, as were the models of shared activism between asylum seekers and supporters through which a resistance was forged to the government discourse, policies and practices.

Finally, a realisation of the inadequacy of existing welfare, legal and other resources available to assist the needs of asylum seekers either in immigration detention centres, or living in the community on inadequately provisioned visas - led these concerned citizens (in both professional and lay capacities) to assist in these tasks themselves. Depending on whether the asylum seekers were either still detained in immigration detention centres or living in the community without adequate support, these tasks could include providing pro-bono medical and legal support, or acting as intermediaries between asylum seekers and their pro-bono legal representatives; providing practical everyday accommodation and welfare needs; attempting to maintain asylum seekers'

hope and sanity; and engaging in numerous endeavours to provide basic rights denied to asylum seekers. This kind of engagement is an example of what Jim Ife has previously described as the building of 'human rights from below' (Ife 2005:18-19), and has been argued as such by other researchers (Fiske 2006). All of this ongoing interaction over long periods of time facilitated the development of close relationships.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THESE RELATIONSHIPS

The complexity and ambiguity of these relationships is related to the many roles played by both supporters and by those being supported. Concern, care, solidarity, friendship, respect and love were all possible ingredients in these relationships, as were aspects of high levels of agency, material and emotional need and dependency, and the significance of cultural differences. Within the circumscribed boundaries of normality that the situations of extremity created, asylum seekers and supporters attempted to create zones of sociality and relationships of care (See Mares and Newman 2007 for examples). Yet these were always permeated by the specificity and liminality of the situation itself.

The complexity and ambiguity in these relationships of care is perhaps best evidenced in their varied nature as long-term relationships, subsequent to immigration detention periods or visa restrictions. Interviewees evidenced examples of many of these relationships which subsequently endured as long-term relationships of friendship and love. As one of many interviewees commented:

> By having known these people now for years, they've become our friends. These people have become part of our lives (Interviewee QS).

In instances where the intensity of relationships gradually ebbed with the natural attributions of time and distance, the relationship could still be remembered and valued, in terms of the profound nature of what had been shared. As another interviewee explained:

> You have this bond and it will always be there. You've shared something that you haven't shared with anyone else. It's part of you and it's part of them. And you'll remember each other forever, and happily. It's part of a good part of your life.

> They know if they've got a problem, they can come to me. … I'm still their friend, but I want them to be independent of me. … They want to make sure I don't feel abandoned. They all call me Mum, and they want to make sure that when they don't come to see me, it's not because they don't care. I do the separating. They ring and I say "That's lovely. What's happening?" And "We'll get together sometime". For example, he rang me and said "I miss you". And I said "I miss you too, but you know I love you and you love me". And he said "Yes, and we will get together" (Interviewee WO).

However, while some relationships forged under these conditions of extremity would continue as long-term relationships, others could end in disappointment and recrimination, as the realities of 'normal' life asserted themselves for both asylum seekers and supporters. The close relationships as attested earlier, could be of great assistance in the situations of extremity of immigration detention centres or of survival on inadequately provisioned visas. However, they could also sometimes become liabilities as that situation of extremity receded. As an advocate involved with many asylum seekers post-detention observed:

> A lot of the time, refugees who have been helped have to break free of that. … Nobody wants a benefactor. People want friends ultimately. They want person to person contact that is free of benevolence. And some people are wise about that and some people aren't (Interviewee XL).

A health professional explained the dynamics of such situations:

> To accept people as part of a family is a very useful thing for the mental health of those refugees, but at another level, it makes people very vulnerable, because they're not family really. They don't have all of the family background. They come from a culture that's very different. Our culture is hard wired into our brains and it's subtle. It comes out in ways that we don't understand really. It's in our subconscious (Interviewee XA).

In some instances, it was noted:

> A lot of things have gone sour in some of the relationships, and that feels really sad to me. I think it's partly that it's easier to be an advocate for a family that's locked up in detention, and can be idealised and have so clearly have been wronged. Then when the family gets out of detention, the cultural divide that would have been there anyway, plus the damage that has been done by the detention experience - they don't always act in the way the others would want them to act, and vice versa. I think that people have been quite hurt by that process (Interviewee XI).

As one of these interviewees reflected, even for professionals with training in boundary setting and with the value of professional support services, the situation could be emotionally challenging:

> It's easy to be on the outside criticising those people who feel hurt. And those people who criticise would say that they had no right to have any expectations. That they've got an issue about ownership, about ego. But if you think about how relationships are built, to me it's a risk that you take. It is another of the risks of doing this work. You've got to do it with your heart or you wouldn't do it. So you do it with your heart, but your heart might be broken (Interviewee XA).

Despite this, for many, the interactions and relationships had had a profoundly positive and long-lasting impact. As one interviewee explained, for him:

> It's ok. We are close friends. I know that will fade. And my view of that is, even if it involves some sense of pain or grief because these people go – tough!. These people required that level of support. It's not about what makes me feel good. These people have been treated abominably. And if it means that I've got to experience whatever, so be it (Interviewee QX).

THE EFFECT OF THESE RELATIONSHIPS ON THE COLLECTIVE ACTION

In terms of individual and collective action, the significance of the development of close personal relationships with asylum seekers was multiple. On the one hand, it intensified the level of commitment of many supporters, since what was at stake were personal as well as political concerns. In the relatively numerically and resource weak nature of the collective action, as compared to the resources against which the collective action was arrainged, this provided valuable additional resources of energy and action. It also produced a role-modelling, in discourse and behaviour for other Australians, of possible positive relationships with 'the other' (Gosden 2005b, 2006a; Tilbury 2007). For these reasons, supporters consciously encouraged other Australians to make contact with asylum seekers in order to increase their knowledge of the situation, and to break down the isolation and separation imposed by government discourse and policies.

As argued by many advocates, the impact of coming to realisation of what the issue encompassed, through a deep connection with one individual asylum seeker or through a focus on a particular group of asylum seekers, could infuse an added element of passion and commitment to action on the issue. As one observed:

> My hunch is that all of the people who are committed to refugees have done a couple of things. One is they see something they think is socially evil or wrong. And the other is that they see individuals they want to support. And out of that comes their commitment. You can't have commitment to an ideal. It's got to be grounded in somebody (Interviewee WY).

In terms of the collective action as a whole, another recalled the way in which she had observed the energy of the social action change dramatically and positively from being action grounded in abstract social justice principles to action grounded in the realities of people's lives and situations:

> The way that people campaigned on it was quite academic I think at that point. It was a fight for justice and people's rights - all of those words and catchphrases. But this made it "people". I think that personal connection really transformed it. … Particularly for longer term campaigners who came in from their political beliefs. I've seen that transformation … a real difference (Interviewee WI).

On the other hand, the development of close relationships was considered by some activists and advocates, to problematically shift the focus of activity away from a level of policy and politics to that of humanitarianism and personal involvement. It was also considered to contribute to a subsequent higher level of burn-out of supporters. Some supporters, while recognising the necessity of the humanitarian assistance and emotional and moral support for asylum seekers, therefore themselves consciously strove to avoid a focus on, or the development of relationships of dependency with a particular individual asylum seeker or particular groups of asylum seekers. As one interviewee remarked:

> This is about politics. … You need to identify what the issue is to maintain your intense focus on your work. … If you look at the groups that formed around Tampa … they've increasingly become welfare groups. … Burn-out too … has cost thousands of people over the last twelve to eighteen months.
>
> I come from a social work background … I saw massive issues developing with boundary issues, privacy issues, confidentiality issues with the visitors to the immigration detention centres, and I didn't want to associate with that (Interviewee XR).

This was one of a number of the tensions evident within the collective action community. Another activist who noted negative consequences of such a personal focus, argued that:

> The emotional and moral pull of the relationship with the detainees, has meant that a number of people who might have been involved in the activist side of things have developed very strong and positive personal relationships with detainees. I'm not saying that that's not important, but I think people see that as their refugee activism. I know that making life more bearable for people in detention is extremely important, but it doesn't do anything to change Australian society (Interviewee WN).

Within this argument, it was necessary to do both, i. e. to have action that took its lead from the needs of the asylum seekers, but that also placed equal energy into changing long-term policy. This was necessary, this interviewee argued, in order to 'not just fix this problem for an individual who we've got a friendship with, but undermine the whole basis of the system' (Interviewee WN).

A member of a political lobby group concurred, observing that:

> There are all different levels from which people enter into the whole big issue. We're set up as a lobby group … a political group. We're not a support group, but we found our membership was dwindling a bit, because people became interested in doing that support thing. I mean I'm glad they did, because those people on bridging visas might not have had any support if it wasn't for that. But the humanitarian work is quicker. They could look after a family or an individual who came out on a bridging visa or who'd left detention, and they felt that they were doing something because they were personally involved with someone. You can see with the political policy area that it's going to take a long while. That political aspect. … I think that's a smaller group (Interviewee XB).

Thus, while the initial effect of the contact, interactions and relationships between asylum seekers and supporters were positive for the collective action, especially in terms of motivation and intensification of involvement, the effect on the maintenance of involvement in the social action was more complex. On the one hand, regardless of the state of supporters' personal well-being, as one interviewee observed, 'How could you stop?' (Interviewee WO). This was, she explained:

> About people's lives. Their lives are at stake. People say, "You're so tired. Why do you go on with it?" And I say "How could I stop?" (Interviewee WO).

At the same time, the intensity of this level of involvement, and the unlikelihood of any policy reform being attained quickly, meant that increasingly after some years, many supporters began to either suffer from the effects of 'burn-out', or to examine ways to

set boundaries to their involvement. While some had had previous experience of involvement in long-term social justice campaigns, others were new to the demands of sustained involvement. In addition, because of the size and urgency of need of the asylum seekers, as well as providing support for organisations involved in services for asylum seekers, many supporters had increasingly taken on stressful but vital roles for which they may have had little preparation or previous skills. These included tasks such as the preparation of documents for courts and refugee tribunals, and the writing of submissions to Australian government ministers and departments as well as to United Nations bodies. With the development of personal relationships with asylum seekers, the consequences of non-action or failed action were vividly present and understood by the Australian supporters, raising the stakes even higher.

Knowing the necessity of sustaining their level of their involvement especially for particular periods, for particular aspects of the issue, and for the support of particular asylum seekers or particular groups of asylum seekers and refugees, supporters sometimes gave themselves 'end-points' for their eventual cessation or diminishment of intensity of action. Such 'end-points' could be the release from immigration detention of a particular person or group of people whom they had been supporting. It could be the granting of a permanent refugee protection visa for a particular individual or particular group. It could be a change in a particular policy. It could be the closing of a particular immigration detention centre. For others, nothing less than an end to the discriminatory policies would suffice.

However, even for those committed to long-term involvement, strategies were often used to sustain that longevity, including periods of time-out, or a change of social action roles, or other strategies for maintaining commitment whilst reducing the intensity of involvement or the primary responsibility for supporting particular individual asylum seekers or groups of asylum seekers. In this regard, a number of interviewees spoke of the way in which they had moved between various roles in adjusting their levels of involvement over time. Sometimes this involved movement between advocacy and activist roles. As an interviewee who primarily self-identified as an activist, reflected:

> They'd be very few cases where you would get no cross-over. … I find it clearest to see it as a primary/secondary thing (Interviewee WJ).

Of the period in which she was the main advocate for a particular individual asylum seeker, she recalled:

> It was very intense. Almost too intense … because he had no one else. I was the main person he was relying on. I couldn't have sustained it for much longer than I did. As soon as I had set him up with the team of lawyers, I felt like I could start pulling back. By then, he'd started to develop a network of other supporters who could help to sustain him. That's what made it possible for me to feel ok about starting to pull back. Otherwise I would have kept going (Interviewee WJ).

For other interviewees with long-term involvement in the issue, sustaining one's involvement could also necessitate time-out periods. [44] For others again, because of the intensity of an involvement which had often happened unexpectedly, the fixing of an end-point to their involvement became a personal survival necessity. In this regard, the concept of 'passing the baton' (Everitt 2007:138-146), was described by one supporter. In the capital cities as numbers of supporters increased, this became more feasible. For those in more isolated regional areas with high numbers of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres, hostile local communities, and very small numbers of people supportive of the asylum seekers, the sense of that not being an available option, was evident. For those who continued past this point, the costs of involvement were often high.

The costs of involvement

While professional staff dealing with traumatised people could usually be expected to possess the resources of professional training in 'boundary setting' in interactions with clients, and the services of counselling and debriefing sessions, many of the civilian supporters who provided ongoing emotional, social, and material support for asylum seekers, for long periods of time, did not possess such personal or professional resources. The survey of Surawski et al. 2008 investigated the level of stress reported by

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[44] As a long-term legal advocate observed:

> If you're working in this area, it's because you've got a commitment to human rights and social justice. … You do get quite worn down, because it's a difficult environment to work in. It's very hostile. … Burning out! Yes. I think you do. You just need to have breaks from it occasionally. And you can come back to it, and it's ok. …But you do need to make sure you have a break. … I went away from what I was doing. It was different and it gave me that breather I needed. It was still keeping my hand in … but it was much less work (Interviewee XU).

supporters, and the way in which this compared to stress experienced during previous social justice advocacy and activism, as well as to reported stress levels by professional staff. In the research, the respondents reported higher stress levels for involvement in this issue as compared to their previous social justice involvement. The research also found higher rates of reported stress levels for them as compared with 'carers such as AIDS workers, physicians, and professionals assisting traumatised refugees in Australia' (2008:26).

The authors identify a number of factors relevant to this outcome. Supporters were either 'very close or quite close' (2008:20) to those whom they supported, as compared to the professional separation of trained professionals (2008:24). If they were volunteers or 'lay' advocates rather than professionals, as the majority of the survey respondents were, they were less likely to enjoy the provision of structured supportive services (2008:20). If they were to have ceased providing support for the asylum seekers they were assisting, there was not necessarily anyone else who could step into that gap and take up that supportive role, as exists in structured professional care, thus also contributing to the high levels of felt personal responsibility.

In comparison with professional carers working with recognised refugees, the situation of detainees and those released as refugees on temporary type visas, was less secure and this contributed to added uncertainty as to their future (2008:24). In similarity with professional carers working with AIDS clients, unsupportive societal attitudes towards those being assisted, and the fear of death or major critical incidents occurring to them, added to the stress for supporters (2008:23). All of these aspects, in addition to the low rates of survey respondents seeking instrumental support, were likely to contribute to high levels of vicarious trauma.

In accord with the findings of Surawski et al., interviewees in this thesis also reported instances of emotional and physical ill heath, and financial and career constraints as a result of involvement, as well as sometime social alienation from family, friends and colleagues. One young interviewee reflected on what he and his colleagues had seen and done. As he recalled:

> I've seen some horrific things in there. I've seen people with scars from the top of their chest to the bottom. You see people who've tried to slit their throat. All sorts of terrible things like that. … When it was all going on, hardly any of us would sleep. We'd sleep maybe four hours a night if that, and get up and keep going. This would be talking to people even until four or five in the morning. You'd have to talk people out of killing themselves on a second nightly basis. … I had someone say to me "You guys are doing the work of torture and trauma counselors. You've got no resources on how to do that". He said "Even professional people only last a year if they're lucky". He asked me "How long have you been doing this?" And I said "Three or four years". And he was like "Jesus Christ, you should be a total head case!" (Interviewee YS).

In terms of his colleagues, he observed:

> A lot of people burned out. A lot of people went a little bit odd at some point. And a lot of people are physically sick where I came from. … That's not even just with the visitors. I watched that with a lot of the guards. I watched a lot of shit happen to them as well. Not many of the good guards lasted that long. The good ones don't last. They just burn out, like the visitors. … The long-term effects are terrible. I should be in therapy. Everyone here should be in therapy. We all should, seriously. Seeing how sick, physically sick people have gotten. You just look, and go "My God!" (Interviewee YS).

A study by Debra King (1999) documented the emotional support strategies utilised by long-time 'persistent activists' (1999:28), [45] mainly in feminist and peace movement activism, where they engaged in a process of structured co-counseling (1999: 233-248). Yet, this was not the kind of structure which could be set up quickly without the resources of experienced counselors. In the survey by Surawski et al., only a quarter of respondents had sought professional assistance for their own situation (2008:25) The authors suggest a number of reasons why more did not seek professional assistance. These include the newness of such a situation to those advocates and activists who were basically 'learning on the job' (2008:25) and had not developed a repertoire of long-term self-support for sustaining involvement; the paucity of available 'instrumental support, given the fact that advocates stood outside of society on the issue of refugees' (2008:25); the constraints of their personal finances and time, given their intense commitment to the issue; and their focus on the much worse comparative situation endured by the asylum seekers they assisted.

[45] King uses the term to distinguish between sustained action as a significant part of peoples' lives, and short-term and sporadic involvement.

For those supporters who were not engaged in the issue in a professional capacity or as a member of a group or organisation large enough to provide such assistance for members, networks of solidarity and emotional support were therefore used as the most common coping strategies. However, the relatively small numbers of both supporters and available resources; and the size and urgency of the situations of the asylum seekers, meant that time and resources were often triaged in terms of the comparative needs. As the previous interviewee noted:

> The key line you'll hear from every visitor is "It's not as bad for us as it is for them". You feel guilty almost when you get upset or can't handle it. You're like "Oh, I've got to be strong because I've got to be there for them". … You'll feel guilty, pick yourself up, and keep going. … We tried to get together to help each other as much as we could, but we were like "Oh shit! This is taking up time." (Interviewee YS).

Similarly, although the majority of the respondents in Surawski's et al. study had used emotional support 'as the main coping strategy' (2008:25), as this interviewee observed:

> We'd try and help each other out … but you're not unloading. You're just passing … a lot of us visited … we'd know everything that was going on (Interviewee YS).

If supporters lived in small communities in which majority attitudes replicated the negative or hostile attitudes towards asylum seekers of the Australian population, as did this interviewee, the effect could be compounded:

> You're shunned by your own community. You're not supported by them. You're not acknowledged by them (Interviewee YS).

The benefits of involvement

Yet, despite this, the same interviewee also reported numerous benefits for his and others' involvement. As he explained:

> Once we got one person out, it was like, 'Hey, we can do this. We can get another person out!' And then, we got groups out. And now, we're getting permanent visas for people. That's the positive you get out of it. You never get a feeling like it. They've got freedom now. They've got a life, and you've helped to get it. It keeps you going (Interviewee YS).

As he describes it, benefits had included aspects for both other and for self, i.e. the well being of previously suffering asylum seekers, and the gaining for himself and his companion advocates of organisational and political skills in the campaign for reform of Australian policies. These were two aspects that were repeatedly mentioned as benefits of the collective action by other interviewees also. [46] As another observed:

> There's a reasonably thriving group of ex-detainees amongst us now. They're friends and we meet with them regularly. And every time I see them in the normalcy of their lives … if you ask any of these individuals who are now free, they'll say 'Of course you've got to keep doing what you're doing'. To me, that's the most real (Interviewee QS).

In addition, there were aspects of personal growth intertwined with the growth in personal political awareness. Many interviewees' comments were reflected in the following observation that:

> It's been life changing. It's when I started questioning about God. It was also my political awakening and the end of my naivete. It was an awakening on lots of different levels, about how we treat people who don't have a voice, who are different (Interviewee XS).

And as another interviewee struggled to express the emotion of the experience:

> It's being able to participate in … to contribute towards justice. And there are many other things. I gained friendship. It's difficult for me to talk about. It's a very emotional thing for me. It's so many things that I've gained. It's been so good for them and for me to know that there are people in this town who care about them. There's just so much that I'm struggling to put into words. And if I try to put it into words, I know I'll fall apart. It was my honour to do that. It was my duty to do that, regardless of the cost and effort (Interviewee QX).

As a consequence of the interactions and personal relationships therefore, respect, solidarity, friendship and love, as well as the aspects examined in the previous chapter,

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[46] In terms of the collective action campaign, the following comments reflect the remarks of many in noting that:

> People are more experienced and there's better networks. You've got people who are more skilled to rally forces and resources. There's more familiarity with the system and what you can do to intervene (Interviewee QD).

And that in terms of social justice campaigns generally:

> A lot of people have been empowered to become advocates not just on refugee issues but on other issues. From being an advocate on refugee issues, they've thought, "It's not actually that hard to talk to my local member. Next time I'm there, I might talk to them about reconciliation or some other issue". That's great. It makes people feel like they're engaged in social change (Interviewee QF).

i.e. of personal responsibility and commitments to social justice, functioned as factors in sustaining activism and advocacy, at the same time that they also led to emotional, physical and material depletion for many supporters.

The calculation of costs and benefits

How are such costs and benefits of taking social action calculated by individuals? The research by Surawski et al. documents, for example, the high emotional, interpersonal, and financial costs which respondents recorded. At the same time, respondents also reported 'beneficial outcomes' (2008:27) as they 'developed strengths and grew personally, found new friends, and began appreciating life and humanity to a greater degree' (2008:26). If a cost-benefit calculation had shown those costs and benefits to individual supporters before their active involvement, would that have stymied their initial steps into action? This area has been an ongoing interest for collective action theorists. Within this theoretical literature, for example, is Mancur Olson's influential thesis (1971) of collective action as 'the result of atomised cost-benefit calculation' (Melucci 1996:62) by the individuals involved in it. This has had a defining influence on the development of 'rational choice' (Zald 1992:332) collective action theories such as Resource Mobilization Theories. On the basis of such calculations, the costs of personal involvement in this particular advocacy and activism, as documented in research such as that of Surawski et al., would have to be weighed against the personal benefits experienced. In addition, the likelihood of achieving successful political and social outcomes from the collective action would also have to be factored into that choice, including factors such as the availability of political opportunities and the adequacy of material and social resources.

However, reports from interviewees in my research and other research (Reynolds 2004; Tascon 2006; Briskman et al 2008), as well as from literature from advocates and activists (Coombs 2004; Mares and Newman 2007; Everitt 2008; O'Neill 2008), suggest awareness of the inadequacy of these latter factors, and the stronger significance of motivational factors in this case. Supporters were well aware of the hugely inferior balance of power and resources held by opponents of the govermental discourse and policies, supported as the government was on this issue by the majority of the population, the majority of the media and the major parliamentary opposition party.

However, I and other authors (Reynolds 2004; Tascon 2005) have documented the strong role which emotion and conscientisation, entwined with aspects of personal and national identity and values, played in the initial step into involvement in action. It can be argued that in this case, the personal and symbolic impact for the participants, of an issue which had developed from a decade of the policies of their own government, and became actualised for them in the suffering of the asylum seekers, was an overriding factor in that first step into involvement and action.

DISCUSSION

Going significantly further than even attributing symbolic, ethical and communitarian values as part of a cost-benefit calculation process, theorists such as Melucci point to the phenomenon of collective identity as the 'condition for any cost-benefit calculation' (Melucci 1996:63) of participation in collective action. Melucci argues that the analysis of researchers such as Alessandro Pizzorno (1993), illustrate that it is only from within the space of such an identity once it has been constructed, that such calculations are made. The subsequent choices that the self makes within such a construction, he argues, are made 'to a significant extent with reference to a definition of a self, which, both intuitive and affective, is charged with emotion and meaning and directs the orientation of action' (1996:66).

In this case, such an identity was developed first of all in the subjective perceptions and intersubjective experiences of individual Australians with asylum seekers and with other supportive Australians. Emotion, motivation and conscientisation came to fruition for supporters not only subjectively through perception and reflection influenced by the factors which I examined in the previous chapter, but also intersubjectively. This latter phenomenon occurred in the process of recognising an 'other' in distress and the role of self in relation to that occasioned distress. Further, this experience was facilitated for supporters by the initial actions of the asylum seekers, and deepened by the response of the asylum seekers to the contact made by Australian supporters. These aspects suggest that it has been in the process of a recognition of a common humanity between 'self and other' from the perspective of both of these groups, that the action I am exploring came into being.

However, Olson's critique has raised questions for collective action theory which must be addressed in terms of how collective action experiences are formed and maintained. In this regard, these aspects cannot be taken as a given. In the construction of a collective identity, for example, Melucci notes that, 'the process by which a collective identity is constructed, maintained and adapted always has two sides to it: on the one hand, the inner complexity of an actor, its plurality of orientations; on the other, the actor's relationship with the environment (other actors, opportunities/constraints)' (1996:67). These are all aspects which must be explored and evidenced.

For many supporters of asylum seekers, a collective experience and identity developed which became forged around the primacy of the needs of the asylum seekers. This development was affected not only by the interactions of the two groups, but also by the social and political environment within which these interactions occurred. Theorists such as McDonald have noted the way in the 'grammars of action' (2006:vi) of social movements have changed in past decades. In the collective action in support of asylum seekers and in opposition to their treatment by Australian governments, the interactions and relationships between supporters and asylum seekers became pivotal points around which the collective action occurred. At the same time, as documented in this chapter, and as examined in more detail in the following chapters, many tensions were apparent around the degree of primacy and intensity that this aspect held for collective action participants.

CONCLUSION

This chapter and the preceding chapter have explored the narratives of the interviewees and other participants in the collective action in regard to the inner complexity of motivation to action. A plurality of orientations have been found to have contributed, including aspects of subjectivity and intersubjectivity which have been primary influences for participants in both their movement into action, and their continuance of that involvement. These same aspects contributed to both an intensity of personal engagement, and to a style of advocacy and activism which became grounded in the needs of the asylum seekers. This in turn began to produce particular kinds of advocacy and activism related to those needs, and to begin to shape the distinctive nature of the collective action. At the same time, tensions were evident between the more

humanitarian and personal orientations towards action, and action orientations which were more explicitly focused on political and systemic aspects.

As indicated by Melucci's argument, these factors of internal plurality and divergence provide an important, but not complete picture of the construction of collective experience and collective identity for the participants. The other important aspects concern the reality of the social, political and material environment which they faced in their attempts to support the asylum seekers and bring change to the discriminatory policies affecting them. These aspects also shaped the nature of the collective action, impacting upon the experiences, decisions and strategies of the participants. The following chapters therefore explore the fluid and ultimately unpredictable process for any collective action entity, of the construction, maintenance and adaptation of collective identity and experience within an external environment of constraints and opportunities, as well as an internal environment of flux. The next chapter engages with this task primarily through the medium of examining the specificity of advocacy and activist work performed by collective action participants.

Chapter 7:
Actions Speak!

INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters examined individual motivations for taking action and for sustaining that action. This chapter, and the following two chapters, are linked in that they explore the practical development of the collective action, and the construction of a collective experience, discourse and identity in course of that development. Together, they provide ethnographic documentation and analysis of the shape and form of a collective that was distinguished by much diversity, and yet was grounded in connections with asylum seekers.

Here, action itself is the subject of study. In ethnographic research, the actions of research participants are perceived to communicate as much as, or sometimes more, than the discourse of participants. This chapter examines the diversity of actions that constituted the collective action, and examines points of cohesion and overlap as well as points of divergence and tension. In doing so, it illuminates much about the social actors themselves. Although the primary focus of the research is the social action of the supporters of asylum seekers, the chapter also importantly illustrates the agency of the asylum seekers, and the way in which the actions of the two groups facilitated each other, to achieve something more than the sum of the two.

THE NATURE OF THE ACTION

The title of the chapter is borrowed from the book of the same name by Eileen Baldry and Tony Vinson. In their introduction to the 1991 publication, the authors note that in addition to internal and external structural aspects which affect social action outcomes, there are the 'distinctly human attributes' (1991:16) to be found in social action, which also contribute to the success or failure of campaigns. They suggest that the 'best way of gaining an appreciation of the importance of these human factors' (1991:16) is from the narratives of those who participate in such actions. While this thesis does not present the complete narratives of all of the interviewees who have contributed to the thesis, the

segments that have been selected facilitate an understanding of what was at stake in their actions.

The chapter explores action as the embodied expression of emotion, meaning and intentionality. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a desire to alleviate the suffering of asylum seekers negatively affected by Australian policies, and a desire to bring change to these policies, were frequently expressed by interviewees. As also documented in the previous chapters, many layers of significance were described by interviewees as being encapsulated within their actions, one of which concerned empathy and compassion for asylum seekers negatively affected by Australian policy, and others which involved systemic concerns for issues of justice and fairness. [47]

Critics of advocates often especially targeted actions performed on the basis of empathy and compassion as though those associated emotions reduced the credibility of the actions. However, what these criticisms misunderstood and underestimated was the way in which the authenticity of the emotional experiences of outrage and empathy and the realities in which they were grounded, provided a depth to the action which went beyond mere posturing, and which could not easily be deterred by derogatory discourse and labelling. As one advocate retorted:

> One of the things that people involved in the movement often get called is 'Bleeding Hearts'. My response to that is this. "Maybe at one level I am a 'Bleeding Heart'. If so, I'm proud of it, not ashamed!" (Interviewee QS).

Arising from this position of emotional authenticity, not only discourse but actions would, as the title of the chapter suggests, speak themselves of the social values embodied and the societal outcomes desired. In addition, social action produces not only quantifiable actions, but also impact and signification. All of this has its own self-reinforcing effects on strategies of action, on the intention attached to short and long-term goals, and ultimately on the nature of the action itself. It is not surprising then that

[47] Boltanski describes two different responses to the suffering of 'others'. One response involves the expression of sentiment at 'the level of the heart' (1999:81) which he describes as 'tender-heartedness' (1999:79). This is marked by an 'intensity of concern' (1999:80), and an 'urgency … to leap to the aid' (1999:80) of those suffering. The other involves a response of indignation which leads to anger and denunciation focussed on 'a persecutor' (1999:57). While both of these responses are evident among supporters of asylum seekers, they are not so clearly separated as in Boltanski's theory. Rather, they were often held simultaneously, but with one or other being a primary expression.

in such an environment, the focus of the action would affect the form of the action, and would produce a range of endeavours which would sometimes depart from standard collective action repertoires.

Though multi-layered and often conflictual in terms of strategies, resources and sites of action, the social action on this issue was still an occasion in which both traditional activism and advocacy could coalesce around a common focus on the well-being of a particular group of people. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized the central place of the asylum seekers not only in the motivation and inspiration for their actions, but also in the intentional focus of their actions and in the constraints which this sometimes imposed. These understandings coalesced around the immediacy of what was at stake for asylum seekers in this issue. As one advocate explained, 'It's about people's lives' (Interviewee WO).

PLURALITY AND CONFLICT

Although conflicts over strategy would frequently occur within the spectrum of activism and advocacy on the issue, the strength of that focus remained. A plurality of perspectives existed in the collective action endeavour. These perspectives, and the accompanying specific societal locations, histories, resources, skills, and experience of the social actors, in turn affected the strategic approaches prioritised within different parts of the collective. Within this plurality, conflicts would occur over the relative benefits of more radical or more conservative strategies of action. They would also occur over more specific, limited and achievable foci of action versus 'big picture' perspectives which raised underlying issues in Australian society such as racism, or articulated the situation within broader related global issues.

They would illuminate more personally oriented styles of support for individual asylum seekers versus more traditionally oriented political work in protest action and in policy development; more centralised and directed action versus the fairly autonomous nature of many of the multiple newly formed groups; and the related status of knowledge of long-term professional advocates and activists versus the passions and energies of the more newly arrived supporters. Tensions were also evident over strategies of publicity

and visibility for individual asylum seekers in terms of whether this produced relative advantage or disadvantage for the particular asylum seekers.

Many of these aspects remained areas of ongoing tension within the collective action, not only differently regarded within the spectrum of advocates and activists, but also within the spectrum of asylum seekers, who within themselves, also encompassed a range of personal perspectives. However, a centrality of focus by supporters on the well-being of the asylum seekers formed the cement of the social action. Where that focus was apparent to other supporters, combined actions could occur which could cross the various divides of sectors, orientations, expectations and strategies. Where it was not apparent, campaigns became more limited in scope.

The centrality of this focus on the well being of the asylum seekers became represented in the visible forms of action. Examples included actions which emphasised humanitarian assistance such as supporting asylum seekers emotionally and socially; assisting them in practical ways with health, legal and welfare assistance, housing and finance; and advocating for them in submissions to the Department of Immigration and to government and parliamentary representatives. It also included actions which more explicitly addressed the political and systemic abuses affecting asylum seekers. Such actions involved the gathering and exposure of evidence of the human and material costs of Australian policies affecting asylum seekers; the provision of that information to the Australian public and to other national and international arenas; and awareness raising of humanitarian and human rights abuses occurring within these policies. Combining both of these foci were actions such as assisting asylum seekers to leave immigration detention by providing community post-detention support; attempting to prevent asylum seekers from being refouled [48] by Australian governments: attempting to bring change to public attitudes towards asylum seekers; and attempting to bring change to the relevant policies.

While I have separated these tasks into different sections in order to differentiate them, in reality much cross-over and complementarity existed in participants' involvement in these various diverse advocacy and activist tasks. Also, the achievement of many of

[48] Refoulment is the expulsion from a country of people who have the right to be recognised as refugees.

these tasks was dependent on the achievement of the related tasks. Bringing change to government policies was closely linked to bringing change to public attitudes. Raising public awareness of the humanitarian and human rights abuses occurring with these policies, was dependant on providing the public with that information. This in turn depended on the gathering of evidence and the exposure of government and media mis-information. Doing this, depended on making productive contact with asylum seekers detained in immigration detention centres or living in the community post-release, as well as with employees working in these locations or in relevant government departments. With government policies of censorship in place in many of these locations, this was a daunting task.

Therefore, what is primarily explored in this chapter is the way in which despite geographical and bureaucratic obstacles and cultural differences, the actions of asylum seekers and their supporters worked to break the silence imposed by the enforced separation of the asylum seekers from Australian society, and to counter mis-information that this separation allowed in official and popular discourse. Simultaneously, the provision of practical, moral and emotional support functioned to assist the survival of the asylum seekers, and to facilitate their own continued advocacy and activism for fellow detainees. None of these tasks could be ignored. All were part of the body of work that was required.

ACTION TO DISRUPT THE SILENCE OF CENSORSHIP AND SEPARATION

Protests by asylum seekers

The story of the making of contact between the asylum seekers and their supporters has its origins in the actions of both. From the remoteness and isolation of Australian immigration detention centres, asylum seekers made desperate attempts to inform the Australian public of their situation. Having arrived in a country which they had usually believed to be a role model of Western democracy, their treatment in the immigration detention centres often appeared to them as an aberration. There was thus a perception certainly amongst part of the detained asylum seeker population, that if only the Australian people were aware of their situation, it would not be tolerated. In addition, some of those who sought asylum in Australia had already been involved in their own

countries as human rights activists, and were aware of the anomaly which their treatment represented in a country which was a signatory to the Refugees Convention. These asylum seekers especially, made efforts to contact and inform the Australian public. A previous detainee explained that:

> When I ended up in an immigration detention centre in 1999, I realised that a facility like that shouldn't be present in Australia. I'd been a journalist beforehand, and being a journalist and a foreign correspondent, I became really appalled, and I started speaking out on the issue of immigration detention centres. … Eventually, I found that Australian people might not support this inhumane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia (Interviewee YI).

Isolated in often geographically remote parts of the Australian continent, asylum seekers in immigration detention centres strove to find ways to communicate the reality of their situation and suffering to the Australian media and public. The misinformation and stigmatising rhetoric which accompanied government pronouncements on the issue, and were often reflected in the media, made this a difficult if not seemingly impossible task. Contributing to this difficulty were the detention centre management and censorship constraints which accompanied the Australian policies and practices.

When efforts to inform the Australian public through Australian media seemed unsuccessful, asylum seekers looked to other sources and methods. From incidents such as the 'break-out' from the remote Woomera IDC, which resulted in a protest walk into the little desert township of Woomera, over time the efforts of detainees to protest their situation and communicate it to the outside world, began to involve increasing self harm, including attempted suicide and suicide (Mares 2002; HREOC 2004). Those Australians opposing the policies watched as the situation worsened. Sometimes, media attention had to come from international media in order for it to penetrate the representation of the issue by Australian government and media. An interviewee who was previously in detention, explained the relief that he felt when this finally began to occur:

> I realised there was some extreme movement fuelled by the government to try to counteract and deactivate whatever we did in the media. So, I was looking for a breakthrough to the international media. There were some international ones. … The American reporter, when he came, was here for two days, and he wanted to meet other detainees. He also saw families. He published in December 2001 or January 2002. It was the front page of the *LA Times*. I was so glad to see that

> journalist's report. It was someone in the western world who had this kind of reason and logic and sense of compassion that we longed for. That was a turning point (Interviewee YH).

Protests by supporters

Public protests by supporters of asylum seekers were another way of raising awareness of the situation. As an activist involved in many of these protests, recalled:

> We were the people with the placards and protests and media releases saying "This is wrong. This has to change" (Interviewee QA).

When these protests took place outside immigration detention centres, especially those in remote desert locations, they became increasingly covered by national and international media. The dramatic physical environment of the locations, the isolated nature of the detention centres, the emotion and actions of protestors and detainees, the raising of humanitarian and human rights issues, and the potential for dramatic interactions between protestors, detainees, detention staff and police, combined to create media events with wide attraction. Though such protests outside immigration detention centres were to be an ongoing source of tension within the collective action entity, even those opposed to them often acknowledged their role in raising awareness of the issue and of the conditions inside the centres. [49]

Journalist Peter Mares observes that the detention centres were 'pushed onto the news agenda by the force of events' (2002:3), including protests by asylum seekers, and these and other public protests by supporters. Following an initial protest outside Woomera IDC in September 2001, these were to become annual Easter events attracting much media coverage, firstly at the Woomera IDC, and then when that was closed, at the Baxter IDC. [50] Protestors would travel for many hours and days from different parts of

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[49] As one interviewee opposed to the protests, conceded:

> The early Woomera protests were important in that they helped to put the issue of our treatment of asylum seekers on the public radar. So I'd certainly acknowledge that (Interviewee XH).

[50] An interviewee recalled media coverage at the latter:

> The media became interested every Easter, when a group of people would come from the eastern states, and go to Baxter and hold a demonstration there. And that set the agenda for the media coverage, because it was a police versus protesters scenario, which the media loves. It's easy to cover, lots of action, lots of violence. And there were some stories getting into the press about the conditions that some of these people were being kept in (Interviewee XF).

the country in order to show solidarity with the plight of detained asylum seekers. The timing of the events in the holiday season of Easter allowed for the many thousands of kilometres that need to be traversed in order for this to occur as a national convergence. One interviewee remembered the September 2001 protest at Woomera IDC as consisting of about 300 people (Interviewee WI). In following years, that number rose, with an estimated attendance of 1000 at the 2002 Woomera protest (Royal 2002). An account by BBC news, illustrates the wide coverage that these events attained. Of the 2002 protest outside Woomera IDC for example, BBC journalist Phil Mercer reported that:

> The county's biggest detention centre at Woomera was stormed by demonstrators who tore down large sections of the perimeter fence. With the camp's outer skin breached, 50 detainees escaped. … More than two days on, 10 of the escapees remain on the run … another extraordinary chapter in the centre's history (Mercer 2002).

ABC journalist Simon Royal writing of the same event, reported protestors marching at Woomera 'with a message of hope' (Royal 2002). Commenting on the diversity of social actors (which would characterise collective action on this issue), he noted that there were:

> Two, quite separate, protests - one armed with toys *(for children in detention)*, the other bent on confrontation (Royal 2002. My insertion in italics)

Royal described the breaking through of an outer perimeter fence, and then with the assistance of detainees inside the detention centre, of an inner security fence through which 50 detainees escaped. He noted that according to police, this was a planned incident, while according to protestors, an unexpected and spontaneous one. Reporting on the police view, he records the comment that:

> The websites for Woomera 2002 … quite clearly state that their intention was to free detainees. And that people were encouraged to bring bolt cutters … and throw those … into the compound (in Royal 2002).

Reporting on the view of protestors, he records their perspective that:

> All we planned to do was try to walk into the so-called prohibited area in an attempt to get as close to the detainees as possible. None of us expected that what

> happened … would happen. I don't think any of us for a minute thought that we would be face to face with them (in Royal 2002).

Royal observes that almost 30 arrests were made, with protestors being charged with 'harbouring detainees' (2002), a crime which if proved, could have carried a possible four year jail term. However, as one of those arrested, stated:

> Me being arrested and other people that have been arrested … the good thing that has come out of this is it's highlighted there is so much incredible support for this issue all around the country' (in Royal 2002).

Certainly, the protestors outside the detention centres as well as the protesting asylum seekers inside the detention centres, had achieved and continued to achieve high coverage of an issue for which, a few years prior, recognition had been difficult to obtain. However, for supporters, this gain always had to be balanced by any losses that could also ensue for asylum seekers from protest action. Following the 2002 protest for example, the well being of those asylum seekers who escaped from the Woomera IDC was a particular concern, both for their immediate physical well being, and for the future of their asylum claims (O'Neill 2008:100-118). In addition, a 2004 HREOC report on children in detention, noted the internal protests which accompanied the 2002 Woomera event. All of this could have deleterious effects on those within, especially on children held in these centres, who witnessed acts of violence on asylum seekers by detention centre management, as well as acts of self harm by asylum seekers themselves. Anxiety about the effect on those within the detention centres who may not have wanted to be involved in protest action, was a concern for a number of interviewees. As one explained:

> When you're speaking to detainees before the Easter, and they're saying, "Please tell people not to come. They're locking the doors tomorrow". It's really hard to say, "Yep. Go out there and do this" (Interviewee XH).

However, as is evident in the multiple recorded incidents of protests, riots, hunger strikes, and self harm that occurred in all of the detention centres (Mares 2002; HREOC 2004), though these incidents occurred in conjunction with external protests, they had also occurred and continued to occur in an ongoing capacity, regardless of external protests. In describing the detention regime which existed for asylum seekers, a State Inspector of Custodial Services, Professor Richard Harding, concluded that:

> It is no coincidence that riots occur in a system that lacks accountability. We do not have riots in our detention centres because we have a riotous group of refugees: we have them because we run appalling systems (Harding 2001).

One of the protestors later arrested outside Baxter IDC in a 2005 incident in which he and companions pulled down part of the detention centre fence, wrote a letter of explanation. In it he quoted a paraphrasing of the work of Daniel Berrigan, North American poet, Catholic priest and anti-Vietnam war and anti-nuclear activist:

> Apologies, good friends, for the fracture of good order, the destruction of fences instead of lives (Berrigan quoted in Newall 2005).

This quote illustrates the dilemma often faced by opponents of Australian policies such as that of mandatory detention. How best to raise awareness of the injustice of the policy and the suffering of those affected by it, in an environment of national political bipartisanship and overwhelming public support for the policies? To what extent did policies which arguably breached international conventions on human rights, and which had led to what could be considered to be a humanitarian crisis in terms of levels of physical and mental illness of asylum seekers, sanction civil disobedience? And to what extent would such actions, if they occurred, convince or alienate the Australian public, with whom any policy reform would ultimately reside?

For those opposed to the protests, tensions generated by these events hinged around two main factors. As already mentioned, one was centred around the well being of detainees who could be negatively effected by the protests at immigration detention centres, either in terms of additional management constraints or in terms of negative consequences for those who became involved in the protests. The other factor was the perception that negative rather than positive publicity was generated on the issue because of the violence of clashes between protestors and police. Echoing the views of many who opposed the protests, another interviewee argued that:

> Certainly the majority of the media coverage was, I think, very negative about the sort of people who were supporting asylum seekers and opposing the government's actions, So on the whole, I think they were more negative than positive. And we could get more positive media coverage in different ways (Interviewee XH).

In contrast, for supporters of the protests, they were considered to be an important vehicle for obtaining increased awareness of the asylum seekers' situation from both national and international media, and consequently from the Australian public. They were also considered to be significant in terms of sustaining the morale of those detained by demonstrating that they were being heard by such numbers of concerned Australians. As an interviewee explained of the latter objective:

> The activism has really been very important for the welfare of the detainees. I often think, of all the things we did, that if the only thing we ever did was to improve the morale of detainees that someone cares, someone's trying, then that was worth doing. Human beings are very vulnerable like this. If you keep treating someone in a certain way, eventually they believe that they must deserve to be treated that way. So if you keep someone locked up, eventually they start to think, "I must have done something wrong". And this activism has ameliorated that problem. There's some other person on the outside saying, "No. It's not you. It's not your fault. It's those bastards who are doing it to you. And we're complaining about it". And really validate their experiences. That was very important, I think (Interviewee XQ).

ADVOCACY ACTION AT GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Lobbying

At the other end of a collective action spectrum of radical public action versus less visible 'behind the scenes' persuasive actions, were ongoing multiple efforts at bringing change to the policies by political lobbying at state and federal levels. A number of the established refugee, welfare, religious and human rights organisations had a prior history of involvement in ongoing discussion on asylum seeker and refugee issues with the Minister and Department of Immigration. Previously, these organisations had functioned in a role of providing expert advice in that field. However, as the issue of asylum seeker policies became more politicised and polarised, the usual avenues for political lobbying became more circumscribed and less accessible. This reached a stage where:

> The government became so closed to any suggestions. Even if you got a meeting with the Minister at that stage, you knew you weren't going to progress the issue (Interviewee QH).

While these established NGOs had previously played influential reform roles in lobbying government, during this period their influence waned and their role diminished

in efficacy. [51] Despite this environment of political stalemate, attempts at lobbying still continued. However, as an interviewee explained, a pragmatic perspective increasingly informed many of these approaches:

> You wouldn't get any legislation change. You wouldn't get any major policy change. But you might get some tinkering at the edges of different policies. There was a recognition that the hard-line, banging your head against the wall, didn't work, and that we needed to work more interactively with government … tweaking other bits of legislation to make it easier to introduce new models. In terms of legislation for example, when we've been able to get wind of it, I think we've been able to stop even harsher legislation coming through. We recognised that we weren't going to get any movement on mandatory detention, but that we might get movement on certain people and certain cases. So there was that room for movement (Interviewee QH).

In these endeavours, advocates, especially those involved in established refugee advocacy, religious and human rights organisations, continued to strive to communicate with government ministers and departments and with parliamentarians from all political parties, in efforts to influence and improve the situation of asylum seekers. In addition to these long established organisations, newly formed organisations also devoted resources to this work, as did small groups and individuals. From the perspective of short and long-term change to the policies and practices, it was realised that not only did the general public need to be educated on the issue, but so did many parliamentary representatives. The evidence gathered by advocates and activists from multiple sources provided a sound basis for this 'education', and multiple varied and innovative approaches to this process were developed. Change could come from a shift in public opinion. It could also come from a shift in the actions of individual parliamentarians.

Collective action resources were therefore often devoted to lobbying and 'educating' parliamentary, bureaucratic and ministerial representatives, and to providing numerous submissions and reports for government inquiries, ministerial consultations, for meetings with parliamentarians, and for other forums. In these documents and

[51] As the previous interviewee observed:

> The way advocacy was done before that was quite different. It was very focused on the Minister. Now, the grass-roots campaign has taken off from an upsurge in public and media interest. But the older groups were very careful about what was presented to the media, and tended to go to the Minister more than the media. Most of the advocacy being done then by those organisations wasn't media directed, so much as directed at lobbying government, but the government by that stage, was unwilling to listen. It was becoming more of a political issue all the time (Interviewee QH).

interactions, advocates provided information, analysis and recommendations for change. At the same time, those organisations which were established in more 'insider' positions with government and parliamentarians in various political parties, engaged in a process of 'behind the scenes' lobbying, which one interviewee succinctly described as 'quiet lobbying':

> Quiet lobbying - it's about recognising that there are buttons to be pushed. … Change will happen incrementally. And it will happen without fanfare. To me, one of the challenges is trying to convince people in government that reform is politically expedient, morally essential, sound in a public policy sense - a conservative, sensible response to an ongoing problem as opposed to radical reform, because I think that's the audience we have to play to. A new government can come and unwind the policies of the old, but an existing government isn't going to implement radical change (Interviewee QT).

For many other supporters of asylum seekers, this strategy was perceived to be *too quiet*, and did not adequately confront and challenge the government publicly over its policies and practices. In contrast, for these established welfare and advocacy organisations, being effective in their endeavour to assist asylum seekers meant specifically developing a collegial rather than oppositional relationship with government, so as to keep open those channels of communication. As an interviewee working in this area explained:

> There were a few groups who took a similar direction to us, in terms of trying to continue engagement with the department and the minister, to keep the conversation going. Others chose to take a different tack in terms of media and campaigning (Interviewee QO).

Another interviewee again, echoed the difference between this approach and a more public oppositional one:

> The point of it is, we're not getting up and attacking the Government, even though what we're saying is a criticism. What we're doing is attacking a particular policy with particular effects. We're taking about the effects. … I guess the approach is more along the lines of saying, "Look, what we are doing is not working" instead of, "What you are doing is not working". I think that's the difference in the approach. Other organisations have adopted much more adversarial approaches, whereas this is more a position of, "Let's work together to fix this up. Let's work together to get better at this". It's a much more collegial approach (Interviewee WU).

In this regard, there was also often a deliberate adoption by established organisations involved with asylum and refugee issues, of a reformist rather than radical agenda for change. An interviewee observed that in adopting this strategy:

> We recognised that lecturing MPs about human rights was going to have little or no sway. We needed to be informed by human rights, but to pitch our arguments around common sense. We wanted to promote alternatives, and in that we were unashamedly reformist (Interviewee QP).

A number of these organisations therefore focused on developing policies and practices which pioneered alternative detention models, whilst at the same time avoiding direct opposition to the government's 'border protection' philosophies. The role modelling of these alternative detention models provided a different kind of counter-voice, one more likely to be accorded recognition and adopted by the government, because of the less confronting manner of the advocacy approach and the more incremental nature of the recommendations. As one of the above interviewees recounted:

> The biggest change has been on getting a change of dialogue within the Department of Immigration. Rather than attacking, you try to discuss and raise awareness. Through that, we've been able to put forward a lot of information about better ways of working with asylum seekers. We've been able to keep the discussion going. It did create more options - huge improvements in the treatment of vulnerable cases (Interviewee QO).

As these interviewees argued, the value of this kind of 'collegial' and less visible action lay in its reception rather than dismissal by government, and in the subsequent more possible implementation of its recommendations for more humane interventions, especially in the case of particularly vulnerable individual asylum seekers.

What is apparent in both these lobbying actions and in the previously described very different social action of public protest, is the environment of urgency around asylum seekers' needs which opponents of the policies perceived and worked within. Also apparent is their awareness of the unequal nature of the contest in which they were engaged, in terms of the resources and legitimacy held by the state. In an environment in which the issue had been politicised nationally to a remarkable degree, the 'brick wall' of resistance which had met the usual pathways of expressing citizen concern, often led to pragmatic strategies aimed at smaller, more incremental but potentially

possible reforms than were otherwise desired. However, it also produced a necessity for more imaginative and 'thinking outside of the ball park' strategies.

The actions viewed so far correspond with what would often be predicted in terms of collective action, i.e. radical protest action at one end of a radical-conservative spectrum of activity, and quieter 'behind the scenes' lobbying for incremental reform at the other end of the spectrum. What was unexpected within the particularity of this social action, was the way in which the actions of many supporters would function in a different way. This was so firstly in regard to a criss-crossing of that spectrum of radical-conservative activity; secondly, in terms of the extent of personal connections, relationships and joint actions which developed between asylum seekers and supporters; and thirdly, in terms of the speedily assembled and pragmatic nature of much of the social action in response to the urgency of the situation of the asylum seekers.

OPENING WIDER COMMUNICATION

The efforts of concerned Australians to make contact with asylum seekers within the detention centres, were successful in some places earlier than in others. Obstacles to communication included geographical distance, the need to already possess contact details for detainees, and detention centre management constraints on communication. All of these aspects had to be overcome as a first step. The following narrative by an activist illustrates some of the combined efforts by asylum seekers and supporters that were sometimes necessary to achieve that communication even in one of Australia's capital cities:

> We went out to the detention centre and marched around and around. At that time, it was almost impossible to get in touch with detainees. There were all sorts of bureaucratic obstacles. You had to know their name. They had to know your name. You had to be on their list of authorised callers. You just couldn't get in. And so people marched around and around. Then someone on the inside smashed the window, and people were yelling out their numbers and names back and forth through the smashed window. … People wrote their names on T-shirts and hung them out the window, and things like that. And that's how we managed to make contact and start visiting (Interviewee XQ).

For detention centres in more remote geographical areas, the making of contact also involved extremely long journeys for activists and advocates, and experiences outside of

their previous comprehension of what could happen in their country. One young woman recalled:

> Port Hedland … I don't think it's possible to grasp it without actually being there … the experience of being at the fence, and having people call out, "We are not animals!" (Interviewee WI).

When some Australians were successful in making contact with asylum seekers in some of the detention centres, the foundations of what would become the joint efforts by asylum seekers and supporters to inform and educate the Australian public, were put in place. Asylum seekers who had been active as advocates and activists within the detention centre, found kindred spirits in their visitors. A former detainee explained his own actions in this regard:

> I took my role in association with the few visitors, those who used to go to Villawood detention centre, to inform and educate the Australian people about the inhumane condition of the detention centre (Interviewee YI).

Asylum seekers and their supporters drew energy and confirmation from each other. For supporters, new energy came from the agency of those suffering under the policies. For those detained, the confirmation by supportive Australian citizens that their cause was a just one, gave hope for wider communication with the Australian populace. It also led, through the knowledge which supporters possessed of the world outside of the immigration detention centres, to the gaining of more understanding for asylum seekers of Australian society and politics. As supporters gained knowledge of what was happening inside the detention centres, they came to share with asylum seekers, the task of 'making known' what was happening. In a period when there was little contact between detainees and the Australian population, actions such as the 'Freedom Bus', which made two trips around Australia with advocates and activists visiting immigration detention centres and then relaying information to Australian communities, were instrumental in making that information known more widely. [52] One of the activists in this campaign to support asylum seekers, described the beginnings of the action:

[52] This kind of action in itself is a collective action repertoire which has a long history in raising awareness of discrimination and suffering.

> We did the first protest at Woomera. 300 people from Melbourne and Sydney mainly, and some from other states came and protested at Woomera detention centre. And we got a call at the SRC from someone I knew in Port Hedland IDC. And he said, "Hey, it's beautiful that you're protesting at Woomera. We feel so great about that. But when are you coming to protest here?" And we had a bit of a discussion in our campus group about what we could do. And I bought a bus, and said, "Maybe we can go on a bus trip around to all the detention centres" … to try to visit people in all the detention centres, and also to actually just break down that isolation which we thought was a really significant part of that policy (Interviewee WI).

She noted the route of their visits from Villawood IDC in Sydney, to Marybrynong IDC in Melbourne, and then to the remote desert location of the Woomera IDC and to other isolated immigration detention centres such as those at Curtin and Port Hedland. It was particularly at the remote detention centres, that the horror of the situation and the desperation of detainees isolated from contact with the outside world, became most apparent. In describing what she and other supporters saw and heard there, and how the task of spreading that knowledge was passed on to them by those asylum seekers, the impact of those encounters become palpable. As she recounted:

> The day we left Woomera, the people inside sewed their lips together, and were calling us on the phone going "You must tell the people of Australia that this is going on. And help us!"
>
> And then Port Hedland … just seeing that – heaps of kids at the fence going, "Give us freedom!"
>
> And then Curtin, which was just so scary, so isolated, so completely out of anyone's control. I've never seen anybody in a more desperate situation. … I met a guy who had gone on hunger strike and had gone blind, and I met a guy who had been in detention for so long he had tried to kill himself. He just explained it all to me … and said, "You have to tell people!" (Interviewee WI).

The profound effect on these supporters of the witnessing of the isolation and desperation of asylum seekers in the Australian immigration detention centres, was one which was to be repeated again and again in activist and advocacy accounts of the period (Mares and Newman 2007; Briskman et al. 2008). As the above interviewee explained, the effect of the isolation plus the management restrictions on communication with the outside world, exacerbated the already stressful situation of detention for those seeking asylum:

> There is nobody to call on. There is no contact with the outside world, except at the discretion of the people who are beating you. And they can cut off your contact at any time (Interviewee WI).

From actions such as these Freedom Bus rides, came knowledge and resources which could be shared with other Australians. In addition, contact details were now available for asylum seekers in detention centres, particularly in the most remote centres where there were few visitors. Not only then did these supporters visit immigration detention centres around Australia and gain information. They also shared that information with other Australians through numerous public information forums as they travelled across the country. These actions facilitated the networking of already engaged supporters across the country. They also facilitated the emergence and growth of new groups. As the same interviewee, reflecting on the result of the Freedom Bus actions, remembered:

> The biggest things that came out of it were meeting people and networking. Getting people together in their communities about it. And informing people – like spreading information. And resources like the video footage. That was used on national media and by a whole bunch of people in campaigning, and that was a real catalyst for a lot of people's involvement (Interviewee WI).

As she noted, all of this was instrumental in activating more Australians to be involved:

> It was quite a difficult time because there wasn't a social movement around to support people's access. There weren't really any groups that were doing stuff outside of cities, except for the few that started up the north coast. We did a lot of organising public meetings. I spoke about Port Hedland, and a lot of people came up and said, "Look! I'd heard vaguely about this, but this has shifted me from the point of knowing about it to the point of having to do something. What can I do?" (Interviewee WI).

Letter writing

One of the actions that followed from this period was one which was to have a defining influence on the future of relationships between asylum seekers and Australians. This was the campaign of letter writing from sympathetic Australians to asylum seekers in immigration detention centres. This campaign came into existence once sufficient contact details had been obtained for asylum seekers in detention centres. Significantly, it created a means by which Australians living in areas not geographically close to an immigration detention centre, could provide solidarity and support for detainees.

At this time, the treatment of detainees by the Australian government meant that they could have easily concluded that there was little to no significant opposition within the Australian populace to these policies and regimes. But if this perception existed, it would have shifted significantly with the opening up, through this campaign, of communication with a much wider population of Australians. In putting individual Australians in contact and communication with individual asylum seekers, this campaign enabled a human to human interaction at a personal level, despite geographical, political and cultural obstacles. The encounter had profound consequences for the development of connections and long-term relationships between asylum seekers and supportive Australians. For those detained, it provided hope and sustenance. In addition, from the communication begun in the letters, flowed other actions of support. As an interviewee explained, the campaign opened up new possibilities for activism and advocacy. Indeed, she argued:

> I think that was like a transformative point of the campaign as well, because it was the mass opening up of contact. And it meant that more people around Australia had that personal contact (Interviewee WI).

The letter writing campaigns brought the reality of the detainees' situation to a much larger number of Australians. Unexpectedly for those concerned, it also brought a depth of connection for those Australians with the people in detention with whom they communicated. While these Australians may have originally written to an unknown detainee from a sense of empathy, shame, guilt, anger, and concern for human rights as mentioned in the previous chapter, the responses they received often quickly altered the relationship to one which was also one of personal connection. That human to human response then often developed into connections which became the cornerstone of support and sustenance for detainees, in lieu of the family and friendship networks which they lacked in a new country.

Letters which have been published from detainees in immigration detention centres, including letters from children as well as adults, provide a window into a world of despair, so deep that the writers fear they are 'losing their minds' (Amor and Austin 2003:X1). The isolation, the lack of communication facilities and opportunities, and the uncertainty and fear about their future, are all evident in the letters. Also evident is the significance for them of the communications with their Australian supporters. Not only

was there now clear evidence for them that not all Australians supported the policies that impacted upon them, but it was apparent that these people were also fighting to bring change to those policies. In addition, there were now individual Australians who maintained regular correspondence with those who were detained, and who gave emotional as well as moral support. In one of the letters, a young man detained for some time, wrote:

> When I got your letter I felt too happy. I have been here about 10 months. But never anyone asked about me before (in Amor and Austin 2003:155).

For an interviewee who began her involvement in this way by writing letters to asylum seekers in detention, this kind of response to the breaching of isolation was only too common. As she explained:

> To have suffered as they have and to have no one! One of the young men said that to us. He said, 'I can't bear the thought that I die without somebody knowing that I lived' (Interviewee QK).

Visiting immigration detention centres

For asylum seekers detained in immigration detention centres in capital cities, advocacy and activist campaigns had also begun which facilitated visits by Australians opposed to the policies and wishing to be supportive to the asylum seekers. These campaigns brought information and clarity to the visitors about the reality of the detention centres. Like the letter writing campaigns, they also brought personal connections with detainees, and often extended initial support into further activism and advocacy. Both the letter writing campaigns and the visiting campaigns therefore launched a larger number of Australian citizens into a detailed awareness of the impact of the policies they questioned or opposed. They also brought them into personal contact with the people detained (as opposed to the mythologised detainees of government rhetoric), and into knowledge of their particular life histories including the journey of seeking asylum.

For those who had already experienced the impact of these encounters, this often led to a desire to reproduce for other Australians, these experiences and the attendant gaining of knowledge. Many large organisations, small groups and individuals across the country therefore worked to facilitate these campaigns and to further the making of contact. One of these was a group called Chilout (Children Out Of Detention). An

interviewee described the beginnings of their visitors' program, which facilitated entry to the Villawood IDC for many supporters in the Sydney and regional area:

> We were the two first people from Chilout to visit Villawood detention centre. And to us, that was such a moving experience, and from there was born the Chilout visitor's program. All we were trying to do was replicate our experience and sharing that with others, so they could experience that for themselves. We were saying, 'See for yourselves. Hear their stories. Be able to look them in the eye. And see that they don't have green horns and green blood coursing through their veins'. And when we got the first feedback from people we took to visit, we knew we were on a winner (Interviewee QS).

These letter writing and visiting campaigns did not involve the physical risks sometimes associated with activist protest action. They did not involve the possession of particular occupational skills as lawyers or lobbyists. They simply involved action at the level of one human being reaching out to another. However, the exposure that the campaigns provided, and the connections made with people detained and suffering under the policy, often fuelled those who wrote and visited to become more deeply involved in advocacy and activism, and to take their part in that same endeavour – of 'Making known!' and of 'Telling Australians!'.

Supporters would sometimes make long journeys of hours or days in order to visit someone with whom they were communicating by letter and telephone. [53] Others who lived closer to immigration detention centres would visit regularly. In the city of Sydney, for example, long queues would form before visiting time, with waits of sometimes up to 2 hours, as supporters took their place in the queue outside. As at all of the centres, after the waiting, came the processing and screening of visitors - usually another long process. By the time they had passed through into the area where they would meet those they had come to visit, first time visitors in particular, were often very stressed. As an interviewee described her first experience of visiting:

> The incredible security. The huge double electrified fence. Huge metal gates that you buzz and then go through to the next one, and you do that 6 times. I had a 10 cent coin in my pocket that set off the detector, and I had to go all the way back to

53 An interviewee described the arduousness of such journeys:

> Fairly early in the piece, they said "Would it be possible for you to visit us?" And I realised that they didn't know how far away my town was, because they weren't allowed to have maps of Australia. They had no idea. When I actually arrived and told them the trip had taken about 16 hours, they were embarrassed and apologetic (Interviewee QK).

> the beginning of the process and start again. And then I waited for an hour and a half for them to come through. It was absolutely the most harrowing experience. I sobbed all the way back. Now when I go, that doesn't happen, but it was so shocking to me (Interviewee QK).

Yet, during such visits, temporary zones of sociality and normality would be created within that environment of abnormality (Gosden 2007b:58; Pedersen 2007:53-54). Food would be shared that had been brought in by the visitors. Tea was often provided by those who were detained. Conversation often concerned detainees' particular situations and supporters attempts to bring change to policies and practices. However group conversations could also be about very ordinary events, and social and casual in tone. In another environment, this might be equated with a social gathering like a picnic. In this environment, it constituted a combined defiance of a policy of isolation and dehumanisation. As well as the extra dimension of advocacy and activism that was fuelled for some of these Australians, asylum seekers also found a deeply helpful resource in the human to human supportive contact. The motivation of both groups was strengthened in these encounters, and awareness of the urgency of need drove accompanying actions to supply humanitarian and practical needs and to build capacity for the basic human rights for those affected. [54]

HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT

A number of established organisations had already been providing services for asylum seekers-refugees living in the community. However, the increasing number in need, and the funding constraints placed by the federal government upon a number of organisations which would previously have been able to assist with those needs, created a crisis situation. This was particularly so when asylum seekers were first released from immigration detention on temporary or bridging visas, but with inadequate government support. These situations of need led to the development of strongly task-based practical orientations within the collective action. The following interviewee described such a situation in the state of Western Australia:

[54] The curtailment of the right to liberty for those who have committed no crime, produced well documented risks to asylum seekers' health and well being (Sultan and O'Sullivan 2001; Mares et al. 2002; HREOC 2004). Even apart from the curtailment of liberty entailed in Australian policies such as mandatory detention, Zion et al. note the way in which 'the protection of basic rights such as health were not ensured through any state-governed organisation of duties' (2009:547). Rather, they were undermined by government policies.

> People were finding people on the streets. … The government only gave them enough money for two or three days at the backpackers where they dropped them off from the buses that were coming down from Curtin and Port Hedland. They were on TPVs which initially had no Medicare on them. … All the normal refugee support services were precluded from assisting them by order of the government (Interviewee XP).

Another interviewee described a similar situation for the state of Queensland:

> There was no helping agency here, so it was left to the community to respond to that need. … The churches and the community were putting so much into this because the government wasn't (Interviewee WQ).

As the interviewee from Western Australia explained, an organic growth took place in which asylum seekers' needs informed the development of services and actions:

> It was an organic thing, because it is a matter of … finding whoever can do stuff. In WA, it's been easy to work with people, because we all know each other. We formed CARAD initially - it's about the welfare on the ground, but it is also about advocacy. And then out of that grew CASE for Refugees which is the legal service. It was a very chaotic time, and you had to hold a lot of balls in the air at the same time (Interviewee XP).

Numerous groups doing such 'practical advocacy' developed in different states, around the humanitarian and practical needs for asylum seekers that resulted from discriminatory government policies. Both long established and new groups were often supported by resources from church groups, although the constituency of group members and donors were reflective of much wider sections of society. Though these actions were fuelled by need, they could ultimately became not only a response to humanitarian need, but also as Fiske (2006) argues, a way of building defacto models for absent human rights in heath, education and representation.

Bridging welfare and politics

As mentioned above, actions often developed ad hoc. For asylum seekers in detention who were desperate to be released, and supporters who were desperate to assist them, this was also the case. Where possibilities arose for that release through visas of various kinds, supporters often responded to provide whatever necessary conditions in the community were required, regardless of their own lack of resources. Despite the

absence of adequate provision of government services for those so released, individual citizens as well as organisations, mobilised resources for this task.

The action described below is just one example of such grass-roots development of practical support. In this particular case, it involved individuals organising and personally funding a community welfare system of accommodation, health services, and income, which enabled asylum seekers to leave detention. Coming together in small groups, the individuals did this from their own resources and from donations, whilst also providing on-going personal social and emotional support for these same asylum seekers. Firstly, one of these groups formed to support a family who were in Woomera IDC. Then other groups formed to follow that model. In the state of South Australia, the concept of the first group which called itself a Circle of Friends, became replicated to the extent that numerous such Circles developed. One of the interviewees who was involved, recalled the beginning of this action:

> I got a call from a lawyer who said, 'I've got this family up in Woomera. We think we may be able to get them out on something called a Bridging Visa on the grounds of mental health. But … they would need everything done. They would need accommodation found. They would need an income. They would need everything taken care of, because they wouldn't have anything except the right to be out. Do you think you can organise something?'
>
> So, of course, times being what they were, I said, 'Yes'. Basically, I made a commitment of an unknown duration and unlimited responsibility for these people I'd never met. … And I sent out an email to everyone I could think of at work, and said, 'Here's the deal. The lawyer thinks we can get them out, but we'll need to find accommodation. We'll have to provide everything'. And about twenty people emailed back and said, 'Yes. I'll be in that'. It's that same commitment – don't know for how long, don't know what the limits are, but, 'Yeah. I'll do that'. So, that was the first Circle (Interviewee WZ).

Describing the action as 'a hybrid between a political response and a welfare response … the best we could do at the time!' (Interviewee WZ), he explained that these were practical responses, where traditional aspects of activism became modified by the urgency of the needs of those being assisted; the moral imperative for those assisting; and the relationships of care and concern between the two groups. At the same time, he noted, such actions also held potential as models of advocacy and activism in social environments of hostility. In this regard, the very form of the action conveyed the message of the actors. It not only provided information about the issue itself and the

needs of asylum seekers and refugees. It also provided a role modelling of the kind of relationships possible between Australian citizens and strangers in need, and of the kind of Australian society so passionately desired by the advocates. The example of some Australians simply 'getting on with it' and taking care of asylum seekers and refugees, gained a credibility for their humanitarian actions and for their cause, that no amount of talking could have achieved. As he observed:

> All of a sudden we had the moral ascendency, because what we were saying was, 'We'll take care of it'. The reaction was completely different to the things around protest or telling the government. It was 'Groups of Australians are banding together. They're putting their hands in their pockets, and they're going to take care of it'. In a movement, practical advocacy, I think, gives you credibility. You're not just talking about what the government should do, or what other people should do - you're doing it. So, that's a demonstration (Interviewee WZ).

Similar actions occurred in other states, with slightly different beginnings and developments. Some of these initial actions ultimately grew into large welfare, health and advocacy organisations (see for example, the website of the group ASRC). In some cases, individuals created new groups and organisations and new models of care for these situations. In other cases, already established organisations became co-coordinating hosts for such actions, or established new models that individuals assisted with. Both professional and voluntary groups and individuals came forward in these endeavours to provide services and care for asylum seekers both inside and outside of immigration detention centres. They also endeavoured to represent them in medical and in legal advocacy, in submissions to Australian government Ministers and Departments, and to United Nations bodies. The scope of the services established, and the resources held by the small groups and large organisations involved varied from state to state. However, whatever their size and constituency, they were all overwhelmed by the needs presented.

THE PRO-BONO WORK OF PROFESSIONAL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

The engagement of many professional groups and individuals in pro-bono work for the asylum seekers added an additional level of legitimacy to the collective action. As an interviewee noted:

> When you see all those professions starting to be involved, that brings serious clout (Interviewee YF).

Speaking of the pro-bono work of professionals such as lawyers, [55] interviewees detailed something of the extent of that work. In the following instance, an interviewee is speaking of a particular state, but what is described here, was replicated across Australia. As he explained:

> I have legal skills and I offered those. We took on an enormous workload, and it was voluntary. The Bar was incredibly generous. In South Australia, anywhere between a quarter and a third of the Bar appeared for refugees in the Federal Court. …Everyone was voluntary … and there were people coming out of the woodwork. There was huge student support. There were fundraising people. There were people who worked as volunteers in the office. There were people who volunteered as interpreters, barristers, and solicitors. A lot of the barristers did continual work. We were doing RRT appeals to the Federal Court and the High Court. Internationally, we also got UN claims up - which was terribly labour intensive work (Interviewee XJ).

At times, these pro-bono efforts became coordinated nationally with 'solicitors and students from all over Australia … here … putting together UN claims' (Interviewee XJ). Overall, he considered:

> We provided an avenue for asylum seekers to establish their rights. Without the pro-bono legal help, the job of getting asylum seekers' claims to be heard would have been very much more difficult (Interviewee XJ).

Professionals such as solicitors and migration agents, often assisted by lay groups and advocates, undertook similar workloads for asylum seekers in appeals to the Department of Immigration and to the Minister for Immigration for reassessment of refugee claims and for Ministerial intervention. As an interviewee previously without any legal skills, noted:

[55] The fact that a significant number were engaged in the issue in a pro-bono capacity, gave the lie to stereotyped characterisations which commonly exist of particular professions. The Australian government provided asylum seekers with professional assistance for initial applications for protection and with the preparation of appeals to tribunals which decided their refugee status. However, they were not provided with legal assistance for judicial appeals they might wish to bring against those decisions. It was thus often pro-bono work by lawyers (assisted by law students and by lay groups and individuals), which enabled such appeals to be made. At the same time as enabling asylum seekers to have legal representation in court, these appeals also challenged the legality of the legislation upon which policies such as those of mandatory detention were based.

> The people for whom we felt it would mean imprisonment or severe interrogation if they were sent back - they couldn't all get lawyers. The legal services were completely overloaded. So, we built up a list of individual lawyers who were willing to help, but couldn't afford to do the transcripts, collect the country information, and go back and forth to the IDCs with affidavits. We began to act as runners, doing that for them. … And a few of us volunteers also began to do the para-legal and submission work and build expertise (Interviewee WO).

Such individuals would go on to develop considerable expertise in these areas. In a similar response to needs, another interviewee, herself a legal professional, recalled such combined actions by legal professionals and volunteers:

> We realised that there were soon going to be lots of people having their Temporary Protection Visas expiring. …We knew there would be a few thousand people going to need assistance. … And it was all voluntary for about a year before we were able to employ people. … We would basically have teams, where you would have a lawyer teamed with a volunteer scribe. It was amazing. We didn't have premises or money, but we picked up just about everybody who needed help. (Interviewee XU).

As for legal assistance, so similarly, professionals in other disciplines organised systems of practical assistance across the country, especially in areas of health, education and welfare needs. At the same time, they raised awareness of the conditions of abuse and discrimination that affected asylum seekers (Rogalla 2001; Steel and Silove 2001; Mares et al. 2002; Koutroulis 2003; Mann 2003; Steel et al. 2004; Zion 2004; Bender 2007; Briskman et al. 2008; Zion et al. 2009**).** [56] For those asylum seekers released into the community on visas which did not include access to medical assistance, the dire need for health services became answered across the country by networks of volunteer health professionals, as well as by staff of existing health centres which sometimes managed to provide unfunded care for this group of people (Rau 2005). Similarly, in the area of education, Fiske notes that despite government constraints on services which could be provided to asylum seekers who had received temporary refugee protection visas (TPVs), 'teachers in classrooms around the country enrolled children on TPVs in Intensive Language Classes' (2006:226); 'volunteers organised English classes in church halls, community centres and private homes' (2006:227); and a number of

[56] While health professionals attempted to alleviate the illnesses and conditions of the asylum seekers in immigration detention, they also acted as public advocates on the impossibility of curing illnesses caused by government policies, whilst the regime of those policies continued to be implemented.

universities ‘developed scholarships and fee waiver places for students on TPVs’ (2006:227).

Whilst providing services, all of these forms of practical assistance also raised awareness. As argued earlier, the very form of an action may convey the message of the actors. These actions not only provided information about the issue itself and the needs of asylum seekers. The attempts by Australian citizens to support the needs of the asylum seekers illuminated the absence of the government support, which could normally be expected for asylum seekers and refugees within a western democratic country with moral obligations under a number of international Conventions. In the process of these actions, humanitarian and human rights concerns were raised, as well as awareness of the discrimination accorded to this group of people. Perhaps above all, the actions provided a simple and clear role modelling of the kind of relationships possible between Australian citizens and strangers in need, and of the kind of Australian society so passionately desired by the advocates and activists.

GATHERING INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE

Importantly, at the same time as this range of actions was being undertaken, actions that furthered the breaking of the silence, censorship and misinformation which surrounded the impact of these policies on asylum seekers, continued and multiplied. The relationships between asylum seekers and their supporters and across the diverse networks of supporters, facilitated the breadth of this process in a remarkable way, as did the range of actions engaged in by supporters. That endeavour of gathering information and evidence; of ‘bearing witness’ to what was occurring; and of ‘making known’ what was happening, was one that united disparate individuals and groups.

One of the aspects that is most striking in terms of the information gathered by advocates and activists, is the range and diversity of the sources. The communication between those on the inside and outside of the detention centres facilitated this, as did the diverse locations of advocates and activists. From asylum seekers in detention centres and in the community, and from their visitors and supporters, came information on the reality of their situation, and on up-to-the-minute developments in those

situations.[57] From teachers, nurses, doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists came clinical research evidence of the mental and physical harm of long-term detention. From lawyers and human rights advocates came knowledge of the legal and constitutional issues around which Australian law and human rights conventions conflicted, as well as potential legal pathways for constructive use of those conventions.

From academics came historical and political analyses of Australian and international mores and intersections on asylum and refugee issues. From established refugee and human rights NGOs came knowledge of preceding struggles and outcomes, and from long-term activists, knowledge and experience of the mobilisation of social actors. From religious groups, from refugee support and human rights groups, and from political activist groups came information on Australian and international asylum and refugee situations and conditions. From advocates in political life, came knowledge of systems of governance and politics, and from long-term activists, knowledge of political campaigns. From advocates and activists with personal resources in arts and literature, media and public relations came knowledge of how this information could most effectively be conveyed to the general public. All of this knowledge was important as a resource in such a struggle against a larger and well resourced opponent.[58]

As mentioned earlier, for asylum seekers in immigration detention centres, the interactions between them and their supporters, provided opportunities for the passage of information, and a number of interviewees described their actions as 'go-betweens'. As one recalled:

> I passed on a lot of information. I could pass information onto people outside regarding the medical state of the detainees. … I was in contact on behalf of

[57] The communication of information between those inside and outside the IDCs, enabled numerous combined actions. These included actions through which many asylum seekers in Australia were prevented from being deported (see Chapter 9). Similarly, a number of other joint actions between supporters and asylum seekers in detention, proved crucial not only for the individuals involved, but for the wider communication to the Australian public. The video recording of the small child in detention has already been mentioned (Everitt 2008). The activist involved in that action would go on to repeat it at another IDC, and to enable another public viewing of conditions inside detention, before being banned from visiting (Everitt 2007). The beginnings of moves to gain awareness for the situation of another detainee, would later provoke an exposure of, and subsequent government inquiry into Immigration Department malpractice (Curr 2007:153-4).

[58] See Gosden 2006a for analysis using Melucci's definition of collective action in terms of the arena of conflict.

> people if they wanted me to ring lawyers. One detainee who was very much into trying to help other people - he'd write reports on the problems in the centre. I was always smuggling them out. He had a whole list of names - every refugee group and politician (Interviewee XV).

This kind of information also sometimes came from staff who had worked in the immigration detention centres or in government. An interviewee described the way in which once he, as the director of a well known organisation, had commenced to make public statements based on such information, further information began to flow in, especially from people who had worked in immigration detention centres:

> A number of staff from the IDC had approached us. They were all telling the same sort of story about the conditions there and what was happening to people. They were genuinely scared for their own safety if they were caught talking about the conditions. But to a person they wanted us to speak publicly. It was a tricky thing to get involved in. I always made sure that we had at least three corroborations for anything I said publicly. We'd be asked about a lot of things that we wouldn't comment on, but once we were sure, then I'd make those remarks.
>
> Because of the position that I held here, it gave some credibility to that information in a way that people as individuals in the community, may not have had from a newspaper's point of view. And once we had that public profile, people just came out of the woodwork from literally all over Australia. There were people who were involved with both ACM and DIMIA. Stuff started turning up on the fax and the post and email from all sorts of people. A lot of information stated coming through - from lawyers who'd worked as migration officers, school teachers and people who were working in education there in the IDC, and detention officers (Interviewee XM).

This flow of information from 'inside sources' was a significant factor in a process of challenging government discourse on asylum seeker issues. Once people who had worked in immigration detention centres broke the silence imposed on them by the conditions of their employment contracts, government sources could no longer speak with impunity on these issues. They could no longer rely on censorship and isolation to prevent accurate information being placed into the public domain. Advocates and activists often now had more accurate and up-to-date information on the conditions and situations of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres and in the community, than did government speakers. It was, as the same interviewee described, a process of discovering what had been hidden from view:

> Back then, most of what was happening was hidden, and we were able to expose a lot of that stuff. The government responded to that by trying to discredit us.

> Interestingly, they gave up on that when they realised that we were in receipt of pretty good information (Interviewee XM).

All of the knowledge gathered was important as a resource in the struggle against a much larger opponent. [59] However, having this information accepted as legitimate in such a hostile political environment, was still not an easy task. Even parliamentary inquiries and reports by government authorities such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) were accorded little response by the Australian government (O'Neill 2008:164). [60, 61] Yet, despite the minimising, dismissal and disputation of the information gathered, the evidence continued to accumulate and to be placed on the public record. In itself, this provided a rich resource for anyone in the general public to access. In addition, the process of the gathering of information in public hearings provided opportunities for the ever pressing task of raising public awareness. Over a period of some years, statutory bodies and government appointed inquiries had heard evidence in public hearings around the country. [62] Regardless of the government response, the very occurrence of these public hearings always provided opportunities for advocates and activists to raise the issues further in the media, and to facilitate a counter voice on the issue. As one interviewee explained, 'Because the victories are sparse, this idea of "bearing witness" ' (Interviewee QD) for the longer term, was very important. Sometimes, it seemed to supporters of asylum seekers, that even if they could achieve little change politically and socially, at least they could do that. Even if the information gathered in such inquiries continued to be dismissed by government, it did ensure, that the counter voice of 'the stories of this disturbing era of social policy' (Briskman et al. 2008:10) would be on the record for future generations.

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[59] As an interviewee noted:

> There is a large body of information and national and international advocacy….which has tipped the balance (Interviewee YL).

[60] Pickering has described a culture of a 'human rights vacuum' (2001b:220).

[61] Australian advocates and activists utilised human rights instruments and discourse in numerous ways at local, national and international levels in seeking protection of asylum seekers rights. Yet, it was argued that its effectiveness was limited in Australian courts by the lack of 'a coherent rights jurisprudence founded on basic principles of human rights' (Saunders and Gardiner 2003:38). See also Taylor S. 1998, 2000a and b; Dauvergne 2000; Kinslor 2002; Zifcak 2005; Charlesworth et al. 2006:69).

[62] Following the 2005 exposure of mal-practice in one of the IDCs, there were repeated calls by advocates and activists for a Royal Commission into the policy and practices. When a government appointed inquiry was limited in terms of the scope into which it could inquire (Palmer 2005), supporters of asylum seekers launched their own 'People's Inquiry' which travelled around the country to document the events of the period (Briskman et al. 2008).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has documented a diversity of actions. However, these diverse actions usually had a central focus on the well being of the asylum seekers affected by Australian policies. This focus impacted upon understandings of the work of traditional activism and advocacy, through the multiple personal interactions with asylum seekers, and through the agency of the asylum seekers. Both of these factors were significant features in this collective action. In terms of social activism, these aspects grounded traditional activist work, which can sometimes be abstract and ideological, through a required ethics of care for the immediate as well as future situation of the asylum seekers. In terms of social advocacy, the agency of the asylum seekers themselves emphasised the significant dimension of subjectivity of those being advocated for, an aspect often not sufficiently recognised in advocacy on behalf of others. Both of these factors had the effect of making the collective action more practical in action and pragmatic in orientation. These factors also held potential for widening personal orientations of humanitarianism into broader conceptions of human rights, and for dissolving boundaries between radical and conservative action orientations; between 'up close and personal' action and action at a systemic level; and between the varieties of knowledge and passion of both long-term and newly engaged supporters of asylum seekers.

In relation to all of these diverse actions, the actions of gathering information perhaps more than any others, could be said to speak for themselves, in terms of what the information that was obtained, revealed. As noted earlier, it was a process of discovering what had been hidden from view – and then of showing or exposing it. However, regardless of the amount of information available, having it accepted as legitimate and authoritative evidence by the Australian public was another task again. When opposing the discourse of a national government, it was also a matter of finding ways 'to get that message across'. That endeavour of communicating the information gathered from these diverse sources, and of building a counter discourse around it, was one which would itself produce further innovative actions. It is this task of 'making known' and 'telling Australians', that the following chapter examines.

Chapter 8:
Telling Australians!

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter examined a range of actions by which opponents of the policies sought to support asylum seekers, and to bring change to these Australian policies, practices and discourse. In this endeavour, communicative actions were vital. This chapter examines that endeavour. It explores the process of communication with the wider Australian public through the development of a counter discourse, and through discursive and non-discursive communicative actions. Constraints for the communication of a counter discourse included the superior resources of the authority of government discourse as well as regimes of control of information. They also included the difficulties of legitimacy faced by any discourse which challenges the dominant story of a nation. In addition, these communicative efforts functioned within a particular culture of disbelief and distrust for discourse by asylum seekers or their supporters, which had been constructed through decades of negative representations of them by government and media.

The chapter examines the way in which the collective action participants worked to build legitimacy for their discourse and to challenge the legitimacy of government discourse. It also documents the range of communicative actions developed in attempts to disrupt that culture of disbelief through the communication of information, emotion and experience. These former communications involved the continuing accumulation of evidence, and the action of 'bearing witness' to the affects of the discriminatory policies, upon asylum seekers. The latter communicative actions included expressive and imaginative modes of literature, theatre and art, and behavioural communications of relationships of solidarity and care between asylum seekers and supporters. Ultimately, certain aspects of these discursive and non-discursive actions were received more favourably than others. The chapter examines this outcome, and the role of the media in this regard.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A COUNTER DISCOURSE

In the endeavour to communicate with the Australian public, the discourse constructed by the collective action was necessarily of import. Collective action theorists and participants have long understood the importance in social action of providing 'meaning systems and cultural themes for talking about political objects' (Gamson 1988 in Buechler 2000:43). In this regard, a range of discursive themes had emerged within the collective action. Asylum seekers had themselves communicated messages concerning justice, democracy, human rights and a shared humanity. These discourses (see for example, communications in publications such as Amor and Austin 2003; Scott and Keneally 2004) as well as those of previous refugee advocacy and activist repertoires, and humanitarian, human rights, social justice, and anti-racism repertoires, were some of those drawn upon by various advocates and activists in the development of a collective action counter discourse.

The research of Every (2006) and Every and Augoustinos (2008) provides an outline of the range of pro-asylum seeker discourse. Every analysed this discourse in parliamentary debates during the 2001 period in which public debate was inflamed by the issue. Although its political impact was limited in parliament by the support of the major opposition party (ALP) for the government policies, parliamentary debate still provided a significant forum for its development and dissemination. Members of the minor political parties, The Australian Democrats and The Greens, as well as individual Independent MPs, and individual MPs dissenting from the perspectives of the major parties, were 'vocal opponents and played an important role in contesting the new legislative direction' (Every and Augoustinos 2008:651). As Every and Augoustinos observe, the development and dissemination of the discourse in parliament, was relevant not only for arguments within parliament itself, but also in terms of the discursive resource it provided for 'recurring arguments in the media and in broader public opinion voiced on talk-back radio, letters to the editor and opinion polls' (2008:652). In addition, the parliamentary identities of the speakers facilitated a greater media uptake of pro-asylum seeker discourses, than was easily available to other advocates (see van Djik 1993:49-114, and 1997 on the influential position which politicians occupy on social debate). All of this had important implications in terms of constructing a counter discourse and mobilising public opinion.

The counter discourse analysed by Every and Augoustinos included a number of distinctive features. The parliamentary speakers re-categorised asylum seeking by emphasising similarities of human behaviour in threatening situations, thus challenging the dominant negative discursive representations of 'us and them' (2008:653). In contrast to government discourses of "economic migration" or "personal choice" or "attraction to soft laws" (2008:653), they explained asylum seeking in terms such as 'victims of circumstance' (2008:653), 'persecution' (2008:653), and families wanting to stay together (2008:653). They refuted government information as being inaccurate, and criticised the government for the minimality of its humanitarian discourse, as well as for violations of asylum seekers' rights (Every 2006:126). They named the discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers as racist (Every and Augoustinos 2007); drew attention to comparisons between present asylum seekers and previous refugee movements; used logic to 'undermine the truth status of anti-asylum seeker claims' (2008:653); and employed metaphors and analogies which attempted to convey the journey and experience of seeking asylum. In addition, they pointed to imbalances of global wealth between countries, and argued for the 'moral responsibility' (2008:653) that a country such as Australia had towards asylum seekers.

All of these aspects were also present in the discourse of the wider collective action, either in conjunction with, subsequent to, or in advance of their presentation in federal parliament. In addition, other new discursive aspects were apparent in the interactions and relationships which had developed between many advocates and asylum seekers (Tilbury 2004, 2007). However, some parts of this combined discourse were received more favourably by Australian media, than others. This was a significant factor which affected the wider communication of the discourse to the Australian public, along with the reality that discourses which threaten to undermine 'the stability of established relations of power and subordination in society' (Pickering 2001a:183), are often 'curtailed or excluded' (Pickering 2001a:183).

Finding receptivity for a pro-asylum seeker discourse

After decades of negative government rhetoric about asylum seeker arrivals (from both major political parties), the discursive task of 're-presenting their arrival' (Every

2006:260) was a more 'complex and difficult argument to make' (Every 2006:260). The most basic requirement for a counter discourse is that it counters the discourse which it is opposing, and this reality therefore framed much of what was developed. At the same time, there was a need to legitimise the speakers of a pro-asylum seeker discourse before they could valuably employ it. Two aspects in particular presented discursive challenges, as highlighted in the analyses made by Every and Augoustinos (2008). One was the challenge faced by advocates in countering a 'culture of disbelief' (Bohmer and Shuman 2007 quoted in Every and Augoustinos 2008:652). Such a public culture had been fostered over time by factors such as negative government and media discourse (Pickering 2001a:169; Klocker and Dunn 2003; Pedersen et al. 2006), as well as by discriminatory practice (Grewcock 2009). This aspect significantly affected the reception of any pro-asylum seeker discourse. A second factor was the delegitimising effect on speakers of any discourse which countered authoritative government discourse of the 'standard story of Australia as a generous nation' (Every 2006:260). In this case, 'alternative voices' (Pickering 2001a:175) could often become portrayed as unpatriotic.

In such a situation, it was not the efficacy of discursive argument as such that necessarily mattered most, but public acceptance of discourse which countered the standard discourse, and public acceptance of those who spoke it. The many discursive and non-discursive strategies adopted by advocates and activists to communicate with the Australian public were therefore not only aimed at countering government discourse and informing the public. They were also importantly aimed at facilitating the reception of those messages. Three strategies in particular were important in this task. One involved building legitimacy for speakers of this discourse. A second involved the discursive power of the personal experience that advocates and activists held on this issue, and the sharing of that in discourse. The third concerned the diminishment of credibility for the government discourse, as an increasing exposure of government misinformation brought a degree of delegitimation to it.

Building legitimacy for speakers

Indicating the social locations of advocates could function as a carrier of legitimation for their message. Indeed, in order to refute a government discourse which often positioned opponents as 'elites' out of touch with ordinary Australians, or as 'lefties'

intent on an anarchistic agenda, a specific positioning of opposition from the location of a 'mainstream' Australian citizen not normally engaged in political activism, was highlighted in many instances. One interviewee described the adoption of such a strategy for a newly created special issue group (which began as a group of less than a dozen people but came over time to count thousands of members). As she explained:

> I said, 'I want the politicians to take notice of us'. If we aligned ourselves with another group then they'll say, "Okay. It's the usual bunch of do-gooders". I thought it would be too easy for the politicians to brush aside student radicals – "Let's not worry about them". Amnesty – "Yes, we already know about them. That's nothing new".
>
> I thought we would be better serving the cause by coming from a marketing positioning point of view where we almost advertise ourselves or announce our presence by saying, 'We're not your usual activists. You can't brush us aside. In our ranks are people who voted for you. We're one of you'. … We deliberately positioned ourselves very middle of the road, so we could fight them on their own turf. … 'We're your ordinary Australians. We're mainstream'. That's the message I wanted to get out there. … I wanted the authorities to take notice that it was from the ranks of their voters, possibly. We could be their neighbours. And that many of us were first time activists. Many of us. I wanted them to be concerned that we might be poaching recruits from their very midst, their very ranks (Interviewee QS).

This kind of specific positioning of opposition was replicated in many other instances. In such a communicational strategy, the location of the speaker was as much of a public statement as the message that they communicated. Supporters therefore often presented themselves in terms of a range of 'mainstream' identities, such as 'mums and dads', as grandparents, as young people, as concerned Australians, as Christians, and in other familiarly accepted traditional subject positions. One of these subject positions for example, specifically involved Australian citizens in rural locations. In Australian society, there had long been an almost mythological cultural association of rural Australians or 'people in the bush', as the 'real Australians' when compared to their more urban counterparts in the cities. As an interviewee explained, the impact of opposition to these policies, from people who would normally be associated in the public mind with conservative political positions, could not be underestimated:

> RAR to outward appearances seem to be very conservative, typical Country Party type people, and here they are standing up and saying, 'This is terrible. What's going on?' And that's very effective in itself, I think. Absolutely not the sort of people that you would ever say were 'rusted on lefties', 'professional protestors'

> and so on. So, I think it's the surprise factor in many ways that makes them effective, too. (Interviewee WA).

In terms of geographical location, the groups established in Australian country regions and collectively titled Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), therefore provided a discursive setting with cultural implications that extended far beyond the few words of the name. As one long-term advocate exclaimed at a public meeting, 'Who would have thought there would ever be Rural Australians for Refugees!' (Interviewee YB). The message that such speaking positionings disseminated was that opponents of the policy were not only from the constituencies of people normally associated with such advocacy. They were also in a broader sense from the ranks of 'mainstream' and 'traditional' Australia. As such they could more easily be identified with by fellow Australian citizens. With each such positioning, a broader societal spectrum of interest and opposition was established on the issue.

In addition, in an environment in which opponents of the government policy were numerically much smaller and arraigned against the authoritative position of the government, the development of authoritative speaking positions was an important strategic resource. As part of this process of a broadening of authoritative and 'legitimate' societal speaking positions, many advocates and activists sought to use their personal, professional and institutional positionings as a way of legitimizing their message of opposition to the policies affecting asylum seekers. Every and Augoustinos have noted the literature analysing the wider influence available to those in political positions in disseminating discourse, because of their greater access to media (2008:651). This was a significant factor in media attention being given to early opposition by the minority political parties The Greens and the Australian Democrats to the government's actions on the arrival of the *Tampa*. Professional groups, high profile individuals, and leaders and members of religious groups and unions similarly positioned themselves and brought added credibility to that opposition. In this regard, many professionals brought the legitimacy and resource of expert opinion into the advocacy discourse as a whole. High profile individuals or celebrities whether from media, sport, theatre or other genres such as political and union genres, brought the social capital of their own individual endorsement of the legitimacy of such opposition. In turn, religious leaders brought the moral capital of legitimacy and authority to opposition to the policies.

At the other end of the spectrum was the legitimacy that can be accorded to a speaker from their positioning in relationships of familiarity and respect, as for example with family, friends and colleagues. In this kind of communication, which is explored in this and previous chapters, the individual character of the speaker and the trust generated in their communications from prior interactions, can open possibilities for influential communications, i.e. trust in the speaker may facilitate respect for and trust in their discourse. All of these positionings broadened the credibility of opposition to the policy, making it more difficult for it to be simply categorized and refuted as the discourse of 'out of touch' elites. As one interviewee who was not opposed to the government's asylum seeker policies, but who been influenced over time by that opposition, noted:

> I shifted from strongly supporting it, to thinking there has to be change to this. … When enough people say, 'This is bad', you start to think, 'Let's have a look at this'. Particularly when church groups say it, you think, 'There has to be something in this'. … I suppose it's people in authority saying, 'This is really bad', or people that you really respect (Interviewee WT).

The discursive power of authenticity of experience

Drawing upon the authenticity of personal experience was another discursive path used in building legitimacy as a speaker on this issue. Because of the particular nature of the collective action, and the multiple interactions between asylum seekers and their supporters that were an integral part of it, this resource was available to a large number of opponents of the government policies. To speak from this position was to speak from the position of having been a witness to the fear of deportation for asylum seekers whom one knew, and to instances of inhumane procedures in immigration detention centres and unfair procedures in review tribunals. It was also to speak from a position of having witnessed deterioration in mental stability and health in the case of many asylum seekers in detention and in the community, and the absence of 'normal' developmental environments for children in detention. It was in general to speak of the discriminatory treatment of this group of people. At the same time, speaking from personal experience also often involved sharing emotion as part of the reality of that experience of witnessing. One has only to read accounts of this period by advocates and activists (Mares and Newman 2007) to understand something of the way in which emotions such as compassion for the suffering of asylum seekers subjected to such treatment, and

anger at the injustice of their treatment and violation of their human rights, therefore permeated this discourse.

Weakening the credibility of government discourse

Not only did opponents of the policy engage themselves in the process of building positions of legitimacy as speakers. As documented in the previous chapter, they had also engaged in the process of gathering information and evidence in order to counteract the government discourse on the issue. While the established discourse common to all opponents was centred around the message 'What is happening is wrong!', the role of gathering evidence and communicating that evidence to the Australian media and public, was central to the legitimisation of that claim. [63]

Something of the process of gathering information has been discussed in the previous chapter. The task had been undertaken from a multiplicity of sites including professional disciplines, detainees in immigration detention centres, 'on the ground' activists and advocates, Australian courts, statutory bodies, government commissioned inquiries, and United Nations investigations. The gradual continuing presentation of this evidence from authoritative speaking positions as well as from personal social positions, became a significant strategic resource in this regard. As the previously quoted interviewee explained further, it was not only whom the opposition to the policy was coming from, but also the increasingly authoritative evidence that appeared, that was convincing to her:

> You've got the government saying one thing, and advocates saying another. It's difficult. But when it comes to a legal thing saying it. …What happened is that

[63] In 2002, government misinformation was exposed in the case of ministerial claims that asylum seekers on a sinking vessel had thrown their children overboard in order to gain assistance for themselves (Grewcock 2009). By 2004, the cumulative gathering and presentation of this evidence to government, parliament and to the Australian community was beginning to show signs of having some effect on public opinion (Henderson 2004; O'Neill 2008:163). Also in 2004, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) had presented to federal parliament a report which documented the human rights abuses which the detention regime constituted for these children (HREOC 2004). By 2005, the exposure of the unlawful detention of an Australian permanent resident and the deportation of an Australian citizen brought about an Inquiry into Immigration Detention (Palmer 2005). This subsequently led to Inquiries by the Commonwealth Ombudsman (2005), as evidence of further cases of wrongful immigration detention became known. These events provided wide media coverage of abuses within the regime of immigration detention and misrepresentations in government discourse.

> more information has come out that is believable - the Inquiry. It confirmed what other people had been telling me. It made it authentic (Interviewee WT).

COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS

However, as Pickering has noted, in the social and political environment of the period, debate on these matters often became 'narrowed and flattened into the framework of nationhood' (2001a:175), with alternative voices becoming 'voices against the nation' (2001a:175). Similarly, in her analysis of the 2001parliamentary advocacy for asylum seekers, Every concludes that the 'discourses of resistance were … constrained and marginalised' (2006:264) by the power imbalance which accorded priority to a government discourse; by a 'continuing shift towards more conservative politics in Australia and other Western liberal-democratic nations' (2006:261); and as in other Western countries, attacks upon the discursive and patriotic status of supporters of asylum seekers (2006:262-263). Yet, she suggests, 'it may be that language, specifically political discourse, is not the site at which changes to the response to asylum seekers can best be effected' (2006:264-265).

Every argues here (2006:264-265) that she is in agreement with an earlier article of mine (Gosden 2006a) in which I suggested that there are many possible communicative avenues for social change, including the persuasive discourse of advocates and activists with colleagues, peers, neighbours, family and friends; communicative actions which share the experiences of asylum seekers and the experiences of interactions and relationships with asylum seekers; actions which communicate solidarity with asylum seekers; and the behaviours which role-model positive relationships between Australians and asylum seekers as part of the values of, and visions for Australian society. All of these communicative strategies were part of the combined efforts engaged in by those supportive of asylum seekers and opposed to government policies discriminating against them.

The endeavour of communicating on this issue with fellow Australians was one that deeply occupied advocates and activists. The various and multiple attempts to do this produced a kaleidoscope of communicative actions and events which varied with the particularity of the resources available to individuals or groups. However, one thing was common to all of these actions. Whatever the resources of the individuals or groups;

whatever the mode of communication of the message; whatever the target audience, the fundamental message was the same – "This is wrong!".

Though differences between individuals and groups often collided in attempts to produce a unified front on issues of strategy, the collective action did succeed in producing a multiple-sited positioning that gave a wide societal coverage to that basic message. When the message was heard, the source could just as likely be coming from family members, friends, colleagues, intellectuals, religious groups, radical students, rural people, neighbourhood groups, politicians, doctors, lawyers, teachers, artists, or actors, as from human rights or refugee groups. It could be coming from school children, or from those who were parents and grandparents. It could be coming from farmers or from an inner city 'café latte' society. Though statistical surveys show a majority of respondent advocates and activists as female, aged 40 years and upwards, and with tertiary education (Raab 2005; Surawski et al. 2008), the range of participants in the collective action and the scope of their involvement was wide.

The diversity of sources of this same message was a significant feature of this collective but also individualised social action. The breadth of the mode of transmission of the message indicated that this was an issue which deeply concerned a significant spread of Australian citizens, even if this did not necessarily equate with large numbers of the population. Though a majority of the population may have had no interest in the issue, or were in agreement with their government's discourse and actions, the discourse and actions of asylum seekers and their supporters meant that the population was still confronted at multiple sites with an exposure to the issue.

Building resonant messages

The discursive and non-discursive strategies adopted to communicate with the Australian public included building resonant communicative messages. As one interviewee explained:

> I thought we have to reach people in such a way that the information they receive just kind of shakes them out of their apathy, makes them think, makes them question. Makes them want to do something. And makes them understand that there are many like us. The message that, 'You are not alone' (Interviewee QS).

In this regard, the personal resources and skills utilised by even small and newly involved groups, included ones concerned with marketing the message in effective ways. In such endeavours, reaching the public and entering and remaining in their minds, was undertaken as part of a discursive strategy. The same interviewee explains such a process:

> I remember the meeting where we said, 'What do we call ourselves?' And I said, 'A name that is short, and sweet and sums everything up and just rolls off the tip of everyone's tongue'. And he came up with Chilout for Children Out of Detention. It is a brand name. We wanted to brand it. And from marketing skills, the thing of making an impact in people's minds is to find a space in their minds and stay there. That's what marketing is about. That's what advertising is about. To find a space and stay there. Something that's easy to capture. And that people can connect with. So, we became Chilout (Interviewee QS).

The impact of such strategies became evident over time, as this group name and others became rallying points for collective action discourses and actions, encapsulating specific messages, while also providing potential for value systems and philosophies to be attached to those messages. Some names provided information about the specificity of focus and action of a group. That of Chilout which communicated the purpose of the particular collective action campaign aimed at realising a vision of 'Children out of Detention'. Other group and campaign names similarly communicated aspects of a broad value-based counter vision. Examples of these communications range from groups such as Circles of Friends which provided the kind of 'practical advocacy' already discussed, and indicated the potential for positive relationships between asylum seekers and Australians, to group names which focused on values and visions of justice and fairness for asylum seekers and refugees. Framings such as Justice for Asylum Seekers, The Justice Project, Justice for Refugees SA and Fair Go for Refugees give some indication of messages disseminated in such namings. Many group names also specifically linked these visions to traditional Australian values, with Australians for Just and Fair Refugee Programs, and A Just Australia providing some examples. These discursive framings also provided messages that identified deeper and wider underlying factors of national and global discrimination and inequality, as significant aspects that needed to be acknowledged and addressed on this issue, with groups such as Australians Against Racism and Fortress Australia providing examples.

Sharing information

Significantly, many supporters of asylum seekers had a strong belief in the goodness and fairness of their fellow Australians, and a frequently repeated understanding was that "If only they knew what was happening, they would change their minds". From this perception, they embarked on numerous and diverse strategies to share their information with fellow Australians. As in many collective action campaigns, a large amount of energy went into creating information resources which could be used by media, by other members of the collective action and by the general public. Through websites and email networks, information 'fact sheets', analysis, videos, and photographs, became community education resources which could be widely disseminated and used in countering misinformation and myth in anti-asylum seeker rhetoric.

In addition to the creation of information resources, numerous public information meetings were organised in diverse locations, with diverse audiences and by diverse individuals and groups. Some were organised by well known organisations and pubic figures, and drew audiences of thousands. Some were in local neighbourhoods with audiences rarely reaching to the hundred. Some were even smaller – gatherings in homes to which friends and neighbours were invited. The following description by one interviewee is an example of the way in which individuals new to activism and advocacy, gradually but inexorably developed strategies, resources and impact in this endeavour:

> If they knew! It was fuelled by the thought that if I felt what I felt, getting to know the issues, surely there must be other Australians out there I can connect with, who would feel the same, if they knew. … So, that started the concept of the information nights. Purely as offering information to counter the myths that we had already learned the government and media had put out.
>
> I wanted to get to as many people as I could get to. For the first session, we had six or seven people. At the second there were 15 or 16 people. The next one it was 30 people, and we had to move it out of our homes. The next one was 50 people. Then the information nights were pulling 150 people. It built up really quickly. And we said "Ok, that's fine, but it's not fast enough."
>
> How can we do it faster? The internet! We can harness the power of the full technology in the aid of activism. Why not? These are simply tools that anyone can use. … And that's how the Chilout website began. And then anyone could reach us. If we were on the run, we just said 'Get into our website Chilout.org'. In the same way, the first email newsletter I sent out was to about 20 people – just

> personal emails to friends and people who said 'Yes. I want to be informed'. … And I think at its peak, it went out to two and a half thousand people (Interviewee QS).

Even at a less organised level than public meetings, were all of the private conversations that advocates and activists had in attempting to counter the government discourse and to share their information. The urgency of the task being undertaken in trying to influence public opinion in such a hostile social and political environment, meant that any and every opportunity was taken. The interviewee above reflected on this process of influencing others:

> I do not underestimate the ability of one individual to be of some influence on another individual, no matter who they are. And that's why when we campaigned, we often said to people 'Even if all you can do is talk to one other person, do that! Talk to your friends. Talk to your families'. If you don't have time for anything else, and if you found out three facts that shocked you today, that you think they don't know about, just approach people you know, and say, "Did you know?" … Just do that. It's the planting of the seed (Interviewee QS).

For some advocates and activists, this involved sharing information with their peers, such as young interviewees who had begun this work while still at school. As one remembered, her involvement had shifted from 'just informing myself', to 'writing to people in detention', and then to ' being in touch with an actual person who was right in the centre of this' (Interviewee WS). At that point, she recalled:

> I was like 'Now I'm in. I'm in, and I'm not going to stop until it's all finished!' … Now that I've met so many people who've been through the system – sharing their stories is pretty much what I do. I think that is a big way to get people on side, and get people interested in what's happening. … I used to take the letters … and read them in my class and share them. It wasn't political. … It was personal stories (Interviewee WS).

For others, it involved sharing information with family and friends. [64] For many, it involved sharing information with colleagues, whether in the work place, in

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[64] Another young interviewee recalled his attempts to do that:

> To begin with, it was really full on and really difficult. My aunty, one of her first comments when we said we were going to visit Baxter, was, 'Why are you going to visit them? They were all probably holding guns at age nine!'. And I was like 'There are some really good people there'. It took a long time, but after a while, she started changing her mind. She even met some of the people I visited. That changed her mind greatly.
>
> It was just a general education, not just of the media, but people at large. Even now, that's the biggest problem still. Some people don't even know what Baxter is. I think it's the personal

professional bodies, in religious coalitions, or in neighbourhood localities. Often, the first advocacy work that might be undertaken was within such locations of personal and professional connections. For one interviewee, for example, this meant raising awareness within the union movement:

> I think fundamentally, unions are very much about fairness, decency and equity, and I don't think that just applies in the workplace. And those things were under attack. It was an opportunity to explain to union members why it was a union issue, and to try to go out there and dispel some of the myths. I think we did start to break down some of those myths. Then it was about getting union people who had actually been refugees talking about their experiences. A lot were finding their work colleagues were actually refugees, and if you know that person or you can relate to that person, I think it changes people's perspectives (Interviewee YQ).

At the same time, this kind of communicative action was also being performed at the level of federal and state parliamentary debate by members of the minor political parties of The Australian Democrats and The Greens, by Independent MPs, and by individual parliamentarians in the majority parties. Nor was this work confined to parliamentary debate, as an interviewee, herself an MP, noted:

> We did a lot of stuff in the parliament, in the media, in the community. And we did a lot of stuff behind the scenes. Primarily my role fell into three categories. It was using the media to build awareness about what was really going on; it was maintaining pressure though the parliament; and it was the hidden advocacy that we did. There was no room for sloppiness. There was no room for careless experimentation. You were talking about people's lives. … There was a whole lot of stuff where we got national media for the issue. …We just maintained that pressure. (Interviewee XH).

Telling the world

Not only did advocates and activists 'tell Australians'. They also endeavoured to 'tell the world' in an attempt to bring to the attention of fellow Australians and international human rights and refugee authorities, the international conventions that were being breached by Australian policies and practices. This work involved engagement with various international human rights authorities such as the United Nations Human Rights

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stories, the personal knowledge, and the shift in the way the media reports. People willing to tell things, but not beat people about the head with it, I think, is the big thing. There's forums set up and websites set up, and then people can come to it on their own terms (Interviewee YS).

Commission. [65] Other interviewees detailed the engagement of many legal advocates in specific appeals to international bodies such as the United Nations Human Rights Committee. International advocacy also involved engagement with forums such as the Office of United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR), as another interviewee explained:

> I know the UN system. I understand it well. We go as advocates and we lobby there. … We saw that the linkage between what was happening in Australia, and the international level, was a gap that wasn't being filled. … No country likes to be criticised. Australia got a lot of criticism, and when it's got a significant number of its own NGOs there in the room against it, it's not a good look. When lots of activism started, I thought – great. I can gather their information if they're willing to give it, and take it to the UN. Over the years, we've been giving the information; showing the videos, talking to people saying, 'Detention isn't good – look!'. I think the whole thing is a package – everything from the ferals outside the fences to the people in suits at the UN, and everything in between (Interviewee QE).

Over time, these combined efforts produced the cumulative effect of a body of knowledge held at this international level. Though this did not immediately or obviously alter the situation, it contributed significantly to the breadth of the advocacy and activism on this issue. It also provided further legitimacy for Australian advocates and activists at that international level of human rights and refugee expertise. For, as one of the previous interviewees, argued:

> I think, in the area of advocacy of human rights, you have to be a supreme optimist – that everything you do is the drip, drip, drip effect – that eventually it makes a difference (Interviewee QY).

Eventually, it was the combination of this wide spectrum of advocacy and activism at local, national and international levels which made the issue one which could not continue to be ignored by the Australian government. Gradually, over time, the combined actions of asylum seekers and advocates and activists began to shift the dynamics of public opinion.

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[65] One interviewee recalled her meeting with Mary Robinson, the then United Nations Human Rights Commissioner:

> She looked at those drawings by the children, and just shook her head, and said, 'I cannot believe this is coming from a western democracy like Australia'. That was important at that time, to raise awareness. She subsequently sent her special envoy Justice Megwhati, and although the cynics would say, 'Well, what happened?', it raised the profile (Interviewee QY).

Humanising and personalising the issue

Ultimately, one of the most successful communicative strategies used in this endeavour to shift public opinion was that of attempting to share the experiences of asylum seekers, and the experiences of interactions with asylum seekers. This was often described as 'humanising and personalising' the issue. Such communicative actions were widespread in nature, and undertaken in different ways across the spectrum of supporters. At the core of this communicative action was the desire to share with other Australians the experience of meeting asylum seekers; the experience of coming to know people who were seeking asylum; and the experience of coming to know their histories and journeys to seek asylum. The assumptions underlying much of this work were based, as were the actions of many asylum seekers, on a view of the Australian population as supportive of justice, but ill-informed or mis-informed on this issue. Another oft repeated comment by advocates about their fellow Australians was for example that, 'If only they could meet my friend, … they would change their minds'. To this end, multiple and diverse ways of sharing that experience were undertaken.

It was a response arrived at instinctively on a personal basis by individual supporters of asylum seekers, and one also formulated strategically within large national and international NGOs following research and analysis. An interviewee from one of these NGOs described some of the strategising and research work that took place around this emphasis, where actions to counter mis-information by government and media, and actions to inform the public were accompanied by strategies aimed at showing Australians the human side of the issue:

> Post-Tampa, we decided we needed research on community attitudes to asylum seekers. … That research told us that the best way to change things was through stories – re-humanising people. … People had no concept of the impact of detention on people. Public impressions were informed by the government's lines … in 2003, we decided it would be good for us to do more media/public relations work. We went back to that focus group research, and hired a photo-journalist … to pitch 'good news' stories about people on TPVs and the Australians who were working with them, to local media. It just took off. The stories started snowballing as other journalists picked them up, and it went into national media. … Up until that point, in Victoria anyway, agencies working with asylum seekers hadn't wanted to put the faces of the people before the media. While it may have happened on an ad-hoc basis, this was the first time there was a consistent

> campaign. That, I think, coupled with RAR lobbying, was very significant in creating a climate of change (Interviewee QP).

Some advocates and activists concentrated on communication with Australians through humanising images in public advertisements. Such projects emphasised commonalities of human experiences and relationships rather than stereotyped racial or cultural differences (AAR 2004). A number of projects involving television documentaries, films, plays and literature did likewise. Some others combined street theatre and protest as a pathway for visible interactive communication with the public, at a time when information about the situation of asylum seekers arriving in Australia was still very much controlled by government. As one of these activists explained:

> Our initial analysis was that what was absent in Australia was a voice in the media that was counter to the government. There were people who were opposing the policies, but they weren't getting in the media. The media wasn't interested in showing calm, middle aged women talking about the suffering of refugees. It just wasn't newsworthy to them. … So our analysis early on was that we've got to do this agitating protest and try to get up some sort of counter voice in the media (Interviewee XQ).

What was important with the limited resources available, he explained, was coverage from a range of locations and strategic approaches:

> We were never doing the type of street-level activism because that was the only way we knew how to work, or because we thought that was the only thing to do, but because there was a niche that wasn't being filled … but we understood that was only one part of the campaign (Interviewee XQ).

In turn, groups such as Actors for Refugees used the medium of the theatre to communicate the human stories of asylum seekers who could not easily tell their stories themselves to a wider Australian public. [66] Similarly, artists and writers used their skills

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[66] An interviewee involved in Actors for Refugees explained that:

> We felt that we could do something which we thought actors could achieve. … The theory always was, 'Yes. Information is important, and this information has changed my thinking, but most people will not listen to this information in this form'. But, 'If they sat down with my friend Amal or Fatima, they would understand'. I think when you get behind the stereotypes … people do change their mind. So, for these occasions when they can't speak because they're in detention centres, we would speak for them. That's essentially the theory.
>
> We were working actors, so we wanted to put our skills into place. I can say to an audience 'Look. What I'd like to tell you as an actor, is the human side of the story, this story that's affected my life'. And it might be the story of refugees that I've met in and out of detention. We were saying, 'These are human stories that we know. Often these are people that we know directly. These are

to facilitate the sharing of experience. Jacqueline Adams (2010) has proposed the concept of 'resistance art' for the varied forms of cultural resistance through theatre, art and literature which have arisen in different periods and places as expressions of suffering and resistance. She also proposes a concept of 'solidarity art' which she argues, can catalyse solidarity in that it can make such situations of injustice and suffering ' "more concrete" in viewer's minds' (2010:2). This concept is apt in regard to the creative forms which attempted to express the reality of the asylum seekers' situations.

What impact, for example, did Kate Durham's paintings of the victims of the SievX tragedy have on viewers of her exhibition? Official reports are not able to list the names of all of those who drowned in this particular attempt to seek refuge in Australia (Kevin 2004). Many were therefore listed as 'unknown man', 'unknown woman' and 'unknown child'. In Durham's art however, those men, women and children were no longer simply a number. [67] They were portrayed as individual human beings visibly linked through the consciousness and creativity of the artist with the nature of Australian politics. Adam's concept of 'resistance art' is applicable to Durham's work, and to the work of other creative artists in various mediums, who attempted to make the situation of asylum seekers in Australia more concrete for the Australian public. Yet the concept of solidarity art, I suggest, is even more applicable, since these images not only inform the viewer, but also invite the viewer, reader or listener to respond to that situation.

As mentioned earlier, other supporters with creative talents similarly used their skills to take their understandings of asylum seekers' voices out to the Australian public in the form of art, music, literature, theatre and film. In a similar way to the spontaneous formation of advocacy and activist groups in the community in this period, one form of solidarity art triggered another by offering possibilities for using creative resources and skills in advocacy and activism. For one interviewee who was an artist, this followed witnessing advocacy by actors:

> the stories behind the headlines'. It was a shift away from rally speak. … These were intimate stories (Interviewee QN).

[67] See Durham's paintings at <http://www.metromagazine.com.au/hope/kate-gallery.htm> accessed 21.12.11.

> Actors for Refugees came to our town … and we saw their performance in the evening. The place was packed. … And there were some people from the pub - a couple of local fellows who went 'What's on here?' And we said 'Actors for Refugees'. They said 'Never heard of them. Anyway, it's free'. So they stood against the back wall. And at the end of the night, they went 'We didn't know this was going on. We're going to tell our friends about this. This is bloody terrible'.
>
> So we thought, 'Actors for Refugees can use their talent to get the message out. What can we do?' And we discovered that we were all artists in some way, working in different mediums. So we thought, 'If we get together, could we do something? Could we tell our friends' stories through our art work? Could we have an exhibition?'
>
> It was all self funded, and none of us are wealthy, but we had about 700 people come through. And for the first time in a long time, people responded in a positive way. We achieved our aim in that first exhibition, which was to take our friend's voices out to people. To provide information, but also to show their humanity (Interviewee QK).

Significantly, as in much of this communicative work, not only were these advocates communicating detainees' voices as well as they could in the circumstances, but they were also communicating their own care for those human beings demonised by the Australian government. Playwrights and authors, singers and musicians, and people based in other creative work, did similarly, and a wide range of creative work including books, articles, plays, poems, cartoons, films and television documentaries, reproduced something of the stores and experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the stories and experiences of their connections and relationships with advocates and activists. As articulated in the words of the interviewee above, what was achieved through these multiple communicative strategies aimed at humanising and personalising the issue, was that:

> Suddenly, they weren't a faceless number who was a threat to our life there. They became real people for other people. Not just for us (Interviewee QK).

ENGAGING MEDIA

Over the period being studied, Australian media came to play an increasingly important role in this process. In attempting to counter government misinformation, the media was of necessity an important focus for asylum seekers and their supporters. In order to attract media attention to the issue and to put an alternative view to that of government, advocates and activists represented the issue in news releases and public statements countering government misinformation, and in other communicative actions in public

forums. They also often acted as communicative intermediaries between asylum seekers, and Australian and international media.

As interactions between asylum seekers and supporters increased, advocates and activists were often in possession of more up-to-date and detailed information than were government departments and ministers. Over time, through the protest actions of asylum seekers, and the information communicated through advocates and activists, more Australian journalists became aware of and interested in the discrepancies between government representations and the realities of the situation. Some had indeed been at the forefront of investigations into that reality (Mares 2002; Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Gordon 2005; Byrne 2007). Others, who had earlier accepted government representations of the issue without question or without further investigation, became increasingly aware of the potential scope for investigative journalism (Penberthy 2002, 2003).

A number of journalists would distinguish themselves by their close investigation of the issue, and expose further aspects of it in print and digital media. A professional curiosity was an essential part of this endeavour (Byrne 2007:113). The reality of what was discovered often then became another ingredient in an impetus to further investigation (Byrne 2007:114-115). When trust had been established, close communication with advocates, activists and asylum seekers facilitated such investigation. As one journalist described such interactions:

> The advocates contacted the media generally. They'd been putting out press releases, many of which would be unread or unused. I was just basically intrigued as a newsman to find out for myself firsthand what I could discover. I chose to go up there and visit the IDC as an individual. … Once you went inside and talked to the men first-hand, and realised the appalling conditions they were kept under, it was very easy to realise that this was a story that was being controlled and contained by the government
>
> I thought I would be accused of trying to smuggle in cameras or get information out, but I didn't have to. A lot of people were doing that long before I got there! All sorts of interesting things would appear on my desk. … Journalists generally don't get the time that you might think they would get to research a story. … As soon as it was known that I was visiting personally, then all the information started coming to me from some of the nuns, some of the RAR groups (Interviewee XF).

The connections that advocates and activists made with journalists enabled a passage of information that provided a different account of conditions and events inside the detention centres to that provided to media by the Australian government. This account was one grounded in the reality of the situation. In contrast, as Peter Mares observes of media coverage of an earlier protest by asylum seekers in 2000:

> The media's shallow treatment of the event shows how effectively the federal government had enforced a black-out on news from Australia's six immigration detention centres (Mares 2002:15).

The role of media in humanising and personalising images

Especially in the early part of the period under study, and in the years preceding this period, government restrictions on media access to asylum seekers, had meant that many journalists had become dependent on 'the official view of events supplied by DIMA in Canberra' (Mares 2002:12).[68] This in turn resulted in a predominance in Australian media of government representations of the issue (for analysis, see Pickering 2001a; Manning 2004; Romano 2007; Grewcock 2009:265-266). Specific government censorship had also extended to visual 'personalising or humanising images' (Grewcock 2009:164), in the form of constraints on any 'imagery that could conceivably garner sympathy' (SSCCMI 2002:25). However, as analysis of media coverage illustrates, over time the media came to play a significant role in furthering communication of humanising and personalising images of asylum seekers to the Australian public (Gale 2002; Saxton 2003; Bishop 2003).

From analysis of Australian media, it is evident that dramatic footage of the situations and suffering of asylum seekers, proved attractive for media uptake. In an analysis of Australian print media discourses on asylum seekers from early 1997 to late 1999, Sharon Pickering points out that there were alternative voices across these issues. However, compared with the standard government and media discourses, she observes that 'these were the exception … and when clearly at odds with broader views (such as stories sympathetic towards asylum seekers and refugees), they were only invoked on grounds of human interest' (2001a:183), i.e. they appeared as 'human interest stories' (2001a:184). Similarly, in examining print media in the pre-election period in 2001,

[68] Romano notes that Reporters Sans Frontieres 'downgraded Australia's rating on its international Press Freedom Index in 2003, from 12th to 50th most free country for reporters to work in' (2007:187).

Peter Gale found that in comparison with themes of 'border protection' (2002:5), and ' "boat people" as a "threat" to the national interest' (2002:5), the prominent contrasting theme could be 'encapsulated by the metaphor of the "human face" of refugees' (2002:3).

Narratives and media

Through this process of selection, the media played a significant role in shaping public representations of the collective action discourse. Research analysing this discourse in mainstream print media publications, has identified the greater uptake of discursive frames involving humanitarian perspectives (Gale 2002:1); 'images and headlines of the human suffering of the refugees' (Gale 2002:3); and concepts of 'fellow humans in need' (Saxton 2003:112), as compared with broader concepts of human rights, or global and historical contexts on the issue, which were also a significant part of the discourse.

Gale found the most prominent pro-asylum seeker theme in the media he examined, to be that of a 'humanitarian perspective on "boat people" ' (2002:1), a theme, which as noted above, could be 'encapsulated by the metaphor of the "human face" of refugees' (2002:3). This theme was one which incorporated a humanitarian perspective illustrated by 'images and headlines of the human suffering of the refugees' (2002:3) as well as humanitarian concerns by prominent Australians (2002:3). Within this theme, he observed, there was also an emphasis 'on images of Australia as a humanitarian nation and a shared humanity with the Other' (2002:8). Pro-asylum seeker discourses which enjoyed a much less prominent media uptake were those which focused on 'the rights of asylum seekers' (Gale 2002: 6); 'the pursuit of truth' (Gale 2002: 6); 'the global and historical context of "asylum seekers" ' (Gale 2002:7); and the 'critique of racism and xenophobia' (Gale 2002:7). These latter themes, he observes, were limited more to the margins, being located in the commentary and review sections of newspapers, with very few front page stories and headlines as compared to the other two representational themes' (Gale 2002:6).

Images and media

Similarly, analysis of representations in digital media such as television, illustrate the role of this medium in mass dissemination of asylum seeker issues through a prism of

dramatic image events (Bishop 2003:143). In earlier references in this thesis, I have noted the pivotal role of such images in the conscientisation of many interviewees. Within the footage of the video or television camera, actions such as an asylum seeker family appealing from within an immigration detention centre for the health of their young traumatised and ill child, provided resonating images of human suffering. Similarly, the actions of a detainee, as he dived from a roof into the razor wire of an immigration detention centre, provided riveting images of human desperation. Footage of asylum seeker men, women and children appealing from behind the barbed wire of Australian immigration detention centres for their human dignity and their freedom, also provided disturbing images for citizen viewers.

These images could be perceived as images which facilitated empathy with that suffering, as many interviewees have described. In contrast, they could be perceived as evidence of emotional manipulation and of the unsuitability of these asylum seekers as potential Australian residents, as the immigration minister of the time often argued. In this regard, Thomas Keenan's comments on the role of images in social conscientisation are apt, in that, 'no image speaks for itself. … Images always demand interpretation, even or especially emotional images' (2002:113). However, regardless of the accompanying or subsequent construction placed upon them, these images provided riveting viewing and enabled wide dissemination through television and through other digital media, of the existence of the issue.

The tension inherent in these images for some participants in the collective action, concerned the issue of ' "violence", both real and symbolic' (Bishop 2003:143) which Peter Bishop argues lies 'at the heart of public/media performance' (2003:143). Certainly, asylum seekers and their supporters endeavoured to illustrate within this digital medium, the regime of violence to which asylum seekers were subjected within systems of Australian policy and practice, and to associate this regime with abuses of human rights and abuses of humanitarian values and responsibilities. Supporters of government policy on the other hand, endeavoured to illustrate images of violence by asylum seekers and their supporters, and to associate those images with wider forms of global violence. Therefore, while many opponents of the government policies and practice acknowledged the value of footage exposing the regime of immigration detention centres, some questioned the equivalent value of footage which showed

protest actions by asylum seekers and supporters, because of the way in which such images could become a double-edged sword.

Other tensions developed around the usefulness or danger of publicity for individual asylum seekers' stories. As I argued in an earlier paper, within an Australian system of non-enforceable, non-accountable ministerial discretion which could be sought for individual asylum seekers, their vulnerability was a constant concern for supporters (Gosden 2007:158; O'Neill 2008:119-122). At the same time, bringing publicity to the situation of an individual asylum seeker was often perceived as the only way in which their situation could be improved (O'Neill 2008:119-122). In the uncertain times, the wiseness of particular strategies could sometimes only be assessed afterwards. Although the social action of supporters of asylum seekers focused on both the welfare of individual asylum seekers and on the larger campaign to change policies, actions tended to be judged primarily by the effect on the asylum seekers concerned. [69] There were many instances in which publicity for individual asylum seekers enabled their situation to improve. There were others in which asylum seekers with high public profiles were perceived to become targets for government retaliation (O'Neill 2008:118-120). In the case of individual asylum seekers who gained high public profiles, whether through their own actions, supporters' actions or joint actions, it therefore continued to be a matter of deep contestation within the spectrum of the collective action entity, as to whether this assisted or endangered their situation.

Bishop cautions that in the uptake of the kind of dramatic images that are most captivating for the medium, there is a danger that 'the object of the protest' (2003:149) can become lost, or in this case, also the Subject. [70] In terms of individual asylum seekers' situations, the nature of the dramatic content preferred in this medium and the potential it provided for wide dissemination and exposure of the issue, was counterbalanced for asylum seekers and supporters by the possible retaliatory response

[69] The most controversial instance in which this tension was played out publicly was in the case of the Bakhtiyari family (See Corlett 2005:13-47; O'Neill 2008:104-130; Bailey 2009). See also Everitt 2008 for the story of the Badraie family.

[70] I use this term in the sense used by Touraine (2002).

by government.[71] This concern and fear for the welfare of individual asylum seekers would lay at the core of the most passionate strategic divergences and divisions within the collective action entity. To a lesser extent, but similarly, there continued to be contestation as to whether protest actions provided 'positive' or 'negative' images in relation to pro-asylum seeker campaigns; or whether accurate information on the situation of asylum seekers became overwhelmed by the image rich nature of the actions.

Seeking truth

Over time, more journalists would avail themselves of the opportunity this situation provided for investigative journalism, as well as engaging personally in the human tragedy of the situation. A number would become advocates themselves in the same manner as other professionals involved in the issue. Just as legal professionals had been shocked by the injustice of discriminatory treatment of unauthorised asylum seekers, and medical professionals by regimes and practices which produced physical and mental harm to those supposedly under their care, so a number of journalists would increasingly seek to find, document and communicate accurate information of the situation from their own investigations (Mares 2002; Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Tyler 2003; Byrne 2007; Gordon 2005; Everitt 2008; O'Neill 2008). The continuing exposure of government mis-information on the issue facilitated a degree of shift in media coverage, until more regular media reports began to appear 'about the dreadful effects of long-term detention on men, women and children' (O'Neill 2008:163). As one interviewee recalled:

> By 2003, you could tell there was a shift in the media. Once we started to expose to the media that they were willing participants in this fraudulence, a lot of the media changed. It went from being a reporting job to their realising that something was going on. When they were finally able to go inside and look at the IDC, and they had all their photographs of the place screened and a lot knocked back by security, they knew what they were dealing with. We then had more sympathy from the media that what we had had up until then. Before that, the attitude was that we were bleeding hearts. After that period, there was a bit of a swing around. The penny started dropping. By then they'd started talking to people who'd actually worked there, and while some were being discredited by

[71] As advocate and activist Pamela Curr notes, 'We always underestimated how far the government was willing to go' (In O'Neill 2008:118).

> the government, they started coming out in greater numbers and with greater credibility (Interviewee XM).

DISCUSSION

It is evident that while a wide discursive repertoire was available within pro-asylum seeker discourses, the reception and dissemination of these discourses within the main Australian print media, selected for some parts of this discourse rather than others. Internal advocacy and activist critics have pointed to gaps in the discourse which they considered were particularly inadequately represented (Taylor 2001: Tilbury 2004; Neumann 2006), noting the relatively diminished degree of public discourse on human rights, on issues of racism, and on relevant historical, geographical and global factors, as compared with the more emphasised personalised discourse. While agreeing with their arguments, I consider that these gaps were influenced as much by the Australian media environment of the period (Romano 2007), and by the interests of media formats more generally (Bishop 2003), as by the strategic considerations of advocates and activists.

The pro-asylum seeker representational themes that were most successful in finding receptivity in print media, were those which humanised and personalised the issue of asylum seeking, whether from the personal stories of asylum seekers or from the personal communications of Australian citizens on their behalf. Pragmatically, many supporters strategised correspondingly. At the same time, this aspect also corresponded with the personal experience of many of them. Whilst not sufficiently advancing the wider social justice and global justice discourse which many advocates and activists desired, the uptake in media and public debate of a personalising and humanising of the issue, still held discursive potential in offering a way to question negative assumptions, and in endorsing compassion as an appropriate human response to asylum seekers' suffering. It also importantly offered a discursive challenge to the dominant national discourse, in terms of the way in which humanity could act to transcend and transform national identities.

Over time, the multiplicity of discourse and communicative actions of the collective action participants, functioned to disrupt the censorship that the Australian government had sought to impose. In diverse ways, participants endeavoured to counter mis-

representations of asylum seekers and mis-information on the issue. The evidence which accumulated, increasingly confirmed the worth of that endeavour in terms of the validity of information that grounded the counter discourse. The behavioural role modelling of relationships of solidarity and care with asylum seekers, and the passionate private conversations of supporters with family, friends and colleagues, sometimes allowed these communications to disrupt previously held negative representations and stereotypes. The cultural interpretations by artists, writers and actors sometimes facilitated an enlarged social imagination, which could sometimes bridge the distance between Australian citizens and these demonised others. The communicative actions by advocates and activists at international as well as national and local levels, repeated and reinforced these messages.

However, as Keenan observes:

> … images, information, and knowledge will never guarantee any outcome, nor will they force or drive any action. They are, in that sense, just like weapons or words: a condition, but not a sufficient one. …We cannot … count on their obviousness, fall for the conceit that information leads ineluctably to actions adequate to the compulsion of the image (2002:114).

Rather, he argues, they must always be interpreted sufficiently for a viewing public. This work of interpretation is just as important as the image or information itself, in the battle for hearts and minds in the public sphere. In contrast, the hope which Keenan [72] describes as naive, is that:

> one more picture, or one more story … would force them to stop shrugging their shoulders, or … blaming the victims (2002:113).

It is evident that such hopes were held by many of the collective action participants. This hopefulness was indeed a source of sustenance for many of the collective actors. At the same time, the political naivety of such hopes was a source of irritation and despair for some of the more experienced campaigners:

> There was a view … that if we gathered all the evidence to prove that this is wrong, that would change the government's mind. There's a naivete about that in terms of people's lack of experience in political change. That material is powerful,

[72] Keenan is writing of publicity and indifference by world nations to the killing of Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s.

> but it doesn't straightaway result in change. … They need to recognise that they need to become more outspoken advocates, and continue to be advocates …and continue to find ways to get that message across (Interviewee QF).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the development and communication of a pro-asylum seeker discourse which challenged the dominant government and media representations of asylum seekers, and of Australia's responsibilities towards them. This discourse included recognition of the humanitarian and human rights of the asylum seekers; of the global and historical nature of people's needs in seeking asylum; and of the moral responsibility inherent in being a signatory to the Refugees Convention. It combined corrections to government mis-information with critiques of the discriminatory racist and xenophobic nature of the policies impacting upon asylum seekers. In addition, it raised issues of personal and national values of fairness and justice, and hospitality to those in need. Accompanying this discourse was a range of communicative actions that were grounded in concrete relationships with asylum seekers, and concepts of 'bearing witness' to the affects of government policies upon asylum seekers.

Despite the constraints of the political and social environment, and the perceived political naivete of many of the newly engaged collective actors, the combination of the multiplicity and diversity of communicative actions laid an interpretive framework of information, emotion and experience. This would eventually prove fruitful, when later events facilitated a higher level of public awareness of the potential risk to all Australians of these government policies. However, the tensions inherent in the collective actors' attempts to communicate with the wider Australian public through varied discourses, replicated tensions and divergences within the collective action entity. The following chapter examines these aspects further in exploring the process through which a collective identity was constructed from amongst the multiplicity of perspectives and strategies.

Chapter 9:
Building Collective Action

INTRODUCTION

> There were a lot of groups who came together. … It was a lot of groups putting in a lot of hard work. It's added more cogs to the wheel, made it a bigger wheel, and each has played an important role in effecting change (Interviewee YB).

This thesis has followed the motivations and responses of interviewees, and the ways in which these led them into action. Though an emphasis on personal responsibility and initiative has been found to be an important feature of the social action examined, this chapter explores these responses from a collective action perspective. The verbal descriptions and images that interviewees have given, tell a story about the collective action of which they felt themselves to be a part. An image which expressed many descriptions was that of 'a wheel with many cogs' (Interviewee YB). Indeed, the collective action as a whole was a combined effort of many different groups and individuals – all contributing to the strength and impact of the whole endeavour, whilst also adding their own uniqueness of positioning and focus.

The type and style of collective action which develops in any situation is always a result of the issue around which the energies of the participants are mobilised, the particularities of the participants, and the external environment within which the action occurs. In this case, the issue was one which was both urgent in terms of the asylum seekers' situations and ongoing in terms of discriminatory policies and regimes. From the collective action participants, it required the response of both immediate humanitarian assistance and action aimed at long-term change to government policies, as well as to political and social paradigms. However, the resource base of participants was limited in comparison with the resources of government, and the passion of the participants for change was matched by the hostility of a government aware of the electoral capital of the issue.

As a result, a tension was often evident among supporters of asylum seekers between desires for a collective action entity within which the diversity of participants could

collect, identify, and become coordinated in philosophy, strategy, and action, and the reality of limited resources for such construction when more pressing needs were apparent. Other tensions included divides between reformist and radical orientations to strategy and action, and divides between the approaches of established and new supporters of asylum seekers. They could also arise over the extent of supporters' engagement of energy and time in personal relationships of emotional support for asylum seekers rather than in more directly oriented political and policy work.

Yet, perhaps the deepest tensions among supporters involved perceptions of what priorities and courses of action were considered to most benefit the asylum seeker. I have already noted the way in which a focus on the well being of the asylum seekers lay at the essence of the collective action. Yet, the variety of roles held by the spectrum of supporters, each with differences in sector positonings and skills, resources, and personal and professional histories, could affect perceptions of asylum seekers' needs. These latter tensions required the building of sufficient trust between participants, before strategies and actions which traversed those divides, could develop. Similarly, the absence of sufficient resources of coordination and finance often necessitated the development of more innovative approaches to action. This chapter explores the collective action in terms of these various tensions, as well as the particular modes of collaborative collective action which ultimately developed, ones which often combined traditional and innovative aspects.

THE FORM OF THE COLLECTIVE ACTION

Supporters of asylum seekers recognised the strength that could be accessed from being part of an integrated collective action entity. Many referred to their own involvement as being part of what was variously referred to as 'the refugee movement', 'the asylum seeker and refugee movement', or simply 'the movement'. At the same time, the diversity of input by supporters of asylum seekers; the widespread ethic of personal moral responsibility for outcomes in particular actions; the urgency of the asylum seekers' situation; and the relatively small material resources held by supporters, mitigated against energy, time or material resources being prioritised for the development of a traditional collective action modality. Rather, these resources tended

to be often prioritised for immediate assistance to the asylum seekers, and organised through multiple task oriented networks.

Therefore, the construction of a collective action entity with a traditional type of heirarchial leadership, centralised control, and directed input of participants' time and energy into the development of collective action philosophy, strategy, resources, and identity, did not occur. Rather, strategy was often developed and action led by the urgency of multiple participants' perceptions of asylum seekers' needs, both present and future. Similarly, philosophy and identity were often constructed primarily 'on the job', i.e. in the process of conscientisation and movement into action, and in the process of engaging in advocacy and activist work. These factors led to much spontaneity and innovation in action, and to a horizontal rather than vertical style of collective action development. At the same time, there continued to be a desire among many participants for the strengths of the former more traditional modality, and where there was a more directed input of participants' time and energy into the successful development of collective philosophy, strategy, resources, and identity, this could elicit favourable and even grateful responses from participants. [73]

There are many parts or paths to social change. The urgent need of asylum seekers, the hostility by government, and the reality of insufficient material resources for the tasks required, challenged supporters of asylum seekers to maximise the material and social resources they collectively possessed. However, achieving the task of combined, coordinated or complementary action was fraught with the difficulties of enabling a successful merging of the different knowledges [74] and energies of participants. Such actions therefore often tended to develop pragmatically based on perceptions of asylum seekers' needs; on perceptions of supporters' focus on the well being of asylum seekers; on the degree of trust developed between participants; and on the usefulness of the skills and resources possessed by the various individuals and groups.

[73] This was evidenced in attendance at national conferences organised on the issue by the Centre for Refugee Research UNSW and by Rural Australians For Refugees.

[74] King discusses the construction of knowledge praxis in social activism (1999:172-221), as well as what she calls the 'unconscious knowledges … [of] insight, intuition, emotion and imagination' (1999:223).

THE SHAPE OF GROWTH OF THE COLLECTIVE ACTION

In the numerically small constituency of opponents of the policies, the diversity of this multi-pronged style of collective action played a valuable role in enabling it to communicate its messages to a wider audience. From the perspective of the interviewee quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

> In terms of the overall campaigning, I don't think any organisation can say, "We achieved this!" … There were those groups who had their approach. But if people didn't agree with it, they said, "I'll start my own group!" I think that certainly happened and in a way that's been really beneficial (Interviewee YB).

When people became conscientised on the issue, they often looked to see what organisations were already involved, and how they could best contribute. Sometimes this meant adding their energies to already existing groups and organisations. Often, in the environment of growing urgency on the issue, and in view of the relatively small number of groups previously mobilised, it meant that they looked at the resources they possessed themselves in terms of their skills, their location in society, and their particular focus on the issue, and started a new group themselves. Sometimes this was because they saw a particular gap that could be filled. At other times it was because they saw a way of working on the issue which they could reproduce in another location or from another skills base. At other times again, they simply created an entirely new way of working on the issue. This mushrooming effect of small, independent or loosely related groups starting up in different locations, produced a spread of spontaneous action. A metaphor that one interviewee used for this was that of a horizontal style of growth, with a filling in of areas not previously covered. Like the earlier interviewee, he noted that engagement often took on a specific positioning and focus:

> Everyone's got their own resources, their specialist knowledge … look at it like a ground cover spreading … people have just taken up … done their little bit … filled in an area (Interviewee WV).

The particularity of this form and shape of growth had specific effects for the social action that resulted, and numerous interviewees commented on the spontaneous, independent nature of the action which emerged. The strengths and weaknesses inherent in collective action initiated from within such a form and shape will be discussed later in the chapter. However, as an interviewee observed:

> I think the refugee movement is so broad and so multifaceted that … there are parts of the movement doing stuff as we are talking now, that I have no idea what they're doing. And that's a strength. That's a strength, that spontaneity. They don't have to wait for some refugee organisation to say, "Okay. Let's do this now". People just act themselves. That's an enormous strength, and I think feeds back into the emotional and moral component of this campaign that people are driven to do stuff (Interviewee WN).

THE ENVIRONMENT WITHIN WHICH OPPOSITION TOOK PLACE

An imbalance of resources

The unequal nature of the material resources held by the Australian government and the resources held by opponents of the policies, made for a 'David and Goliath' type of struggle. Adding to this was a societal environment of authoritative legitimation for the policies, which was supported not only by the government but also by the major parliamentary opposition party. The weight of material resources and social legitimacy against which opponents found themselves arraigned, was expressed by an interviewee in the following terms:

> We are independent and no one can silence us, but the infrastructure issues – it's the giant versus the peanut (Interviewee WQ).

The bipartisan support by the majority political parties not only gave greater authoritative power to the government policies, but also lessened media and public interest in dissenting views. The difficulties encountered in even publicising a counter public discourse were expressed by a number of interviewees. As one explained:

> Because the government and the opposition party have pretty much a joint policy on asylum seekers, so there's no argument between them. When there's no argument between them, the press aren't interested. And if the press aren't interested, the truth of what's going on doesn't really get out (Interviewee WA).

In addition, the number and resources of those groups which were already existent and engaged on the issue, were limited in dealing with the situation. The difference between the situation facing opponents of such discriminatory policies in Australia compared to a similar situation in Europe, was something one interviewee was well aware of:

> The thing with Europe is that they do have a number of well established NGOs. The Refugee Council in the UK is huge. You have ECRA and JRS which are much bigger, as is Amnesty. So there are other NGOs you can tap into if you want to, or you can sit back and say "Well, they're doing it" (Interviewee YB).

In contrast, he noted, in the Australian situation, much of the breadth of the collective action began to be built from the ground up:

> In Australia, people looked around and said, "Which organisation is doing? … No one. Well, we'll do it!" (Interviewee YB).

Other factors affecting the environment in the early period studied in this thesis, included the popularity of the policy in opinion polls, especially in the years of 2001 and 2002 when many opponents of the policies first came into advocacy and activism on the issue. It also included the hostility engendered in the Australian community against both those seeking asylum and those supporting them, as governmental and media discourse of the period facilitated the issue becoming an emotive and frightening one for many in the Australian community. Indeed, not only social but political opportunities for change through normal channels of lobbying and 'quiet diplomacy' were limited in an environment so fraught and electorally sensitive. One interviewee provided a picture of the period from the perspective of established refugee advocacy groups. As he described, it was a difficult situation in which to provide assistance to asylum seekers - for financial as well as political reasons:

> The advocacy field at that stage *(when the Tampa event occurred)* was very different to later. There was Amnesty International, Red Cross, the Refugee Council and a number of the bigger organisations like NCCA with established refugee programs … but the government by that stage was increasingly unwilling to listen. … It was taking more and more of a hard line stance on refugees, and it was becoming more of a political issue. … At the same time, the government said to NGOs, 'If you're receiving money for the integrated humanitarian settlement scheme, you can't do advocacy.' That had a big impact. … A number of organisations lost their funding as a result of that (Interviewee QH). (*my insert)*

Tensions between new and previous supporters of asylum seekers

For the newly active, especially in the early 2000s, there was also often disillusionment with the results of both the established advocacy groups' lobbying and with their own lobbying of major political parties. An interviewee who had been a long-term activist on the issue, explained that:

> A lot of people can't believe that the official channels are incapable of dealing with these things. So for people who think there's a real democracy - they go to their politicians and start to write letters, and what they find is that not only are the doors slammed in their faces, but they start to get justifications for that. I think that too is quite a shocking revelation … that the advocacy they've been used to, the quiet diplomacy, the appeals to rationality, perhaps even the dinners, they don't work (Interviewee QA).

The diminishment of many of the usual political channels of influence meant, as another interviewee observed, that 'It took it out of the power structure, and depended on individuals' outrage' (Interviewee XT). From this position, new opponents of the policies were increasingly drawn to more immediate strategies of action. These included the direct nature of humanitarian and social support for asylum seekers. They also included action which attempted to inform and influence public opinion more directly. The attacks by the federal government on advocacy for asylum seekers by NGOs, which limited the capacities of some established refugee advocacy organisations, only further radicalized new opponents. For an interviewee from an established advocacy organisation, this connection was clear:

> A number of the more established refugee organisations were government funded, so how critical could they be when the minister came out publicly and threatened their funding if they didn't fall into line. That had an impact on them, but at the same time, it radicalized what others were doing which made it easier to dismiss the refugee movement as a radical bunch of left-wing ratbags (Interviewee YB).

The result, he observed, was visible in mobilisations on the issue in the immediate period that followed, where:

> It meant that attendance at World Refugee Days went from hundreds to thousands, because it became obvious that something more substantial was required … to bring about change - something more than the usual channels (Interviewee QA).

In an environment increasingly recognised as being 'not a normal political situation' (Interviewee QA), frustrations spilt over between 'old' and 'new' opponents of the policies. This collision was described by an interviewee previously engaged in the established NGO advocacy sector, who observed that:

> There was a feeling that there were two sectors. There was the pre-Tampa refugee advocate sector which are more institutionalised and had much better understanding of the situation … and there were all these people coming out of community and different human rights organisations, starting to jump up and down about refugee issues, but not sure where to go (Interviewee QH).

As he explained:

> It was very hard at the time, to build bridges between the two. They were very differently focused. Most of the community organisations and grass-roots advocates were more focused on the media … whereas the old group tended to go to the minister more than the media. … These people had all the knowledge, and these people had the energy (Interviewee QH).

Tensions between insider and outsider strategies of action

Tensions between those advocating 'insider' or 'outsider' strategies of action (Grant 2004; Considine 1994; Vromen 2005) [75] paralleled these divides between 'old' and 'new' opponents of the policies. These differences of strategic approach reflect the different political options open to groups. From an insider position (Grant 2004; Considine 1994; Vromen 2005) of some possible influence, the development of relationships of co-operation with members of parliamentary parties and government bureaucracies, can be a substantial step towards potential reform work on an issue. This may then negatively affect the associations made with those not similarly positioned. From an outsider position (Considine 1994; Vromen 2005) of a radical protest group, the strength of campaigning lies in the demands that are made publicly, which attempt to raise public awareness on an issue, and to increase public openness to change and the potential for public demands for that change. In instances where relationships of trust had developed, it was possible for differences of strategies and objectives between these two positions to be managed in a complementary manner as part of an overall long-term strategy and objective. However, where this trust did not develop, fear of subversion of valued strategies meant that this did not occur. From the former perspective, an interviewee explained:

> A lot of the new groups came in with the view that anybody who had been working in the sector was clearly a failure. … A lot of groups were very reluctant to take any sort of advice. … While some were very open to suggestions, other

[75] See Grant 2004 for discussion of original insider-outsider typology.

> took approaches which were far from constructive and made it a lot more difficult for a lot of us that were plugging away on some of the issues (Interviewee QT).

At the same time, others in established advocacy organisations recognised the necessity and strength of combining the diverse approaches in ways that, though varied and often seemingly at odds, could work in a complementary fashion and allow a flexibility of approach that was useful in such an uncertain environment. As one of these observed, the differences could be used strategically:

> I do think you need those people who are going to work closely with the government and talk with the department and say, "Here's a better way of doing things." And you need those people who are out there being outraged. That's important, because if the government doesn't think there's a constituency out there that's unhappy, then you're not going to get change (Interviewee YB).

Indeed, some interviewees reflected on the opportunities this form of 'double action' provided, for utilising both 'insider' and 'outsider' styles of advocacy and activism, as political opportunities for normal advocacy channels waxed and waned. As the previous interviewee explained:

> Sometimes we think we can achieve more by saying things privately (*to the Minister)* than we could by going straight to the news. … It's a fine balance that a lot of organisations have to work out. The roles have changed over time. … But there were certain things where the government was not going to move. … We could have those private meetings and say, 'Australia is out of step. Something has to be done here'. But when the government dug in its heels and said, 'No'. … We said, 'Right. We're going to have to try a different strategy here'. And that's when we go back to the activists, and get in coalitions with them (Interviewee YB). *(my insert)*

Over time, such 'combined' though separate strategies were to become a significant feature of the collective action, through cross sector alliances and through strategic role division even within the same sector or organisation.

Tensions around perceptions of asylum seekers' agency and vulnerability

Yet, the areas of tension within the collective action entity that were least easily resolved were those that concerned strategies perceived by supporters to be harmful to asylum seekers. These tensions involved supporters' different perceptions of asylum seekers' vulnerability and agency. These were most evident where it involved asylum

seekers' material dependency on particular sectors, or their interactions with supporters around common political purpose. Within these disputes, positions were repeatedly taken in which individual supporters were adamant that other supporters' actions had been against the best interests of asylum seekers. As one interviewee reflected:

> The end is a shared end. But it's the means, the way it occurs (Interviewee QO).

The actions of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres to protest against their treatment and to raise awareness within the Australian community, were actions which had emerged out of vulnerability and necessity as well as agency, as did their journeys from their own countries for protection and rights (Sullivan 2006; Briskman et al. 2008:28-55; Hoffman 2010). However, when the number and diversity of Australian supporters increased over time, so did the strategic options which became available to asylum seekers through the range of skills and resources of various supporters. [76] Advice on strategic options could vary considerably depending on the particular networks of professional and personal support that individual asylum seekers or groups of asylum seekers were most closely connected with. Asylum seekers were immersed in networks of varying degrees of dependency, obligation, gratitude, friendship, trust, and political purpose with supporters, and sometimes these various networks provided conflicting advice. [77]

The environment of government hostility and potential retaliation against individual asylum seekers (Corlett 2005:13-47; Everitt 2008; O'Neill 2008:104-130) often deepened supporters' anxieties for the welfare of asylum seekers. A number of interviewees observed that these anxieties could lead to conservative advice which was heavily weighted against incurring risk for asylum seekers, and to protective attitudes

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[76] O'Neill has described a period in which there were:

> As many different strategies as there are strands in the burgeoning, but disparate refugee movement. …Diverse new groups have now flocked to the barricades, and they don't always agree with each other. Lawyers want to find a clever way to unwind the government's policy in court. Doctors want to end it on mental health grounds with ever more shocking research. Radicals want to smash it with mass protests. Advocates want to overturn it through heart-breaking stories (2008:118).

[77] Partly, this related to the particular areas of expertise offered. Partly, it related to different orientations towards the asylum seekers. Boltanski's analysis of the different actions produced from orientations of anger and indignation (1999:57) and orientations of 'tender-heartedness' (1999:79) is relevant here.

which were ultimately patronising and controlling. [78] Through such attitudes and advice, it was argued, the agency of asylum seekers (which had been the cause of their initially gaining greater communication and exposure of their treatment) was denied and curtailed. [79]

Conversely, a number of other interviewees reflected critically on supporters whose advice encouraged asylum seekers into participation in specific political campaigns. Here, it was argued that although the overall outcome of their participation could be beneficial for the campaign, the impact on the individual asylum seeker could be dangerous in terms of their own refugee claim process, and traumatising in terms of their exposure to potential violence. These interviewees also argued that information given to the asylum seekers before their decision to participate in such events, did not adequately address the possible negative consequences for them. [80] In both of the above examples, one interviewee observed, what was similar was that the power imbalance in interactions between asylum seekers and supporters, was not adequately acknowledged. [81]

What was also not adequately acknowledged were the differences within the asylum seeker population. In contesting the policies which discriminated against asylum seekers, it could sometimes be forgotten that they were not an homogenous group, apart

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[78] These interviewees criticised the orientations of individual and professional advocates who approached asylum seekers from a viewpoint of :

> "I am going to help you. I am going to rescue you." … that sort of patronising power disparity at play (Interviewee XW).

[79] As argued by these interviewees:

> With that approach, you can't engage with the politics of the situation or the politics of the individual. Yet, a very high percentage of people who leave their country of origin and find themselves as refugees are in fact remarkably resourceful, very determined, and very few are politically naive (Interviewee XW).

[80] As noted by an interviewee:

> Some groups, maybe they've been well meaning or ill advised, but in some cases, don't care … they felt they needed asylum seeker involvement in their political intention to deal with a fundamentally flawed policy … I've seen cases where there has been a disregard for the impact on the asylum seeker (Interviewee QO).

[81] See the research of Hugman et al. 2011; Pittaway et al. 2010; and Mackenzie et al. 2007 on relational moral autonomy in research with refugee groups. This model is applicable to other kinds of relationships and interactions with populations which are both vulnerable and full of individual agency, such as the asylum seeker population in Australia.

from the similarities in journeys to seek protection, and their suffering in the treatment regime they were subjected to under Australian legislation. According to interviewees, for some supporters, asylum seekers were perceived as vulnerable 'victims'. For others, they were perceived as 'heroes' and 'freedom fighters'. Yet, the reality was rarely so simple and straightforward. Indeed, it was possible for people to live both roles simultaneously. It was also possible for them to move, through time, from one role to the other. However, the perceptions and responses of individual and group supporters were not always able to be so fluid.

These tensions reflect those often observed in international refugee crisis situations between concepts of non-political humanitarian aid and political engagement of refugees in bringing their own voices and agency into decision making processes that affect them (Nyers 2006: 125-126; Agier 2008). In writing about this, Nyers argues that assumptions currently made about what constitutes 'refugee identity' need to be transformed (Nyers 2006:125). Similarly, in this collective action entity, inadequate recognition of the differences between individual asylum seekers' situations and needs, as well as their personal histories and desires, was a key factor in supporter conflict over strategy. Because this was an area of conflict in which those with conflicting views all considered they were acting in the best interests of the asylum seekers, it was particularly resistant to resolution. The challenge for the collective action entity was to recognise not only the common situation and needs of those asylum seekers affected by Australian policies, but also to respect individual subjectivity and identity within that.

Overall, where the various tensions within the collective action entity could be resolved through perceptions of a shared primacy of focus on the well being of the asylum seekers, then the collective action was enlarged. Where they could not be resolved, the collective action was more limited in scope. However, given the numerically small population of opponents of the government policies, the most effective campaigns were those which ultimately achieved a pattern of a wide combination of advocacy and activist actions working independently but in tandem for a single focus and objective.

BUILDING MOVEMENT CAPITAL

Absorbing and utilising new energy

The early post-Tampa period was a difficult one for many established refugee advocacy and welfare groups as their normal channels of advocacy access to government sometimes became diminished, and their funding threatened. At the same time, it was a period of growing outrage from many opponents of the policies, and much new energy was entering into engagement with the issue. Pre-existing refugee advocacy groups were relatively small in terms of resources. The crisis environment of this period, and the outrage and urgency of the new recruits, meant that it sometimes proved difficult for them to absorb and make use of this new influx of creative energy.

The relative suddenness with which the collective action entity grew in late 2001 and early 2002 resulted largely from the publicity brought to the issue by particular events occurring in that period. Those newly entering the scene of collective action had not necessarily any prior knowledge of the issue, or previous experience in political advocacy and activism. Some had. Others had not. While a few of the pre-existing advocacy and activist groups had already given thought to the building of social capital and to the building of a movement around the issue, many others had not. An interviewee who had already been engaged on the issue for a number of years in a welfare and advocacy NGO, described a situation of chaos, where the offers of help from incoming supporters of asylum seekers swamped the capacity of the pre-existing groups to easily channel this new resource. As he remembered:

> It was the Tampa that really hit it off, and it never stopped … heaps of phone calls, particularly after the Tampa. That actually hasn't stopped in terms of people wanting to volunteer. We'd been around since 97, but we were still so small. It took us a year and a half to be able to deal with all the offers. … People were coming to us at different points so disheveled and upset, saying 'I've got to volunteer. I've got to visit an asylum seeker or write letters' (Interviewee QO).

The urgency of the situation for asylum seekers, some of whom had already been held in immigration detention centres for years, contributed to the environment of crisis. Yet, the existing structures of advocacy and welfare organisations:

> … weren't really able to draw in all the new advocates who were coming in. There was all this education that needed to go before actually getting together. It

> was quite a hard time in the sense that someone would call a big meeting of all the people involved with detention, and they wouldn't really know where to go with the meeting. Everybody was absolutely charged and wanting to do something. A sense of urgency. But it's a matter of how you channel that energy (Interviewee QH).

These tensions between 'old' and 'new' opponents of the policy were often reflected in tensions around strategy and action. From the former perspective, a long-term refugee advocate described the way in which the actions of a number of 'new' community opponents were perceived as troublesome and inept:

> It's that lack of sophistication that means they are running around with this great big hammer that they are hitting, whereas what they could do is use a little tap hammer and get a lot closer to the nail. It's a legitimate issue they're raising, but by doing it in a way that is so imprecise, they're spending a lot of energy, and they can be so easily dismissed by the people they need to convince (Interviewee QT).

They were also sometimes, she noted, taking actions which unintentionally endangered asylum seekers and their families:

> There was for a time, a big trend of sharing people's stories over the internet, and publishing through email groups, lists of names. Under the old Iraqi regime, I can guarantee there would have been someone who was feeding all that information back. The same with the Iranians … I used to despair. These people have families back home in some really nasty regimes. By publicising this person's name here, it could be putting people's lives on the line. It's done with the best of intentions, but with extraordinary ignorance (Interviewee QT).

This publicity was sometimes part of an energetic circulation of email lists and website development amongst new players seeking to gain more widespread assistance for asylum seekers. Though this incoming energy of support for asylum seekers was welcome to previously involved NGO and professional advocates, frustration and anxiety could accompany it. For one legal advocate, it was a 'two-edged sword' (Interviewee XU). In her experience:

> The support was fantastic … but they were so outraged once they heard the stories … a lot of the time, they wanted to just shout it from the rooftops, and go to the media and all sorts of things. … It was a wonderful movement of people becoming involved, but … I remember a lot of other advocates at that time, we had an enormous amount of frustration. … I ended up having to get off certain refugee email lists, because suddenly your client's details were splashed all over

> the internet. … So that was very difficult to manage. I couldn't control what other people did (Interviewee XU).

From the opposite perspective of a newly converted opponent of the policies, some 'old' advocacy groups were perceived as clinging to a formerly held leadership role on the issue, and as being obstructive of new collaborative endeavours. One non-professional in the refugee advocacy field, who nevertheless possessed considerable other professional skills which he wished to contribute to the area, reflected on his frustrations at these obstructions;

> We're getting very little encouragement. There are two factions in the refugee industry. One is the professional refugee associations. They meet … but they won't take any lead or advice from anybody who's an amateur. The community groups – they just get in and do things. They've got an enormous amount of energy, but they're rather disjointed because of their voluntary nature. It seemed to me that combining the two would produce an enormous amount of symbiosis. Yet we've had rejection after rejection from the professional refugee groups for any idea. … They said, 'We're self-sufficient. We do okay'. And we said, 'But the volunteers say you're not doing okay, and they want to collaborate' (Interviewee QC).

He argued that the scattered nature of the multiple new advocacy and support groups had a lot to do with 'turf politics':

> It's about control … that other groups should defer and check before they do anything. So what happens is that other people still feel the need to set up new organisations. There's this whole archipelago of organisations floating around. … But I must say, things have got better. Maybe in some way, we did influence things. There is more collaboration now and that's a healthy sign (Interviewee QC).

With an obdurate government and a compliant opposition party, the environment of the period increasingly directed new opponents' energies at what often seemed the most important target for change – the Australian public. With the apparent diminishment of political openness to influence, change on the issue seemed more likely at the time, to come from outside of the normal parliamentary channels. Activist groups were often better situated to channel this new energy and outrage into actions such as mass rallies and other events directed at raising public awareness. As discussed in the previous chapter, activist groups supporting asylum seekers had already been pro-actively engaged in the collective action endeavour of building resources of supporters, information and networks. The work of activism in mobilising large numbers of people

for mass rallies and demonstrations and other public events, also lent itself more easily to the job of handling new recruits, than did the very particular work of lobbying government ministers.

Building social cohesion in coalitions

In some states, the building of social capital in the form of broad community coalitions had been a particular focus for advocates as well as activists for some period of time. When crisis periods such as those in 2001 and 2002 occurred, these groups were therefore better placed to strategise cohesively from a broader base of agreed positions and community alliances. A number of interviewees who worked on the issue on a national and international scale, reflected on the phenomenon of cohesion in advocacy strategy as it concerned the two largest Australian cities of Melbourne and Sydney. As one interviewee noted:

> In the culture in Melbourne – there's more cohesion across groups. In Sydney, you've got great people doing things, but often … it's more scattered (Interviewee WF).

Other interviewees similarly noted a more collaborative organisational culture in general in Victoria, which was considered to be paralleled within refugee welfare and advocacy organisational modes. As another interviewee expressed it, ' the dynamics of meetings or coming together are quite different' (Interviewee QV). As she explained, in the one scenario, 'We would plan as a team … identify things to seek support and think around, and work out together' (Interviewee QV). In the other, she explained, 'You come with what you think and you put it on the table, rather than making it part of an interaction' (Interviewee QV).

However, another interviewee also described the long process of purposeful and ongoing coalition building which underlay such remarked upon cohesion. As he explained, the building of such social capital was both a decision and a process, with a long-term aim of achieving an agreed strategic agenda:

> We were an alliance of organisation and community associations that were concerned about the increasing prejudice and government mislabelling of asylum seekers that had been going on since 1997. JAS was created in 1999. … Its main work at first was in the media, responding to prejudicial statements. … But what

> we were also doing was community building amongst ourselves, because we hadn't necessarily as organisations and community associations worked together this closely before. The process was as important as the outcomes in terms of building cohesion in Melbourne among a certain group of players (Interviewee QP).

He described:

> A process of trying to bring all the organisations along together, rather than one or two organisations charging off. … Regular large meetings were a consistent feature. Three or four times a year in the evenings; more or less monthly for working groups in the daytime; and subgroups and developing stuff in between (Interviewee QP).

In contrast, the advocacy structure of interaction in Sydney was described as having a more 'specialised function' (Interviewee QH). An interviewee familiar with the welfare and advocacy organisations in both cities observed that at that time:

> In Melbourne, with organisations like the Justice for Asylum Seekers network … basically their whole focus is advocacy and education. They sit down to plan lobbying strategies and that sort of thing. … The structures in Sydney reflect much more an institutionalised relationship with the government and the Refugee Review Tribunal … Centrelink, Department of Housing, DIMIA. …You're working through the implementation of new policies with government, giving them feedback on what's going wrong so they can adjust their programs. You get a lot of cooperative work done through that with all the groups that are involved. But outside of that, you don't get the NGOs sitting down and talking about strategic direction unless they do it as a one off thing. There's no ongoing meeting for that (Interviewee QH).

In times of crisis and diminished political access for established refugee advocacy organisations, the benefit of a previously established wide and cohesive community structure of collaborative strategising, became apparent.

Building organisational resources

In states with cities of smaller populations, although such coalition building may not have occurred deliberately before the period of crisis action, opponents of the policies were more likely to already know or know of each other. In these situations, individuals and organisations were often able to come together quite quickly in order to provide a more effective local voice and local action on the issue. The process of the development

of such an advocacy organisation is described here for one state, but the nature of its development could easily apply to others:

> Tampa was the time that activated groups and individuals into dissent, and gave them voice in some ways. With other people in Adelaide, we formed a very small grassroots group called Fair Go For Refugees. … And from then on, there was a groundswell from pubic interest. We were really a grassroots, sort of protest group. … From that, Justice for Refugees SA grew, because there was a lot of interest from broader groups about having a peak body in South Australia (Interviewee XB).

The same interviewee also described the way in which in coming together, the combined group was able to develop the resource of a greater authoritative speaking position, as well as to facilitate a public voice for those organisations constrained in speaking publicly:

> It became like a peak body that incorporated lots of church groups, other NGOs, legal groups, and individuals obviously, like academics … lots of groups together that were doing their own little lobbying and advocacy, but would try together to make a more powerful and legitimate body. Which it did. … Also, some of the member organisations were partly funded by the government, so they couldn't be political and they couldn't speak out. So we became an independent, non-aligned group that could give voice to the issue, and that was our main purpose – to speak out against government refugee policy (Interviewee XB).

This scenario of relatively quick and organic growth of both advocacy and welfare organisations in the smaller states, was echoed in other interviewees' comments, at the same time as these interviewees often bemoaned their isolation from the larger organisational hubs of advocacy and strategy.

Creating new organisational models

For the same state, another interviewee described the way in which an established refugee advocacy organisation and a number of newly begun community groups involved in advocacy and humanitarian support for asylum seekers, joined together to create an innovative organisational model. In this case, it involved the established group acting as a background administrative 'host' for the newer community developed groups. From the perspective of the interviewee below, this development produced a creative structural relationship which facilitated flexibility and support for the new

groups, at the same time as critically extending the resources available to both the established organisation and the newly developed community groups:

> We are talking about a different model of coordination … organisations receptive to individuals. It's about balancing the new fluidity with some structure. … Ideally what you have is something that has coordination, without then restricting the energy and fluidity (Interviewee WZ).

He argued that this mode of relationship provided a model for future community action on other issues. As he explained, it enabled the grass-roots actors, while bringing in new energy to the host organisation.

> As an organising model, there are real lessons here. If someone can provide the nest for action, it's a more interesting way for mainstream organisations to work with the community. The thing you don't want to do is kill the energy. … You've got all these people going mad doing all this work and raising funds. In some ways it's like heaven (Interviewee WZ).

It did however, he observed, entail some potential risk for the established organisation:

> It's like having the tiger by the tail as well. Who knows what these people will run off and do? … So that was quite courageous (Interviewee WZ).

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE MODELS OF ACTION

Building task oriented networks

The urgency of the situation tended to focus attention on 'the "emergency work" of ameliorating the effects of the policy on asylum seekers and refugees' (Gosden 2006a:16). In such situations, trust and social capital became forged in the joint struggle. 'What do we need to do? How do we do it? And who has the resources to do it?' tended to be more important questions for advocates and activists than, 'Who and what are we?'. Where it had not already been established, the building of social capital therefore commonly occurred in the process of action. Social movement capital such as trust, networks, infrastructure and group identity were often forged in the process of engagement in campaigns and actions.

With numerically small numbers, but with a wide spread of diversity of skill and resource positionings, many campaigns required cooperative work across the various sectors in order to be effective. This ultimately relied on the making of connections of

trust between individuals within and between advocacy and activist sectors. Those who established such relationships of trust in a number of sectors became what was often referred to as 'key networkers', or as an interviewee who held such a role described, as 'bridge builders' (Interviewee XQ). Since the most effective campaigns were those which included not only a range of skill and resource positioning across the sectors, but also the strategic use of both 'insider' and 'outsider' positionings, the initial development of such trust often required some effort. The point around which the establishment of such trust revolved was the primacy of focus on the wellbeing of the asylum seekers and refugees concerned. Once that degree of trust had been established, such cooperation became a significant feature of some of the most successful campaigns of the collective action.

Bridging the sectors

An activist who understood the importance of making those connections across sectors described the active process of building trust around that focus, and the way in which that could then transcend the reform-radical divide. As he explained:

> Often activism can be quite abstract. … But I don't think that's the case in this campaign though. … We were doing street level activism … but also visiting detention and running a transport roster for a family where the husband was in detention. We were always looking for ways where those two things - activism and practical advocacy intersect (Interviewee XQ).

Speaking from his experience in other social issue campaigns, he observed:

> That really helped us get over the prejudice and suspicions in some of the more conservative elements, and establish credibility. … I think that over a range of campaigns, there's often a struggle to make those intersections with other layers – with people coming from a different political or social place, or coming to it for different reasons. … But I think it's common in the refugee campaign for those links to have occurred quite well, with some exceptions (Interviewee XQ).

Once such trust had been established between individuals on different sectors and different parts of the radical-reform spectrum, it enabled collective action that could

strategically utilise a wider range of effective skills and resources. In terms of a specific campaign aimed at preventing deportations of asylum seekers, [82] for example:

> It was certainly one of the best examples of good coordination between different groups – lawyers, lobbyists, visitors, and activists. … And it was really so successful because a few individuals successfully spanned the spectrum - had credibility at both ends of the spectrum – from the extreme radicalism to the conservative (Interviewee XQ).

The range of tasks involved in this action had required many kinds of input. Collaboration on this action had also required trust:

> Because we spanned it and had credibility at both ends of the spectrum, I could ring up and say, 'Someone was snatched from Baxter yesterday'. … And she could go, 'Yes. I know him and he's serious'. And then they'd be willing to go and knock on doors on the basis of that, and the lawyers as well. So it was a good thing, because those people could mobilise significant institutional resources to lobby and pressure, as well as support the legal stuff. But we'd find out first, because we're the ones who get the phone call and who've got people who've got time to skive off work to do shit (Interviewee XQ).

Maximising expertise

The success of such cooperative collective actions revolved not only around the development of trust, but also around the skills and resources that individuals and groups could bring to the particular task. Multiple networks or 'task forces' functioned around the performance of particular campaigns. Some of these operated within sectors, as for example within professional medical or legal sectors. An interviewee speaking of this process of networking within the legal profession, described:

> A lot of interaction across the board. Also between quite a number of the bar in different states in terms of arguments we would develop. Even from the point of view of presentation to the High Court or Federal Court, we'd work similar arguments or bounce ideas off each other. So, there were lots and lots of meetings and discussion, and telephone link-ups about … what would work and tactically what we'd do. … The doctors did too, and the psychiatrists did. That's at professional levels, but RAR did it too (Interviewee XK).

[82] These campaigns required expertise across many sectors of involvement. They also successfully combined insider and outsider resources, and so effectively covered the reform-radical spectrum of advocacy and activism.

Other situations required a more multi-disciplinary and cross-sector networking of task oriented skills. For this process, she described the development of 'directing groups' of expertise:

> There used to be lots of telephone link-ups across the states. There wasn't any formal structure in place, but there was a keen awareness that it had to be a joint effort. … There was a real sense that there were nub issues. When there was a move about the deportation of Iranians, we had an enormous link-up right across the board, to work out our strategy. There was that realisation that we had to net together each time we had a challenge … some politicians, some of the religious groups, some in RAR, some legal, some medical, some in unions, some agencies. Small really, but a kind of directing group. It was a good example of networking for particular issues (Interviewee XK).

The membership of such multiple task focused networks tended to shift as different difficulties and therefore different skill and resource needs arose. As another interviewee explained:

> It was the issues that linked the organisations. With that, you're clear what the task is, and it's limited in scope as well. The key workers shifted. When the trouble of mental health really started to blow out, the psychiatrists came to the foreground. With different issues, it's other people. As different difficulties arise, different tasks arise from that, and so you link with new people. It's task-oriented networking (Interviewee XR).

'Niche roles' of expertise and influence, held by individuals and groups in many diverse resource areas across the sectors, were thus valuably utilised on specific issues and campaigns. The above interviewee noted for example, that with the legal sector:

> I would ring different lawyers for different issues. If it's Migration Act stuff, I ring a migration agent who is also a lawyer. If I need the politicians pushed on a legal issue, I ring. … If it's mental health, I ring. … We need to be open to talk to whoever (Interviewee XR).

At the same time, direct networking also occurred between those in positions of influence to gain public exposure on an issue; those with the social capital to do 'behind the scenes' advocacy with parliamentarians; and those 'on the ground' advocates and activists with up to date communications and information from asylum seekers themselves. For an interviewee who was a parliamentarian:

> I'd get lots of people ringing me and saying, 'Such and such has happened. You've got to call media. You've got to tell people about this!' … You tossed around every bit of weight you could find. There weren't many occasions when I did this, but I did it on refugee and asylum seeker issues. It's about naming and shaming (Interviewee XH).

Multiple over-lapping networks and roles

As well as such issue based and task oriented shifting networking, another feature of the collective action was the overlapping nature of much of it, with multiple roles played by many of the collective actors. Coombs has described the patterned nature of this phenomenon well as 'a vast mosaic of overlapping networks' (2004:125). As Azadeh Dastyari notes of her own involvement in the campaign for the release of children from immigration detention, cohesion was often facilitated on particular campaigns because of this 'blurring of the lines between the actors' (2006:7). In that particular campaign, in describing the work of a diversity of actors such as newly activated and concerned citizens, NGOs, academics, lawyers and refugees, she notes for example, that 'many members of NGOs were activists, academics were making submissions for NGOs, and lawyers were also the newly activated' (2006:7).

In addition, asylum seekers were themselves often 'key networkers' and organisers. Before the increased awareness of the issue, asylum seekers in detention centres had few channels of communication with those outside. As communication opened through the growth of advocacy and activist networks, those in detention also took a more direct role in networking and organising. As another interviewee describes:

> They called us, and we wrote down what they said, and put out media releases about what they were demanding. … And the day we left Woomera, the people inside … were calling us up on the phone going, "You must tell the people of Australia, that this is going on! And help us!" … And the enormous effort – like the coordination of protests inside detention centres … was incredible. My experience was that all of my activism had been spurred by people in detention (Interviewee WI).

As advocacy and activist networks increased, and more Australians became engaged with the issue, advocacy and activist networks working with particular asylum seekers and refugees came to geographically span the country, let alone the gamut of sector involvement. Within this, overlapping networks built around the needs of particular

asylum seekers became a recurring phenomenon in the spectrum of collective action. All of this facilitated action, as a professional advocate remembered:

> Refugees know to ask other people, and so you would potentially have three or four or five or six people all doing slightly similar but different things for the same person. And that's why the system works across the board, as opposed to hierarchical. So, Circles of Friends would be working on. … Lawyers and migration agents would be working on. … Some people would write letters. Someone would get some money going. For any particular person, there would be all these different kinds of interactions. It couldn't work any other way (Interviewee XK).

CONSTRUCTING THE "WE" OF A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Tensions around differences of messages communicated

Regardless of a diversity of collective action aims, objectives and strategies, a common message communicated by all concerned, was that, 'What is happening is wrong!'. This was a message which countered the government's discourse. Though ostensibly a negative message, its impact was strengthened by the fact that it was the same message being expressed in a variety of different discursive and non-discursive ways; coming from a variety of societal positionings; and being communicated to a variety of audiences. At the same time, the varied aims, objectives and strategies of different collective actors meant that agreement around more than basic messages such as this, or around narrow foci such as particular campaigns, proved difficult to obtain. One interviewee argued that:

> People giving different messages to the media often hurt us as a sector, whereas where we've provided the same message to the media, it works much better (Interviewee YB).

On the issue of mandatory immigration detention for example, campaign messages ranged across the radical-conservative spectrum of the collective action. At one end were campaign messages of 'No Detention', 'Free the Refugees', and an accompanying call by activist groups for a return to a pre-1992 pre-mandatory detention situation for asylum seekers. At the other end, from established NGOs, were campaign messages such as 'A Better Way!' which acknowledged the right of an elected government to enact policy, but which sought alternatives to mandatory detention, and changes within the policy to make immigration detention more humane (JAS 2002).

Such differences of radical-reformist strategic approaches illustrate the tensions within the collective action on the issue. However, as an interviewee from a group positioned at the more conservative end of the spectrum, observed of a group positioned at the more radical end of the spectrum:

> RAC might always be the group that keeps pushing you on to ask yourself, 'Are you doing enough?' For example, we didn't support them on Tampa Day because of their statements to end mandatory detention and to end all deportations. Our official policy isn't to end mandatory detention. We're talking about humane detention. Nor is it our policy to end all deportations. So RAC with ideas of open borders is not where we're at, and it's not what most people are going to support. We were taking a more pragmatic approach that we're not going to get a total shift. Whereas RAC says 'No Detention'. But in some ways, you know, it highlights that structurally a lot of the stuff is still there (Interviewee WF).

Finding commonality from diversity

With such differences and divides along a reform-radical interval, the occasions on which the whole spectrum of collective action came together most strongly were in those circumstances in which all could lend their support through different approaches and strategies, to collectively work on a specific focus. Such occasions allowed the most powerful use of the collective strength. From the perception of many interviewees, the issue of asylum seeker children being detained in immigration detention centres was an exemplar of this phenomenon. While sections of the collective action, let alone sections of the Australian population, could not agree on strategic approaches to the general issue of immigration detention, there was a more unified agreement that the detention of children in immigration detention centres was an anathema. As an interviewee noted of this and a later campaign:

> Forging alliances has been a challenge, and strategies. This is where the 'Children Out Of Detention' approach worked so well. All agencies came on board. It was a clear, simple message, and it didn't matter if you were on one end of the spectrum or the other. The message was the same. The same with the DUA Bill. The message was the same and everybody could employ their different campaigning strategies to it. We brought our strengths to the issue … not so much coordinated as focused (Interviewee YB).

From the perspective of collective action and social movement theory, such campaigns provided a 'framing' of the collective action [83] that more easily gained resonance with the public. On the issue of children in immigration detention, this occurred more strongly than on the issue in general. [84] As another interviewee observed:

> We supported the release of all refugees, but we understood that for the children - that was the biggest gong to beat … a way into people's hearts and minds especially in the beginning, in the very hostile period. Because if you ever ask someone if they think it's alright for children, they really back down on that point (Interviewee QS).

The campaign and slogan 'Children out of Detention' that gained such resonance with sections of the Australian community, fulfilled the requirements of successful collective action framings, utilising 'evocative cultural symbols' (Valocchi 2005 quoted in Noakes and Johnston 2005:11) that drew upon beliefs and values that were part of the community's 'cultural tool kit' (Noakes and Johnston 2005:14). In so doing, it successfully subverted the government discourse, and appealed directly to cultural values embraced by the wider Australian community. These values included beliefs concerning the innocence of young children and values opposed to the punishment of the innocent. As an interviewee noted, the material of multiple reports and clinical evidence was crystalised for the wider population more by images of children in immigration detention than by anything else:

> In 98, 99, and 2000 - explaining what mandatory detention is and why it's wrong, was really difficult. When you say, 'It's locking up kids!', people suddenly understand what's the problem with mandatory detention. It's about locking up children. And this is what it does to them. And suddenly they get it. It's terrible! (Interviewee YB).

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[83] Noakes and Johnston argue that successful collective action frames must 'ring true with an audience – or resonate' (2005:2). The key to such successful framing of a message, lies in 'finding evocative cultural symbols that resonate with potential constituents' (Valocchi 2005 quoted in Noakes and Johnston 2005:11); that are articulated by 'cultural symbols that "appear natural and familiar" to them' (Gamson quoted in Noakes and Johnston 2005:11); and that draw on 'beliefs and values that make up part of the target group's cultural tool kit (2005:14). Collective action frames must, they argue, not only 'indicate what is going on and why it's important' (2005:2), but they must do so in a way that is convincing to a broader public.

[84] Collective action frames with the greatest mobilising capacity are likely to be those which fulfill a number of requirements. These include responding effectively to counter the discourse that is being opposed, while maintaining a balance between this opposition and resonance with 'existing cultural values' (Hewitt and McCammon 2005:34). In addition, Hewitt and McCammmon argue that the most effective frames are those which also address 'a broad range of related problems' (Hewitt and McCammon 2005:34).

The campaign for 'Children out of Detention' showed the discrepancies between these cultural values and the inappropriateness of the government policy of detaining young children and their families in environments harmful to them. It pointed to the failure of the Australian policy to respect the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to the lack of response of the government to clinical and authoritative evidence of harm caused to children by detention. At the same time, it acted as a focal platform for the discussion of societal values and philosophies of generosity and assistance to those in need including strangers, and for discussion of the kind of society in which these are seen as desirable traits.

With the simple message of 'Children out of Detention'; the cultural, social justice and other value dimensions implicit in that message; and the visual images of children in immigration detention which were broadcast on television, this campaign was able to reach beyond some of the political rhetoric and polarisation of the society around the asylum seeker issue, to appeal directly to the hearts and minds of fellow Australians. While it challenged the status quo by the focus of its opposition to the immigration detention of children and their families, it did so within the frame of familiar cultural values of parenting and societal nurturance of children. In addition, the specificity of the campaign focussed on specific human beings in immigration detention. This placed it within a humanised and personalised frame of reference. Again, this made the frame less daunting to engage with for those in the wider populace who may still have been in agreement with the government's overall immigration detention strategy.

Campaigns for the release of asylum seekers who had already been detained for periods of sometimes up to seven years, and campaigns for the release of asylum seekers who were suffering mental illness, provided a similar specificity of focus of the situation of particular individuals or groups of people in detention. Again, this made the frame less daunting to engage with for those who were troubled by humanitarian dimensions of the issue, but still supportive of the retention of the government's overall immigration detention strategy. The relative success of these campaigns reinforced the value of complimentary and specifically focussed action across the spectrum of collective action participants. It also reinforced the value of pragmatic strategies, in the course of

collective action taken within an environment of social hostility and little apparent political opportunity.

THE IMPACT OF PRAGMATISM

Indeed, a pragmatic emphasis on strategic framing perspectives that would achieve the most resonance with intended audiences, as well as on pragmatic strategic actions, would prove to be at the centre of both what was achieved by the collective action, and what was not achieved by it. An interviewee described the potential gains and losses from this strategy, explaining that:

> Some groups have a significant element of pragmatism when deciding what component of the refugee issue they're going to lobby on by saying, "This is one we see as achievable". They have framed it around, "This is what we think we can win" (Interviewee QF).

While she understood the reasons for this strategy in terms of what it achieved, she cautioned against losing sight of larger objectives. As she argued:

> I'm very wary of reducing our vision of what we can achieve. Because then if you achieve that, well then, where next? Whereas if we're arguing for an end to the system, then we can do it in steps, but at no point do the people involved think we've achieved that – like, 'We can go home now' (Interviewee QF).

Yet for much of the early part of the period studied in this thesis, the achievements of the collective action in terms of bringing change to government policy and practice, were at best, as one interviewee commented, about 'holding a line in the sand'. At least, this interviewee argued:

> I think we've been able to stop even harsher legislation coming through (Interviewee QH).

Within such a situation, pragmatism through a continuous re-prioritising of the changing needs of asylum seekers and refugees; a monitoring of the resources and constraints in play; and a strategising in terms of what was potentially 'winnable', became a guiding principle for many groups and individuals. An interviewee who was involved in professional advocacy for asylum seekers in both the period studied in this thesis and for a decade earlier, commented on a distinct difference of approach that he noticed: As he observed:

> In the earlier period, it was the whole kit and caboodle of mandatory detention that was being challenged. In more recent times … the policy changes that people perceived as achievable has narrowed. Now, in terms of trying to advocate for change, it's picking at bits of the policy, not the whole policy (Interviewee WM).

This observed shift in emphasis can be partly attributed to the experiences of advocates in that earlier involvement. As those interviewees who had engaged with the issue in both periods noted, the earlier period had been one of cyclic litigation and legislation, with successful litigation on behalf of asylum seekers being followed by federal government legislative amendments to overcome those 'wins'. Such prior experiences led to more nuanced perceptions of the value of public contestation. In addition, an increased amount of restrictive legislation affecting asylum seekers and refugees had been developed in the later period. As a consequence, the mandatory detention policy of 1992 onwards was now only one of a number of policies negatively impacting on asylum seekers and refugees, as compared to the earlier period.

In a situation where there was perceived to be an overwhelming imbalance of power and resources arrayed against the potential for change, attitudes and strategies of pragmatism provided a prioritised or triaged response to the urgency of the situation. Some situations were perceived as life threatening for the asylum seekers concerned. Some were perceived as involving seemingly inevitable declines into severe mental illness. Overall, the situation was, as a member of the group Rural Australians for Refugees described it, 'a humanitarian crisis' (quoted in Coombs 2004:131). At the same time, the policies which mandated such treatment of asylum seekers needed to be opposed and altered, and the majority popular support for these policies engaged with and turned around. A pragmatic approach allowed a prioritising of what was deemed most urgent.

In addition, in a situation where there was no one acknowledged coordinating body for all of the 'social actors' on this issue, actions and campaigns tended to emerge from specific local situations and positionings. This contributed to multiple small foci approaches. In this regard, pragmatic philosophies functioned to facilitate some hope for change in an even small particular area. In the taking up of these attitudes and strategies, and the consequent exploration of the small openings they provided for social action,

social actors were spurred by their own needs and desires to act for change, in whatever way seemed possible, however small that change may be. Philosophies of pragmatism offered possible paths for action, and perhaps even successful action within the narrow parameters that they provided. In this way, a pragmatic approach facilitated and sustained active involvement. It also allowed an engagement with the issue as a more bounded entity. In this sense, philosophies and strategies of pragmatism opened small windows of hopefulness in a social action landscape which often appeared otherwise hopeless and in which any action appeared futile.

A pragmatic approach also allowed involvement in the issue to by-pass political allegiances. As noted by many commentators and interviewees, people from many political persuasions worked together on this issue. This cross-party political approach was ultimately to prove significant in later achievements and outcomes. A pragmatic approach moulded the nature of the social action into one which was grounded in the reality of the asylum seekers' situations. It provided a model for counter balancing 'traditional activism' with the reality of those being supported. This closeness to the reality of the situation of asylum seekers in turn affected the nature of the social action, facilitating the development of forms of social action which had both a welfare and political intent, and therefore provided a more accessible entity for the wider Australian public to accept, 'particularly in an environment which is very hostile' (Interviewee WZ).

Criticism of pragmatism as a guiding principle

However, this approach also created points of tension with more global approaches to the struggle. For a number of advocates and activists, the emphasis on a pragmatic focus was perceived to have led to a diminishment of a 'big picture' perspective. This tension is evident in Savitri Taylor's critique of advocacy discourse, where she contests from a human rights perspective, the value of a pragmatic advocacy discourse which uses 'the language of humanitarianism, charity or economics when appealing for better treatment of on-shore asylum seekers' (2001:195). While noting that arguments using humanitarianism, charity or economics may be effective in terms of communication with the general public, she argues that such a discourse can ultimately be counterproductive since it, 'reinforces frames of reference that should be challenged'

(2001:195), and thus jeopardises 'the possibility of achieving more significant and enduring change that would benefit all asylum seekers in the long-term (2001:195).

This vision of achieving 'enduring change that would benefit all asylum seekers in the long-term' (Taylor 2001:195), can be seen to underlie many of these internal criticisms. While Taylor's critique is specifically attentive to discursive strategies, a number of other critiques were similarly concerned with the pragmatic focus on short-term humanitarian goals versus a 'big picture' task of defining a vision of systemic change, i.e. one which encompassed the complexity of inter-related issues, and within which long-term goals could be simultaneously pursued (Gosden 2007a:157-159). As an interviewee explained:

> The immediacy of the campaign acts as a real pull, so that the bigger picture, the longer term political needs are not always easy to see. All of a sudden you're confronted with the fact that they're attempting to deport detainees and you become immediately focused into that. It's the urgency of the thing. … People's energies are pulled in other directions and I think the urgency and the immediacy of individual needs means that people don't see the wider picture. I don't think we've built up the political awareness and the momentum of the campaign sufficiently to be able to see it in that way (Interviewee QA).

These advocates and activists therefore argued for the establishment of guiding perspectives or frameworks which would locate the particular situations within a more 'global' perspective, which would also address underlying and related issues (both local and international) which had impacted upon, and would continue to impact on asylum seeker and refugee issues in the future. For a number of interviewees who were former asylum seekers, problems identified in the advocacy and activism that took place on their account, were perceived in a way similar to the movement's internal critics. These interviewees noted the way in which pragmatism and principle often jostled for precedence in movement strategies, with the former frequently overriding the latter. As an interviewee who had formerly been in immigration detention and who had himself been an advocate for other asylum seekers argued, this gave too much power to a government whose policies were being contested. As he observed:

> There was an argument that if we thank the government for doing some good things, they will do more good things. When there was this idea of collecting letters to thank the government, I was so angry and disappointed. I'm very grateful for anyone helping us, but I seriously disagree with this attitude. The core

> principle is that there is injustice being done and maintained by this policy. This policy is as bad as detaining and torturing people, and you want to thank them! It's like leaving someone in the sun, and then they decide to give you a sip of water. You would not thank them. That was against the principle we were fighting about. If Australians knew everything that was happening, they would force the government. It's a double betrayal by thanking them (Interviewee YH).

For another former asylum seeker, also an advocate for others in detention, the choice of such strategies when dealing with government, related to the way in which a democratic society either makes or does not make demands on its government for principles of justice and human rights. Although, he observed of the many advocacy and activist groups, 'I respect all of them. … For me, all the groups were like lifelines, like oxygen, you know' (Interviewee YJ), he considered that in this regard, there had been a failure of determination. As he argued:

> If you are a humanitarian; if you believe in human values; if you believe even in freedom; if you believe in the United Nations charter of human rights; if you believe that people who have not committed any crime should not be imprisoned … then people should demand the government to close these camps which are a violation of the United Nations basic charter of human rights … I would say Article 7, 8, 9 are clear cut - people who have committed no crime should not be imprisoned.
>
> They say, "This is cruel – what is happening! Women and children shouldn't be detained! The detention should be more humane!" But I think that people drew that line – they did not want to go beyond that. That is an inability I think, of the resistance of the people who believe in democratic values. In democratic societies, people have rights to ask how government has tackled this or other issues. In Australia, thousands of innocent people are detained, and I could not understand advocacy groups who say that they are humanitarian groups or political groups and yet, they agree to this detention. They didn't want to move on this. They didn't want to force it (Interviewee YJ).

The placing of pragmatism over principle, he believed, allowed the government to control and narrow the agenda for debate and demands. In the process, the rights of asylum seekers suffered, as did Australian democracy.

AGENTS OF CHANGE?

What is clear is that many advocates and activists struggled both within their own thoughts and consciences, as well as with the varied and sometimes oppositional advice and strategies of other advocates and activists, to find the most effective way to both assist particular asylum seekers with their particular situations, and to bring about long-

term change to policies in practice and in legislation (Gosden 2007: 157-158; Everitt 2008; O'Neill 2008).

Bill Moyer in Doing Democracy (2001) observes that there are four different roles which collective action participants need to play in order to successfully create social change. He categories these roles as those of 'the citizen, rebel, change agent and reformer' (2001:21), and argues that each role has 'different purposes, styles, skills and needs and can be played effectively or ineffectively' (2001:21). In terms of Moyer's categories, the early part of the period under study presented extensive obstacles to the effective role of the reformer, as government policies proved popular with the Australian community, especially in the earlier as compared to the later part of this period, and as normal political advocacy opportunities became diminished. For established NGOs previously accustomed to consultation and some influence with the government on these issues, it was a frustrating time as openings for dialogue became diminished.

At the same time, this period proved to be a more effective one, in terms of Moyer's categories, for the roles of 'citizen' and 'rebel' opponents of the policies. As traditional advocacy opportunities for political influence became limited, advocates and activists turned increasingly to the Australian public and to public channels as the focus and forum for their message. Over this period, they were to slowly succeed in breaking through some of the stereotypic images of asylum seekers in governmental and media discourse, and in humanising and personalising those images.

In Moyer's view, change agents have a deeper and longer term cultural role to play in the process of change. As he explains, the role of change agents is to 'not only help citizens redress the symptoms of a social problem, but they also promote the need to shift the paradigm or traditional viewpoint' (Moyer 2001:25). In many respects, this was exactly what internal movement critics argued was not occurring, as pragmatism was perceived to take precedence over principle. As a number of these interviewees noted, the immediacy of the more practical and personal humanitarian and support work tended to attract the engagement of movement actors more than did the long-term political policy work. Although engagement with the issue invariably 'grew' people's awareness of needs in areas of both practice and policy, an intensity of focus on the

former was perceived by some to result in decreased energy and resources committed to the latter. [85]

And yet, in terms of Moyer's concept of 'change agent', the level of engagement that was taking place in those relationships with asylum seekers at a personal level was perhaps producing a change at a deeper level than a purely political one. This was a change which was often occurring at a personal social level between Australians and asylum seekers. It was then being role modelled for other Australians through behaviour and discourse which kept the issue before the Australian public, but in a manner which continued to functioned at a personal level as well as a political one (Tilbury 2007; Gosden 2005b). Its effects would eventually appear visibly in the influence which it exerted at a level of conscientisation in Australian society. This influence would later feature in political debate and parliamentary events. [86]

DISCUSSION

I have argued earlier that the 'glue' which developed and held the collective action together was a central concern for the humanity and welfare of asylum seekers suffering within discriminatory Australian policies. The 'We' that was constructed within that concern, provided a collective identity that was resonant with people's knowledge of and connections with asylum seekers affected by Australian policies. As a collective identity, it was not limited by nationality, as it included asylum seekers who had arrived in Australia from many countries, those who actively supported them, and those who sympathised with them. It held philosophies and values which centred around respect for the humanity of other human beings, and the moral responsibilities ensuing from that for individuals and countries. It also held an emotional repertoire which included empathy for asylum seekers as well as outrage at their treatment by the Australian government. Within this concept, rather than an identity of 'us' and 'them', similarities

[85] McDonald points to other examples of personally involved humanitarian action which emerge 'out of a culture of urgency' (2006:76). He refers to them as 'new forms of humanitarian action' (2006:76), and records similar criticisms by theorists that 'humanitarianism has replaced political solutions to conflicts' (2006:76). Boltanski (1999) investigates the 'sentiment of urgency' (1999:79-80) in action in relation to the different emotions of pity and anger. Both authors investigate the impact of visual media on contemporary understandings of humanitarianism.

[86] By 2004, in contrast to the 2001- 2002 period, the harshness of the policies would begin to produce a negative effect for the government in some electoral areas (Henderson 2004).

within a common human identity were perceived, were often lived and experienced in daily life, and were expressed within the various discourses of the collectivity.

At the same time, as Melucci argues, individual collective actors are influenced by the broader systems of relations in which they are embedded (1996:26-41). Radical or conservative strategic approaches for example, positioned collective actors differently. So did situations of new or prior histories of involvement in this issue in particular, or in previous social justice or global justice issues in general. Similarly, the particular positionings of individuals and groups in terms of their material and social resources, and their particular responsibilities, affected their strategic responses. A collective glue of central concern for the humanity and welfare of asylum seekers drew supporters together and provided a central zone of shared identity regardless of these other aspects. These different approaches, positionings, personal and group resources, and repertoires of discourse and action, also occasioned conflict as to how best to realise that concern, and often exerted a centrifugal effect on the formation of identity as a collectivity. At the same time, asylum seeker populations were themselves not homogenous entities, and different strategic approaches also existed within asylum seeker populations, as to how supporters could best meet their concerns.

Overall, that shared domain of emotion, experience, identity and conviction in opposition to the discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers under Australian legislation, enabled asylum seekers and the spectrum of their supporters to recognise each other as a collective 'We', against the might of the majority view. However, the area in which the concept and reality of collectivity functioned most strongly was either enlarged or diminished depending on the amount of trust (based on that identity), that developed and functioned between differently placed supporters. Where that trust and enlarged identity was developed and maintained, the identity of the 'We' in which individuals and groups were immersed was enlarged, and the collectivity was enabled to function co-operatively across much larger areas of collective action. Where distrust developed and continued, the scale of identity formation and potential action of a collective 'We' was reduced.

CONCLUSION

The tensions examined in the chapter included those common in the construction of collective action, such as reformist versus radical divides; insider versus outsider perspectives; and professional versus lay perspectives. They also included significant tensions between the perspectives of some of the participants who had already been engaged in support for asylum seekers and opposition to discriminatory government policies affecting them, for more than a decade, and those new to that engagement. The effect of these interacting tensions was compounded by an environment of urgent need of asylum seekers and hostility by the government. Despite these tensions, cooperative models were developed within the collective action, with the power to traverse the various divides. These models revolved around the creation of trust, which in turn depended upon a primacy of focus upon the well being of the asylum seekers.

The achievements of the collective action included the development of models of 'practical' activism and advocacy which combined humanitarian and practical assistance with activism and advocacy, in ways that were grounded by concerns for the welfare of the asylum seekers. They also included the development of collaborative actions in a number of campaigns which spanned the spectrum of the collectivity. At one level, the collective action that was constructed through these processes could hardly be called revolutionary or even radical in nature. Much of its orientation centred around traditional principles and repertories of humanitarianism and human rights, and was welded to what were perceived by supporters as traditional Australian values, principles and identities. And yet, at another level, a radical concept was nurtured in these processes, i.e. of a communal identity of a 'We', which included asylum seekers and citizens within that concept of collectivity. Within this concept, rather than an identity of 'us' and 'them', similarities within a common human identity were perceived, were often lived and experienced in daily life, and were expressed within the various discursive and non-discursive actions of the collectivity. The nurturance and communication of this concept of inclusive identity was, in particular, a radical achievement of the collective action. But what structural change was achieved? The following chapter examines the trajectory of the social and political change that did occur between 2001 and 2006, and the way in which the various constituencies of the

collective action entity known by many of its supporters and opponents as ‘the refugee movement’, interacted in this process.

Chapter 10:
The Refugee Movement' - A trajectory of struggle

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored the process of building collective action that navigated the tensions between different strategic orientations, and allowed collaborative campaigns to be established. It also explored the construction of a collective identity that enabled asylum seekers and the spectrum of their supporters to recognise each other as a collective 'We'. This cultural model of an inclusive identity, and the values it encoded for respect for a common humanity and universal human rights, was used in discursive and non-discursive communications with the Australian public. Through a humanising and personalising of the issue, a degree of change in public attitudes was facilitated, beyond political rhetoric and stereotypic representations.

Achieving political reform was a more difficult task, and would be influenced by external forces and events as much as by the work of the collective actors. This chapter examines the degree of political change that was achieved in the period studied. It traces the trajectory of the collective action between 2001 and 2006, and documents the turning points named by interviewees. In the early years of the period studied, in terms of changing policies and practice, a defensive holding pattern was described by many interviewees. However, by 2004, shifts in public opinion and the actions of individual parliamentarians facilitated possibilities for reform. In 2005, these possibilities were furthered by the exposure of instances of wrongful immigration detention, and a degree of change in policies and practices was achieved. In a common pattern of collective action entities, a relative quiescence of activity was then observed. However, towards the end of the period under study, as the reintroduction of harsher policies again appeared likely, an effective re-mobilisation of the collective action campaigns occurred.

During the various phases of the period, the shifting political and social environment differentially favoured the actions of various parts of the collective action entity. The chapter examines the effect of these shifts in external opportunities and constraints upon

the collective action campaigns. Overall, some success was achieved in bringing a degree of reform to discriminatory policies and practices. Given the discrepancy of resources between the supporters of asylum seekers and the government, this was a remarkable achievement. However partial and temporary they might prove to be in the future, their achievement in this period has many lessons to impart.

THE MOVEMENT

As Randall Collins describes it, 'social movements … are crescive, emergent phenomena' (2001:27). For a number of interviewees, especially for those involved intimately in political activism for the first time, this was their own experience – of being immersed in a rise of social action which seemed to almost propel itself and them from the moral outrage and passionate disagreement with Australian government policies towards asylum seekers. It is perhaps from the experience of this visceral phenomena, this rush of energy for change, that many participants began to identify with that social action as a social movement, variously called 'the movement' or 'the refugee movement', and to perceive themselves as part of this larger entity of other similarly conscientised and energised Australians. In addition, when particular segments of the collective action actively promoted a cohesive social movement identity through discourse, email newsletters and national conferences, [87] this was appreciatively responded to not only by those situated within those particular segments, but by much wider numbers of social actors involved in the collective action.

Despite the participants' own descriptive term, in this thesis I have chosen to use the term collective action for the various discourses and actions engaged with in attempting to bring change to policies and practices impacting upon asylum seekers. It is obvious that this term would not be as valuable a strategic framing and mobilising tool, compared with the more resonant descriptive frame of a 'movement'. It certainly does not convey the same image of energy and action, nor does it have the same connotations in terms of endurance, cohesiveness, force and effectiveness. Melucci, amongst other theorists, has been rigorous in defining the attributes which collective action must meet in order to be defined as social movements (Melucci 1981:176, 1996:13-41), and I have

[87] This process was particularly evident in mobilisations around national protest actions by groups such as RAC and RRAN; through the Freedom Bus campaign; in the email newsletters of the groups RAR and Chilout; and in the national conferences organised by RAR and CRR.

demonstrated in an earlier article, the way in which this particular collective action meets those requirements (Gosden 2006a). However, I have preferred the more generic concept when analysing the social action of the participants, and the ebb and flow of energy and strategy, diversity and cohesion, opportunity and constraint, and greater and lesser visibility. This has especially been so, since my analysis of this particular collective action is situated within the context of global-local connections and contradictions. However, in this chapter, I use the term by which many (but not all) participants referred to their own social action, i.e. as part of a social movement, as I trace historically a traditionally analysed pattern of social movement emergence, maintenance, and potential success or failure over time. The chapter therefore follows the trajectory of the 'refugee movement' through the period from late 2001 to late 2006, as the opponents of the government policies struggled to bring change to policies and practices.

2001-2004: 'HOLDING A LINE IN THE SAND' AGAINST EVEN HARSHER LEGISLATION

Interviewees had named a number of events as turning points in the campaign to inform the Australian public, and to bring change to Australian policies affecting asylum seekers and refugees. Many of the named turning points for this period, as explored in the previous chapter, involved the opening of the segregated worlds of asylum seekers and citizens to each other; the building of zones of common humanity between them; and communications to the Australian public and to the international community. At the same time, as the years passed, the situation of asylum seekers continued to worsen, with some asylum seekers having already been held in detention for many years. Mental deterioration had become increasingly apparent amongst immigration detention populations, and increasing numbers of incidents of self harm had been documented in immigration detention centres. A number of those deported had been documented as having been returned to countries where they faced danger. Some children had spent all of their early childhoods in immigration detention centres. In addition, the impact of these experiences had been increasingly documented by researchers and in legal actions.

The previous chapter has documented the growth surge of the movement in the early 2000s. However, in terms of change in policies and practices which were being

opposed, achievements during this period were at best, as one interviewee commented, about 'holding a line'. At least, this interviewee argued:

> I think we've been able to stop even harsher legislation coming through (Interviewee QH).

The nature of the struggle in this period, against the superior resources and legitimation of the government, is captured in Coombs' description:

> Good people. Good ideas. But they are not going to shift this Government. And the Opposition is not much better … futility overwhelms me (2004:130).

> In such a situation, a number of interviewees not surprisingly noted the comparatively reactive nature of much of the collective action that ensued. As one observed:

> The movement itself has in the past been so reactive. It's crisis management. And sure you get results, but you also dissipate a lot of energy (Interviewee QS).

This aspect was understood by interviewees to be a consequence of the urgent nature of the assistance required by asylum seekers affected by Australia's policy, as well as of the imbalance of power and resources between the government and movement. [88] However, as Coombs observed, it was paralleled by very real effects on the opponents of the policies:

> We're being worn down and the Government knows all it has to do is out-wait us, wait till this people's movement dissolves from weariness and disillusion and apathy takes over (2004:130).

In terms of social movement trajectories, the period had witnessed a spontaneous rise in late 2001 and early 2002 in advocacy and activism which was opposed to Australian policies discriminating against onshore asylum seekers (Coombs 2004; Gosden 2005a, 2006a, 2007b:59; Mares and Newman 2007:xii). This added significantly to the efforts of those who had long been engaged in this task. The ethos of this period though, for social actors who opposed these policies and formed part of this social movement for change, is still best represented in Coombs' words:

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[88] As an interviewee observed:

> We felt that no matter how much energy we put into it, we weren't able to shift a government that had a very firm view of the politics of asylum seekers, and was prepared to use them as political pawns. They understood what the politics were and the political advantage they derived from it (Interviewee YR).

> We must keep going because there is no alternative. We must keep doing what we can (2004:131).

A Just Australia

In terms of social movement trajectories, this was also the period in which the desires of a number of supporters of asylum seekers for the formation of a new advocacy group which could have a national reach and exert a more powerful influence on the situation, were engaged with in the appearance of the national campaign A Just Australia (AJA). [89] [90]

Although the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) had been the peak organisation for refugee advocacy in the country for many years, the sudden influx of new advocacy groups and individuals had brought different energies and expectations to the climate of advocacy and activism for asylum seekers. With the increasingly restricted opportunities for effective lobbying of government by established 'insider' organisations such as RCOA, and the emotionally charged nature of the political and social environment, advocacy representations by RCOA were sometimes perceived, especially in the eyes of some newer advocates and activists, as 'fairly passive' (Interviewee YR) in terms of changing government policies and practice.

A Just Australia, which defined its role as a national refugee advocacy organisation which would complement the work of other organisations, [91] appeared to have the

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[89] This campaign was developed by a newly formed coalition Australians for Just And Fair Refugee Programs (AfJRP).

[90] A number of interviewees especially in geographical areas outside of the two most populated Australian states of New South Wales and Victoria, described their eager anticipation of the value of such a coalition. The coordination and resources which such a group was envisaged as providing, was especially perceived as being able to assist advocates and activists in geographically dispersed situations.

[91] At the public launch of the coalition, its role was defined as:

> A national refugee advocacy organisation … to complement and support the outstanding work being done by many organisations, communities and people in generally state or local community-based programs' (AfJRP 2002).

In turn, the coalition's missions and objectives were defined as including:

> Building national community support for our goals
> Promoting the exchange of ideas, information and informed and constructive debate on refugee policy and practice
> Cooperating with, supporting and resourcing organisations who share our aims
> Developing, fostering support for and advocating alternative policy models and

potential to fulfill the role desired by many of the new advocates and activists, i.e. of a coalition which would provide more publicly visible national advocacy as well as coordination and financial assistance in the struggle. Yet despite auspicious beginnings, the magnitude of the task of managing what was described as 'a coalition of coalitions' (Interviewee YR); the reality of financial constraints which became apparent within a year of commencement; and the limited energies which advocates who were already fully engaged in assisting asylum seekers through the activities of their own groups, could devote to the coalition, soon became apparent.

Apart from a small number of long established refugee, human rights and church sponsored organisations, the work of many groups was performed on a voluntary basis. A large proportion of energy was also necessarily invested by these individuals and groups in the local urgent humanitarian needs of asylum seekers. All of these factors therefore affected the capacity of individuals and groups around the country to devote time and energy to the new national coalition. As one interviewee observed:

> You fantasised about a coherent, consistent group, you know – that the combined roar might be louder than the many individual ones, but it was terribly hard to produce. I think AJA tried to be an umbrella organisation, but nobody they were umbrella-ing was a funded organisation. Well, some were, but a lot weren't. There wasn't the time or energy to further AJA's projects as powerfully as we furthered the projects we were working on. It was kind of – do what your energy can, and nothing else fits (Interviewee XL).

For these same reasons, there was also a lessened capacity or willingness to invest energy in unsatisfactory arrangements with other groups. In the perception of a number of interviewees, while the timing and conditions for the emergence of such a national coalition had been perfect, the implementation had been less so, especially in regard to the style of collaborative communication which individuals and groups across the

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> Seeking funding for our work (AfJRP 2002).

And in terms of supporting the existing work of advocates and activists across the country, it was envisaged that the coalition would:

> Create a national linkage between the organisations working towards similar goals.
> Commission research on solution-oriented policy alternatives as they are identified and seek to popularize those policy alternatives through campaigning and accessing of networks for discussion and debate.
> Lobby political decision-makers for the introduction of policy alternatives and
> Attract and coordinate new sources of funding for refugee advocacy work (AfJRP 2002).

country, who were acting fairly autonomously and often at great personal cost, expected of such a coalition.

These tensions contributed to a subsequent falling away of some of the grass-roots support which had heralded the launch of the national coalition. Other factors included the ever-present challenges of geographical distance; the 'turf politics' of pre-existing groups and the tensions created within those internal politics by the emergence of the coalition; the disjunctions between the preferred strategies and directions of groups within the coalition; the financial constraints which the coalition began to experience and the effect of that upon its interactions with other advocacy groups; the fact that for many organisations in the coalition, refugee advocacy was not their 'core' business; and perhaps most importantly of all - an original level of unrealistic expectations. [92]

To some extent, the coalition can be seen as representative of the state of the collective action as a whole - in that it was formed within urgent desires for a national coordinated entity which could bring adequate attention and strategic and financial resources to the struggle. Yet, such an outcome was extremely difficult for any opponent of these policies to achieve, given the political and social environment of the period. Intersecting influences and agendas often resulted in movement dialogue at cross purposes. [93] In addition, disjunctive perceptions of the coalition had sometimes resulted from the multiple influences on the creation and development of the coalition, as well as from the expectations which had been projected onto it by various movement actors. While official coalition statements such as the 2002 launch speech had provided a number of objectives, it is also apparent that different aspects could be variously prioritised by

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[92] As an interviewee observed:

> In part, I think, we had created expectations that were unfulfillable. Because of a combination of the people who were involved, there was a perception that we had very deep pockets, and that we were going to be able to fund many of these organisations with whom we were meant to be collaborating. When it became apparent that we didn't have the money to do that beyond relatively token amounts, I think that began to disillusion people. So a combination of that and the other factors meant that people began to think, "Well, this is not quite what we hoped it would be" (Interviewee YR).

[93] As another interviewee remembered:

> I spent a lot of time attending meetings by people like A Just Australia and others who were trying to pull all these disparate groups together and have some kind of national action. And they failed dismally. They were talk-fests where we went over the same things over and over again. There were always disjunctions between the types of actions that people thought were appropriate or inappropriate (Interviewee WC).

member individuals and groups. [94] As financial constraints began to impact upon the coalition, the coalition could no longer hope to be 'all things to all people'.

At the same time, through the formation of the coalition, with the wide media publicity that it attracted from its high profile individual patrons and organisational support, and its effective links with the arts and media community, thousands of new people had been brought into support for the issue. These remained as individual AJA members, largely unaffected by changes in the relationship of the coalition with the wider advocacy sector. The coalition had therefore succeeded during this period in reaching a larger audience of Australians who had not been engaged by the previously existing groups. In addition, it had developed a range of significant information and social capital resources including a high media profile [95] and patrons [96] as well as:

> A website that people looked to, an acknowledged role in lobbying that gave us access to some key people, a clear policy position, access to some quality research, access to international networks, and knowledge about human rights issues (Interviewee YR).

In affect, the organisation had established its own niche within the collective action 'wheel'. However, as one of the previous interviewees noted:

> AJA became progressively … isolated from the grass-roots. There was a sense of a failure of collaboration, so that we weren't able to support each other in the way that we originally conceived the campaign would do. But I don't believe in many respects that it diminished the value of what we were doing, though it certainly changed the style of our operating (Interviewee YR).

While the coalition would later (in 2005) make a renewed attempt at a collaborative style of engagement with sectoral allies, by this time, there had already been some dropping away of the level of intense engagement of community advocates and

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[94] For example, while the focus of local community groups with few material resources and perhaps entirely dependent on voluntary labour, was often on the creation of national linkages and resource infrastructure to assist their work with asylum seekers, other more well-resourced groups were more strongly focused on other aspects of the coalition's role such as the development of policy alternatives and the campaigning and lobbying role around that.

[95] As one of a number of interviewees mentioned:
It got a high media profile and it reached a conservative audience that hadn't been concerned about the issues (Interviewee QP).

[96] See <www.ajustaustralia.com/who/patrons.php>.

activists, and of the hopes which had initially been attached to the national coalition. In the desperate times of the period, the development of the desired national coordinating and resourcing body, had proved to be a difficult enterprise. For many movement actors in this period, the experience reinforced an understanding that especially in periods of urgent needs when demands on time and energy were already over-extended, a return to a focus on the urgent 'emergency work' was more important. From what was perceived by many advocates and activists as the apparent failure to produce a 'combined roar' through the coalition, there also occurred a reinforcement of the comparative success of the existent movement style of a 'many spokes in the wheel' approach. This gave further impetus to the default position of partnerships and conjunctions which had already proved themselves to be successful, with 'people coming together on very particular issues' (Interviewee WC).

2004: CRACKS IN THE EDIFICE

2004 was to be a year of changing dynamics – of gains and losses and possibilities for asylum seekers and their supporters. Shifts in public opinion indicated some lessening of the public support previously existent for the government's approach to asylum seekers, and in an election year this appeared to manifest itself in a mixture of government approaches. For opponents of the policies, improvements were noted in the actual implementation of policies with an increased number of asylum seekers released from detention centres (usually occurring quietly without publicity). At the same time, there was a continuation of the government's previous 'hard-line' approach particularly in the cases of asylum seekers with a more public profile. The contradictory (or strategically complementary) nature of these approaches was combined in this period with media statements from the Minister of Immigration seemingly illustrating a softening of policies, but with the detail of these initiatives proving on later examination by advocates, to be not so beneficial.

These mixed approaches appear to indicate that the movement had begun to exert enough influence on public opinion to have made it a force whose influence needed to be more explicitly countered and neutralised by government action. As Melucci notes, in terms of collective action and social movements, a conflict, as he has defines it, is 'a struggle between two actors seeking to appropriate resources regarded by each as

valuable' (1996:22). In this case, the struggle was around political and cultural resources, namely public opinion and particular societal values. As an interviewee explained:

> There's a philosophy of life which is narrow, self centred, Australia centred. It's about saying we look after our own interests and do not go beyond that. That leadership is being presented by the government (Interviewee WB).

It was this struggle between values that was at stake, he argued. It was 'not only about the poor people who are caught up in it' but about 'an Australian future, in a sense a human future … the human value there'. As he observed:

> That's where I see the big picture problem in the asylum seeker stuff. The small picture is, of course, that it's crucifying each one of those asylum seekers for fleeing persecution (Interviewee WB.

Social movement theorists Marx and McAdam have observed that interaction between social movements and their opponents 'resembles a giant chess match' (1994:109). In this regard, in this period government discursive attacks on those sympathetic to asylum seekers (especially in regard to responses of empathy and compassion), and dismissal or denial of research evidence which countered the government position, continued. At the same time, a number of medical professionals became aware of more concerted government actions to discredit research findings which detailed mental health harm from government policies and practices (O'Neill 2008:155-160).

In policy literature, the role of expert opinion has been validated as one which can facilitate the development of innovative policy which balances stability and learning (Considine 1994:252-272). Yet, the government response to increasing evidence of the harmful nature of its asylum seeker policies had been to ignore, deny or denigrate this body of research (Steel et al. 2004: 659-687). In an article in 2004, medical researchers Zachary Steel, Sarah Mares, Louise Newman, Bijou Blick and Michael Dudley pointed to 'the systemic attempt on the part of the Australian federal government, to minimise, trivialise, and deny the alleged mental health harms associated with protracted immigration detention' (Steel et al. 2004: 668. As one of those involved, commented in an interview:

> We had most impact when we formed our big alliance around the HREOC inquiry with the AMA and the medical colleges, because they're fairly conservative mainstream bodies that have a lot of impact with media and a hearing with government. But when it became apparent the government didn't like what we were saying, it suddenly stopped. There have been some remarkable attempts by the immigration department to discredit the work we've done – pages on the website, personal attacks, things I've never come across before - all done by people with no qualifications to say what they're saying, so quite remarkable (Interviewee QD).

The contrast with the innovative policy development model proposed by policy theorists such as Mark Considine in which there are 'rich information exchanges … and an ideology or culture of trust and commitment' (1994:269), could not have been further from the actuality of the experiences of professionals whose research findings ran counter to government discourse. [97] As Considine allows, 'an already existing regime of policies and practices creates a dominant mind-set and a pattern of vested interests which must be confronted in any strategy for change' (1994:254). A decline in federal government acceptance of advocacy opinion not in agreement with government positions, had been remarked upon in regard to a number of issues during the decade of LNP governance (Hamilton and Maddison 2007). However, the government challenge to the findings of these medical researchers moved further than simply their exclusion from policy development. As quoted by O'Neill (2008), and as articulated in early 2005 in media outlets, a psychiatrist involved in this research recounted a mid 2004 conversation with an immigration department staffer who told her:

> "We're getting organised and we're going after that so-called research" (O'Neill 2008:159).

O'Neill continues the account:

> Soon after, Professor Derrick Silove and Zachary Steel become the targets of complaints of unethical research by a Sydney psychiatrist. Despite having no background in either research or detention centres, Dr. Doron Samuell produces a report which concludes the research by Steel and others is flawed by political bias.

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[97] As the previous interviewee observed:

> Your question about whether they listen to expert knowledge – no, they don't want to. It's very difficult for professionals, because normally people listen. You go to court, you're the expert witness, you're meant to know something to bring to bear on the issues. It's been a very novel and sobering experience. … They listen to experts who agree with them. So, they have some tame experts (Interviewee QD).

> … The complaints against the researchers are all dismissed by the University of New South Wales (2008:159).

By early 2005, media outlets reported the Department of Immigration as disclosing a DIMIA payment for Dr. Samuell's report (Kirk 2005; Metherell and Marr 2005) though denying a campaign of discreditation. As one advocate remarked in terms of government responses to these and other researchers challenging government policies on asylum seekers: 'Look at where the flak is focused and you'll know what actions are being most effective' (Gosden: Participant Observation at seminar Policy, Politics and Other Aspects of Mental Health and Human Rights in Australia, June 2005).

Significantly, a campaign of discreditation against a movement distinguished by its multiplicity and diversity, was a much more difficult enterprise than would have been the case for a social movement more centrally and hierarchically structured. The multiplicity and diversity of the movement meant that attacks against particular groups or individuals did not de-stabilise the movement as a whole, in that it was not dependent on 'a leader' or on one leadership organisation. Rather, individual groups and individuals were able to be initiate their own actions. As an interviewee remarked in regard to the phenomenon of a social movement with multiple faces rather than one particular recognised public face:

> That's good. It shows it's strong without that - that there are many powerful advocates. Everyone is a strong advocate. Sometimes there's great value in having one spokesperson, but there's some fantastic strength having many powerful people able to do that work (Interviewee QF).

Certainly, this diversity made campaigns of discreditation more challenging endeavours for the state than they might otherwise have been.

Changes in implementation of policy

Even before 2004 however, changes were already beginning to be observed by advocates and activists. A number of interviewees had regarded the 2003 government change of immigration minister from MP Phillip Ruddock to Senator Amanda Vanstone as an event of significance which signalled a shift of government approach from an ideological stance to one which was more pragmatic. As an interviewee noted in 2004,

although changes were not occurring in the policy legislation, they were occurring in its implementation:

> Officially, the government has not moved at all. Unofficially, it's clear that they have. Vanstone, without signalling it, has fairly systematically made decisions in favour of people who would otherwise still be in detention. A lot more were released – admittedly on these awful bridging temporary visas. But they're not still detained, and she's intervened on a number of occasions in ways that Ruddock didn't and wouldn't. I think the movement has had an affect on the government's desire to be seen as a little more flexible and a little more humane (Interviewee QG).

Other interviewees similarly perceived the contradictions between some 'softening' in the implementation and practice of the policies, at the same time that the policies themselves had not changed in legislation:

> While it still looks like a hard line policy on the surface and there are still hard line decisions being made, what the government is trying to do is rid itself of these residual cases that are causing it trouble. I think it's more pragmatic now. If it had a face saving way out, it would take it. While it assumed a populist stance during the 2001 elections, if you look at the policy, it doesn't make sense now (Interviewee QH).

This phenomenon was noted as one of the features of the various shifts and interactions that had occurred over time between advocates, activists and government, and was marked by an increasing move by some of the 'new' advocates [98] into 'quiet lobbying'. [99]

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[98] An interviewee reflected that:

> It became increasingly clear that a number of advocates were able to call up someone in DIMIA and advocate a lone case. And that's how we all began to work. Because we couldn't change policy, we could only affect practice by putting forward a case of concern. And that's the way we began to operate. It was a realisation that policy couldn't be affected under this government, and the only way that we could in fact affect change was to advocate for individual cases and groups (Interviewee YN).

[99] O'Neill documents the 'insider' access available to some advocates from personal contacts with government members and ministers including the Prime Minister (2008:120-122). But, as she notes, these 'links to the government elite were not available to everyone' (2008:122). An advocate interviewed by O'Neill observed:

> He would say 'Oh, you can do it quietly, you can get people out the back door". Well, three might come out that way, what about the other 500? I still don't hold with that and anyway it was wrong. The policy was wrong and when something is so evil, it has to be blown apart (O'Neill 2008:122).

At the same time, exclusion of advocates from influence in avenues of appeal for individual asylum seeker or groups of asylum seekers was another outcome perceived to result from public criticism of government policies. As a consequence, an interviewee outlined the direct effect of this on the mixture of advocacy and activism that she personally undertook:

> My dilemma is that I spend so much time writing to the Minister on behalf of 417B applicants. My name is in front of her. It's known. So I don't dare write 'Letters to the Editor' under my own name. I don't want to do anything to jeopardise the case of the refugees I'm dealing with. I don't demonstrate and I don't write to the paper. We're dealing with people's lives, and if you've spent weeks preparing a case, you don't want some silly thing to affect that. You don't want them to say "Why do you listen to what she says when all she does is complain about policy, rather than working within the policy'. I feel it is a drawback for me, and I think a number of us feel the same way (Interviewee WO).

Changes in the direction desired by advocates when they occurred for individual asylum seekers, therefore often occurred 'quietly' in such a way that the overall nature of the regime remained as a public face to the policy, including the retention of the legislative basis for the policies. Government strategies seemingly rewarded 'quiet lobbying' and 'behind the scenes' negotiations and appeals, at the same time as seemingly punishing public exposure of the negative impact and flaws of the policy. The 'tough' public face of the policy was often reinforced by ministerial decisions which focused attention around particular asylum seekers who had achieved a public profile. In turn, these decisions were often perceived by advocates and activists as a scape-goating of these individuals and their supporters (Corlett 2005:13-47; O'Neill 2008:106-121).

The utilisation of media had been an important aspect of advocacy and activist communication with the Australian public in order to counter government discourse and to expose the reality and impact of the policy. Yet perceived government retribution on particular asylum seekers multiplied the constraints of uncertainty for advocates and activists in terms of publicity, especially for those advocating for individuals cases and for particularly vulnerable people within this asylum seeker population. At the same time, in situations where the knowledge possessed by advocates and activists was important enough for the department to desire further details for its own utilisation, publicity given to particular issues could also result in increased access to government;

to 'behind the scenes' negotiations with ministerial staff; and to a progressing of particular issues. As one interviewee recounts:

> Not so much under Ruddock, but certainly under Vanstone, what was said publicly and what happened privately were two completely different things. Because we were making public statements, it heightened our access. They sought us out. They knew we had the networks and they knew we had more to speak out about, no matter if they denounced it. They were very quick on our heels to follow up. We had all of Vanstone's staff come and meet with us regularly. While in the media, she said they wouldn't give us anything, in the background, we had a number of meetings. At one time, we had meetings with DIMA's internal investigation unit apologising for the fact that Amanda was dismissing us in pubic, but also coming to look at all of the evidence we had, to check their own staff in relation to the evidence we had. Publicly we were being denounced, but it was a different story what was happening behind the scenes (Interviewee YN).

In this period of flux and uncertainty, these contradictions were a fact of life for advocates and activists as the struggle for change continued. Significantly, in such a diverse advocacy and activist population, diverse but often complementary strategies could be undertaken simultaneously, with particular advocacy and activist skills, resources and positions of authority being utilised across sectors for particular purposes. This diversity allowed great flexibility and functioned to the advantage of the collective action in such period of uncertainty and contradiction.

Highs and Lows

Regardless of the government dismissal of accumulating research evidence on the harmful effects of the asylum seeker policies, as O'Neill reports, 'By 2004, there are regular media reports about the dreadful effects of long-term detention on men, women and children' (2008:163). In May 2004, a high point for many interviewees came with the presentation to federal parliament of the landmark report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) on children in immigration detention. This report had been three years in the making and the Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention had conducted multiple consultations throughout Australia. The report documented the human rights abuses which the detention regime had constituted for these children. It found that Australia's immigration detention laws 'as administered by the Commonwealth, and applied to unauthorised arrival children, create a detention system that is fundamentally inconsistent with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC)' (HREOC 2004:849). The report made multiple recommendations including the

release of children with their parents; the amendment of immigration detention laws to comply with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*; the appointment of independent guardians for unaccompanied children; the codification in legislation of minimum standards of treatment for children in immigration detention; and a review of the impact on children of legislation that created 'excised offshore places' and the 'Pacific Solution' (HREOC 2004). In addition, through its process of wide consultations in the Australian community over a period of years, the Inquiry had also achieved a significant amount of publicity on the issue.

A correspondingly low point for opponents of the policies came with the government's response on these recommendations. O'Neill records the government's rejection of the report's major findings and recommendations (2008:164). The reaction of one advocate (quoted in O'Neill 2008: 164-165) voiced a common reaction of anger by advocates and activists to this government response. Other responses by opponents of the policies included those of depression and despair, but also a reinforcement of commitment to the continuation of the struggle. As the HREOC Commissioner stated at a community seminar discussing the report, 'It is now up to the Australian public' (Gosden: Participant Observation at community seminar, Camperdown, Sydney, 2004). Regardless of the government response, the HREOC report contributed to the growing authoritative documentation of the impact of these policies. The document was placed into the public domain, and added to a body of evidence-based support, calling for the reversal of these policies. Its recommendations would also provide a resource for future advocacy actions.

Wins or spin? - a battle for the hearts and minds of the Australian public

It seemed that in the election year of 2004, a campaign aimed at those in the Australian population who appeared to have strayed from the government position on this issue, was being engaged in by the government. For advocates and activists, it was also a time of uncertainty as to how best to support asylum seekers and advance their cause, as the gaining of publicity for individual cases often worked to the disadvantage of those asylum seekers, and as seeming 'wins' in terms of policy change, were often found to be government 'spin'. Patterns of 'highs' and 'lows' followed each other in succession throughout the year, as government statements on policy change which were often

initially perceived by advocates to indicate government 'softenings' of policy positions, were later found to be wanting. One example in this period involved statements by the Minister of Immigration in July 2004 concerning Temporary Protection Visa holders. [100]

The website of advocacy group Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) gives a good indication of the tortuous nature of this period. In responding to the announcement, a RAR email bulletin initially noted that:

> With this morning's announcement that several thousand refugees on temporary protection visas (TPVs) will be allowed to apply for permanent residency in Australia, a key plank of the government's hard line policy on refugees and asylum seekers appears to have collapsed (RAR Urgent Bulletin 13 July 2004).

A week later, the next RAR newsletter communicated a very different message, cautioning that:

> The unanswered concern by legal and other advocates is the prospect that a significant majority of TPV holders will not be eligible for Migration Visas, even though they may be required to renounce their refugee status in order to apply (RAR National Newsletter No. 10, 21 July 2004).

The editor of the newsletter reflected on the way in which government statements seemingly positive for asylum seekers and refugees, became in actuality quagmires of uncertainty for them and for their supporters:

> How many times are we – the Australian public, the refugee movement and most importantly, the refugees and asylum seekers whose interests we are trying to advance – going to allow ourselves to be misled by Amanda Vanstone … a strategy used to great effect by the Minister on several occasions to create a positive public image without much substance. … In essence, the latest announcement is no different to those made previously: a vague undertaking that, on analysis promises little for most and contains potential dangers for many (RAR Newsletter No. 10 21 July 2004).

This scenario was to be repeated in regard to a number of government stated changes to visa regimes, and in regard to 'alternative detention' options (RAR Newsletter No. 10

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[100] A media statement by the Minister on the issue, as reported in one Australian newspaper, recorded that:

> About 9500 refugees on temporary protection visas will be able to stay in Australia permanently after another softening of immigration rules by the Federal Government. The change will allow temporary protection visa holders to apply for mainstream migration visas … without leaving Australia (Jackson and Shaw 2004).

21 July 2004). [101] Again in this period, the uncertainty mentioned earlier in this chapter about 'the best way to proceed' in advocating for asylum seekers, was an ongoing concern for supporters of asylum seekers and refugees. The reflections of one mental health professional addressed this issue in response to the reported statement by the Minister regarding TPV holders. As he explained:

> What I am most concerned about is the devil in the detail. What TPV holders and in fact most refugees and asylum seekers need is clarity. … If there has been a real change of heart on the TPV policy, then this will indeed be a fresh start for many traumatised people. But there must be something real and genuine in the government's efforts. … If TPV holders already disoriented by trauma, sometimes years of detention and then the relentless insecurity of temporary status in Australia, find that once again they are facing mixed messages, it will be disastrous (Procter 2004).

In addition, supporters of asylum seekers were already aware of the government repercussions which could fall upon individual asylum seekers and refugees who had provided rallying points for protest against the policy. This roller coaster ride of some positive changes in implementation of policies – often performed quietly by the government; some public announcements of seemingly positive change which were later found wanting when the detail was examined; some adoption of alternative detention models proposed by advocacy groups which were however, implemented in ways that proved flawed, reflected the hopefulness and despair which characterised this period. It was a period of flux and uncertainty; of some positive changes and some devastating disappointments for asylum seekers and supporters (Corlett 2005). In the multiple and contradictory responses of the government, it also indicated that the movement had certainly 'arrived'.

Some real success

By 2004 the cumulative gathering of evidence and the presentation of this evidence and counter discourse, to parliament and to the Australian community was showing clear

[101] O'Neill observes for example, that in regard to the facts of the detention of children in this period:

> In the lead up to the 2004 federal election later that year, the government is so sensitive about children in detention that it pretends there is only one child still locked up. Amanda Vanstone tells the Sydney Morning Herald that she is 'very pleased that we're now down to one child in detention centres'. The 'one child' is in Baxter detention centre … In fact there are 75 children in detention at the time, including 59 around Australia and 16 on Nauru (2008:165).

signs of having some effect. Anne Henderson observed prior to the federal election in October 2004, that the harshness of approach especially in relation to asylum seekers found to be refugees but granted only Temporary Protection Visas, and to children and their families in detention, was showing up as 'a negative for the Government in seats where it could make a difference' (Henderson 2004). While popular support remained for the policy, there had been a shift away from the strength of previous agreement with it (Macken 2005; Gosden 2006a:2-3). A poll in 2001 had indicated a 77% strong agreement or agreement with the government policy of preventing boats carrying asylum seekers from entering Australian waters (Goot 2002:72), whereas by 2004 this figure had dropped to 54.4% (Dodson 2005. See also Bean et al. 2005).

Recognition of this affect was also evident in the shift in government electoral campaigning focus from the 2001 election in which the issue of asylum seeking played a major role, to the 2004 election in which it was rarely mentioned. The issue was no longer the overwhelming vote catcher than it had been for the 2001 election. This lessened degree of anti-asylum seeker discourse in the 2004 government electoral campaign could in itself be claimed to indicate an achievement by the movement. As one interviewee stated:

> Governments rarely admit error, but in three years, you've seen an end to official vilification of asylum seekers by both major parties, by and large. I'd say that's a success given where we were at in 2001. Three years later, it's a different scenario. All the activity has moved us away from the officially sanctioned demonisation of asylum seekers that was occurring (Interviewee QP).

In terms of social movement trajectories, Moyer argues, 'The intensity of public feeling, opinion and upset required for social movements to take off can only happen when the public realises that governmental policies violate widely held beliefs, principles and values' (2001:48-49). It is apparent that by 2004, this phase had been reached to a degree sufficient to concern government, and to activate further responses to the movement's achievements. Opponents of the policy had gathered authoritative evidence of the harmfulness of the policy to those impacted by it, and of the contradiction it posed in regard to accepted Australian societal values. In addition, I argue that the slow process of an education of fellow Australians on the issue, by dialogue and behavioural example at multiple levels of society, had put down some tentative roots into the wider Australian consciousness.

The movement had always been characterised by its diversity and flexibility. These attributes remained apparent in the width of strategies utilised in this period. In terms of policy theory and social movement theory, the full gamut of strategies identified as a continuum from that which 'is most explicitly directed at government (lobbying) to the strategy that is … focused more on society and public opinion (protest)' (Vromen 2005:100) had been utilised. [102] With the relatively small number of people and the resources involved, this in itself had been a remarkable achievement.

Losses and opportunities

Yet at the same time that shifts in public opinion [103] could be claimed as an achievement, the October 2004 federal election returned the existing government to office with even greater power, with the LNP gaining control of both houses of parliament. For movement supporters, this was a particularly disheartening event. As a marker event, it was perhaps the lowest point for many who had been working at a feverish intensity on the issue for a number of years, and had hoped that the shifting public opinion of the issue might be reflected in the election result. As an interviewee observed:

> People who supported the hard line border protection policy feel they've been vindicated because the government was re-elected. You also have this sense in the refugee field that we've been beaten again (Interviewee QH).

The increased power of the government following the 2004 election, with a majority in the Senate as well as in the House of Representatives, also meant that any legislative change to the opposed policies would now be possible for the following three years, only if it came from within the ranks of the LNP government party itself. This event and an August 2004 High Court decision which found that indefinite detention of asylum seekers was lawful under Australia's Constitution (Crock et al. 2006: 173-181), caused

[102] Ariadne Vromen, following the work of Wyn Grant's (2000) 'insider/outsider' distinction, lists this continuum of insider – outsider strategies as 'lobbying, service provision, advocacy, strategic research, community organising, pubic education and protest' (Vromen 2005:100). It is also, she notes, 'a continuum from reformist strategies to strategies that start to challenge the state and are synonymous with social movement action' (2005:100).

[103] See comparisons of Newspoll for T*he Australian* from 2001-2004 in Hiles (2010: Appendix A). See also responses to polling on a similar question between AC Nielsen polls on 31 August-2 September and 9-10 October 2001 (Goot 2002:73) and analysis of the *Australian Election Study 2004*, by Dodson (2005).

some advocates and activists to decide that little more would be achieved by simply following the same strategies. For some, this then directed them onto an additional course of more intense involvement on the issue of a human rights act, something which had it been in existence, could have made a difference to the High Court decision (Zifcak 2005).

Both of these events had thrown the onus of responsibility for change back onto the LNP itself, within which a number of individual parliamentarians had already showed themselves to be concerned at the impact of these policies. In this new political climate, an already well established advocacy lobbying strategy which was focused on parliamentarians, became an arena of increased significance for advocates. Increasingly, the inherent opportunities of the political situation were recognised. As one interviewee perceived it:

> It sounds really weird, since we were crushed by the election results, but perhaps now that the Liberal party is in such a secure position, Howard can afford to let go of the reins, to be a little more compassionate and still come out looking good. We always knew that was there – that unhappiness in the ranks. But because Howard had such an iron like hold and is so Machiavellian in his management of his party, they have all been silenced. Now, I think more and more of them will start to not break ranks, but will start to make their personal feelings known (Interviewee QS).

Another interviewee similarly commented on the need to constantly re-assess the political opportunities available. As she explained:

> One of the challenges at the moment is stretching the hand of the 'uncomfortables' – the people who are uncomfortable with this within the Liberal Party, and increasing their numbers from the undecided. There are people within the Party who are firmly of the view that they've got everything right. There are also those who are deeply uncomfortable with it. And there are people who are undecided. I think if we can get more of the 'undecided' being 'uncomfortable', there will be that power from within, and I think that's where the changes will happen (Interviewee QT).

We now know from O'Neill's interviews with MP Petro Georgiou and others, that his decision to attempt to introduce legislative reform, as compared to the internal administrative reform which he had long been engaged in trying to achieve, was made at the end of this same year (O'Neill 2008:166-173). Unexpected events in 2005 were to

assist that endeavour. As an interviewee noted in terms of the ups and downs of the struggle for change:

> Things don't just go evenly. They go in fits and starts. You think nothing's happening, but then it does (Interviewee QV).

Throughout the highs and lows, wins and spin, and losses and gains of the period, the flexibility of the wide range of advocacy and activist actors, and the effective networks and partnerships they had entered into, had functioned to utilise possible opportunities. Social movement theorist Buechler argues that 'Political opportunities improve when the power discrepancy between authorities and challengers is reduced and the bargaining position of challengers improves' (2000:37). Such a scenario had seemingly been enacted throughout this period. Shifts in public opinion had been recorded away from the earlier overwhelming support for government discourse and actions, and government strategies seemingly moved to contain these shifts of public opinion, while also offering some increased openings for successful 'quiet' advocacy for individual asylum seekers and groups of asylum seekers.

While the shifts in public opinion on the asylum seeker issue had provided some advocacy hope for policy change through electoral change, the electoral reality had proved very different and had initially appeared to exert a negative impact on the advocacy and activist cause. However, the secure control which the 2004 election provided for the LNP government also produced a situation which gave increased possibilities for individual government MPs to exercise their conscience on the issue, and also perhaps for the government to make policy concessions.

Within the spectrum of social movement theories, political opportunity structure theories 'put emphasis on political institutions as the key to whether structural problems can be successfully challenged' (Garner 1996:50). These theories argue that 'at certain times, the political system may open up intentionally or unintentionally and create opportunities for movements (Garner 1996:50). Parliamentarians who appeared sympathetic to reform of these policies, had already been a focus of lobbying by individuals, small advocacy groups and large established human rights and refugee rights NGOs for many years, as had also been those parliamentary representatives

seemingly uninterested or unsympathetic to such reform. As MP Georgiou noted later of such advocacy communications:

> Their letters, emails, phone calls and personal visits constantly remind parliamentarians that a significant section of the community to whom we are accountable cares passionately about the impact of our nation's policies on the individuals most immediately affected by them: asylum seekers and refugees (Georgiou 2005:10).

Following the election, these possibilities were pursued even more strongly by opponents of the policies. O'Neill reminds us that this process also functioned in a dual capacity, as MPs concerned with the issue, garnered electoral as well as moral support from that constituency. This relationship between individual parliamentarians and advocacy constituencies was to bear fruit in the following year, as increased political opportunities were unexpectedly created for change.

2005: SCANDALS AND INQUIRIES

In early 2005, an unexpected event played a pivotal role in facilitating further change on the issue. The exposure of the detention in Baxter IDC of a mentally ill woman of German heritage who was an Australian permanent resident, suddenly changed the media environment within which asylum seeker issues were represented, and subsequently provoked an exposure of the actions and policies of the immigration department. The authors of a citizen-led People's Inquiry into Detention which was initiated following this event, describe the event thus:

> In February 2005, Cornelia Rau, a permanent resident who had lived most of her life since she was 18 months old in Australia, was discovered in the Baxter immigration detention facility. She had been incarcerated as an 'unlawful non-citizen' for a total of 10 months, six of them in a Queensland prison. Affected by schizophrenia and psychosis, she had told immigration authorities she was a German citizen called Anna … she was only released from detention and given appropriate medical treatment when a newspaper article generated by an advocate described her plight and family members identified her. … As Cornelia's sister, journalist Chris Rau, said at the time, her case illustrated a 'shameful double standard': "While she was an unnamed illegal immigrant, the only treatment she received for mental illness was longer periods in lock-up as punishment for bad behaviour. … Yet, magic! As soon as she became an Australian resident, she was whisked away to a teaching hospital, seen by consultant psychiatrists and medicated" (Briskman et al. 2008:18).

The possession of Permanent Residency and Caucasian appearance had not provided immunity for this woman from these government policies. On exposure of her detention however, these facts ensured mass media coverage of the actions of the Department of Immigration in a way that nothing had previously. As legal advocate Julian Burnside observed:

> The only novel feature of the Rau case is that she is uncomfortably like us. She looks like a typical Aussie girl. We are shocked at her treatment, but she received the same careless, cruel indifference that most asylum seekers receive. Why is it acceptable to treat asylum seekers this way, but shocking when it is done to one of us? (quoted in Briskman and Goddard 2007:91).

While similar abuses had been reported and evidenced in regard to asylum seekers over the previous years, this event signalled to the Australian community that the issue no longer only affected asylum seekers. Whereas the perceived preceding message on the issue might have been, 'This is happening to them!', the wide media coverage of Cornelia Rau's immigration detention brought the issue closer to home. Now the perceived message was more likely to be, "This could happen to me and mine!" (Interviewee QI). As an interviewee noted:

> People have been shocked at what was done to Cornelia Rau. But it's just as shocking that we do the same thing to other people. The media even as recently as a few weeks ago, will still refer to 'illegal immigrants' when they are talking about asylum seekers in detention. They know that it is simply a false description, and yet they still do it. And as long as the media are either so slack or so complicit that they will perpetuate the government's own dishonesty, it's not too surprising that the thing doesn't become an issue. But Vivian Alverez and Cornelia Rau cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called 'illegals'. No matter how far you're prepared to bend the truth in relation to asylum seekers, they can't be called 'illegals'. And so, on their issue, it becomes a different debate. It shouldn't be a different debate, but it was (Interviewee WA).

All of the work of advocates and activists over the preceding years had created a greater awareness of the issue amongst the Australian population. Now, this event functioned in social movement terms as a trigger event which gave the movement the necessary 'leverage to pursue their goals through "proper political" channels' (Marx and McAdam 1994:83). The public response to the event took shape from the basis of knowledge that had been created in the community, but the event also opened the way for more authoritative exposures and investigations of Department of Immigration practices. An interviewee described the situation:

> When we started in 1999, it was almost like there was this juggernaut out of control, gathering speed as more and more punitive changes were made; more and more vilification of this group. It was very much gathering speed and that happened for quite a long time. Even though that image would say that at any minute, the wheels would fall off and it will just tip over, well, it's five years later and there's been regular chaos and regular abuses from that juggernaut, but it hasn't stopped it, until recently (Interviewee QV).

Finally, in early 2005, the 'juggernaut' had tipped over. [104] The exposure of the wrongful immigration detention of Cornelia Rau led to a government authorised inquiry into her detention (Palmer 2005). This in turn led to further inquiries as evidence of further cases of wrongful detention by the department became known (Palmer 2005; Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005). As O'Neill records, Cornelia Rau was not the only person to have been unlawfully detained in immigration detention. Indeed:

> The first half of 2005 had seen a string of shocking scandals inside detention centres, including nearly 250 cases of wrongful detention (O'Neill 2008:10).

The exposure of the previous deportation of an Australian citizen, Vivian Alverez (also identified as Vivian Solon) provided further public controversy. It was now evident that even Australian citizenship did not provide protection against these policies. The fact that this citizen was of Filipino heritage, one interviewee argued, sent a message to a different section of Australian society in that:

> That deportation particularly reverberated with migrant communities (Interviewee QI).

Ultimately, the possession of Permanent Residency and Australian citizenship had not protected these particular women, or hundreds of other people (as became apparent later) against the power of an Immigration Department, whose processes would be described in those subsequent inquiries as 'inadequate' (Palmer 2005: xii) and

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[104] In the words of advocate and activist Pamela Curr:

> In the end it has been the Immigration department's own failures which caused Australians to question government policy towards refugees and asylum seekers. As one detainee said after the uproar when Cornelia Rau, an Australian resident was found in a detention centre, 'Cornelia was an angel for us and she does not know it.' He understood only too well the value of this blond, blue-eyed, ex-Qantas air hostess and her effect on the conditions in detention centres. It was the first time that the government had been called to account by the electorate and the media (Curr 2007).

‘fundamentally flawed’ (Palmer 2005:xiii), and its actions as ‘catastrophic’ (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005:xv).

The Inquiries and their impact

In July 2005, Michael Palmer submitted the report commissioned by the federal government into the *Inquiry into the Circumstances of the Immigration Detention of Cornelia Rau*. The report also included preliminary findings into an ‘Examination of the Vivian Alvarez Matter’, which was further investigated and reported on in a subsequent 2005 report (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005). The findings of the Palmer Inquiry were highly critical of the Department of Immigration, noting the exercise of ‘exceptional, even extraordinary, powers’ (2005: ix) by department officers ‘without adequate training, without proper management and oversight, with poor information systems, and with no genuine quality assurance and constraints on the exercise of these powers’ (2005: ix), as well as ‘deep-seated cultural and attitudinal problems within DIMIA’ (2005: xi). The Inquiry found that the organisational structure and arrangements of the department had failed to deliver outcomes ‘in a way that … respects human dignity’ (2005: x) and that the department had operated ‘in a way that is clearly against the public interest and the intent of the Act’ (2005: xiv).

In July 2005, the federal government asked the Commonwealth Ombudsman to complete the investigation of the immigration department treatment and deportation of Vivian Alvarez. The inquiry also investigated 200 other immigration detention cases that had been referred to the Palmer Inquiry following its commencement. In turn, this report reinforced the findings and recommendations of the Palmer report (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005). In commenting on the systemic problems within DIMIA, it noted that for some DIMIA officers, ‘removing suspected unlawful non-citizens had become a dehumanised, mechanical process’ (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005:31), and that ‘basic human rights obligations that characterise a democratic society’ (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005:31) were not observed. In addition, as in the Palmer report, the Inquiry concluded that many of the systemic problems had been present for some years (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005:xvi).

These Inquiries had raised questions which any citizen of a western democracy could have been expected to raise and pursue, but which the Australian Department of Immigration had not. In his report, Palmer articulated these concerns:

> How could an Australian resident of German origin be detained in prison in Queensland for six months and at the Baxter Immigration Detention Facility for four months and not be identified for all that time? How could this person's long-standing medical condition remain undiagnosed? (Palmer 2005:1)

And as the later Commonwealth Ombudsman's report observed on the forced removal of Vivian Alvarez:

> It is almost unthinkable that in contemporary Australian society one of our citizens could be unlawfully removed from the country by a government department. That such an incident occurred on July 2001 and went unnoticed at the time should be of grave concern to the Australian government and the community (2005:1).

What both reports raised for the Australian public and government, were issues of individual liberty and the protection of that liberty. As Palmer observed in the Principles of his Inquiry:

> Protection of individual liberty is at the heart of Australian democracy. Where there exist powers that have the capacity to interfere with individual liberty, they should be accompanied by checks and balances sufficient to engender public confidence that those powers are being exercised with integrity (Palmer 2005:i).

With continuing media coverage of the cases of wrongful immigration detention, the consequences of these exposures, Inquiries and findings led to a discreditation of the Department of Immigration. The reform recommended by the Inquiries was aimed at achieving profound changes in the department. The report of the Commonwealth Ombudsman noted that, by late 2005, this had already begun (2005:8).

Reform?

The climate created by these events also facilitated the attempt to introduce and support Private Members Bills by those LNP representatives who had long campaigned on the

issue. [105] This attempt would ultimately lead to the introduction of some humanitarian and legislative change to the government policies. As an interviewee noted:

> The extra coverage of Cornelia Rau and Vivian Solon – I think those two things are what gave the liberal backbenchers the heart to demand change. Those are the two things that really attracted public concern in a way nothing has before (Interviewee WA).

In May 2005, two Private Members Bills were tabled in the Coalition party room by Liberal Party MP Petro Georgiou. One bill was the *Migration Amendment (Act of Compassion) Bill 2005* which had been drafted as an 'Act of Compassion' for long-term detainees, for children and their families in detention, for holders of temporary Protection Visas, and to provide permanent residence for people who could not be removed from Australia (AJA 2007a). The other Bill was the *Migration Amendment (Mandatory Detention) Bill 2005* which had been drafted as an Act to reform the mandatory detention system (AJA 2007b). This Bill was concerned with reform to the situation of mandatory detention of children, asylum seekers and unsuccessful asylum seekers subject to removal from Australia, and with the provision of permanent rather than temporary protection visas.

In June 2005, following negotiations with the Prime Minister (O'Neill 2008), these Bills were withdrawn. In their place, the negotiated *Migration Amendment (Detention Arrangements) Bill 2005* was introduced and accepted by parliament (ComLaw 2005a), and later in the year, an accompanying Bill, the *Migration and Ombudsman Legislation Amendment Bill 2005*, which enlarged the role of the Commonwealth Ombudsman in immigration matters was also accepted by parliament (ComLaw 2005b).

The degree of humanitarian relief that was thus provided for the suffering of children and their families in detention; of long-term detainees in detention, and of those on temporary protection visas who successfully moved to permanent visas, was deeply welcomed by those affected asylum seekers/refugees and by advocates and activists. In terms of legislated protection of human rights, parliament had affirmed (in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and earlier 2004 recommendations by HREOC) the principle that 'a minor shall only be detained as a measure of last resort'

[105] Despite official political party platforms, individuals within both the LNP government and the major opposition ALP had agitated for a number of years for reform to these policies

(ComLaw 2005a, Sch 1, Pt 1, s4AA), although this principle applied only to the holding of children in immigration detention centres or residential housing projects, rather than the new 'residence determinations' of community detention.

However, the increased investigative and reporting role of the Commonwealth Ombudsman fell far short of the decision making power of the Judicial Assessor of the earlier Bills proposed by Georgiou. In addition, measures which would have provided targeted rather than mandatory detention, an appeal system for judicial review of detention, and permanent protection provisions for all asylum seekers found to be refugees, were absent. Nor did the changes constitute sustainable gains. In large part, they were discretionary rather than codified, with implementation dependent on the goodwill of the government and the discretion of the Minister. In contrast, the proposed Bills had been concerned with both immediate humanitarian relief and with more profound change for processes of justice and human rights protection. Among other things, as Crock et al. note of the *Migration Amendment (Mandatory Detention) Bill 2005*, 'the limited grounds for detention proposed … largely mirrored the UNHCR Guidelines … and would have represented a striking improvement of Australia's detention regime' (2006:164). Ultimately, the concessions gained had been hard won and provided significant and desperately needed humanitarian relief. Yet, sustainable protection for the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees who arrive in Australia unauthorised had not been achieved (Manne 2006).

INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVOCACY / GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE

However, the 2005 government appointed inquiries had confirmed the inappropriateness of much of the immigration department's prior actions. The impact of the authority of these inquiries and the devastating critique they made of the immigration department, had the subsequent effect of opening the Department of Immigration to potential reform and in this regard, to increased dialogue with advocacy organisations (Vas Dev 2008). [106] As David Manne commented, 'The atmosphere was now different, and this shift from the previous position of deadlock and hostility … appeared to be part, at least, of the spirit (if not the letter) of the new reform period. It seemed to represent a mixture of

[106] See Vas Dev (2008) for analysis of the effectiveness of dialogue between NGOs and government in the reform of policy and practice).

pragmatism, and even, perhaps, humanity' (2006:6). In addition, the 2005 reform bills themselves had brought not only a degree of humanitarian relief, but also hope for some of the further role which the 'liberal' values of humanitarianism might play in reforming the regime (Georgiou 2005).

As mentioned earlier, Moyer has argued that there are four different roles which social movement actors need to play in order to successfully create social change, i.e. those of 'the citizen, rebel, change agent and reformer' (2001:21). While all four roles had been undertaken over the previous years by those seeking change to the situation, the post-Palmer period provided an expanded area of engagement for the latter role of the reformer. While some established NGOs had managed to maintain dialogue with the government on the issue throughout the period, there had been periods especially in 2001 and 2002, in which effective communication had been greatly diminished. Though NGOs involved in service delivery programs to asylum seekers and refugees were likely to receive more favourable interactions with the Minister and the Department (Vas Dev 2008), even those interactions could be fraught and at risk of being suspended (Vas Dev 2008). For the post-Palmer period however, as Vas Dev notes, NGOs commented upon a very different kind of engagement. This environment accorded more openings for effective dialogue between the Department of Immigration and asylum seeker and refugee service and advocacy organisations. Through this dialogue and accompanying reform environment, possibilities appeared to exist for a continuation of incremental improvements to practices affecting asylum seekers and refugees. As one of the interviewees in Vas Dev's study noted:

> Post-Palmer, things have certainly improved and the other interesting way that it's improved is there's a lot more consultations. Not only are they putting in new programs for asylum seekers, but they're consulting with the NGO sector to get our input and our involvement in those programs (quoted in Vas Dev 2008:279).

However, Vas Dev argues, at the same time as 'Most AS AOs recognised these developments as positive and embraced opportunities for engagement' (Vas Dev 2008:279), they also recognised 'that the government's greater willingness to engage with them was more the product of political circumstances rather than a genuine shift in attitude towards AS AOs as policy players per se' (Vas Dev 2008:280). Indeed, despite the scandals, inquiries and concessions of 2005, fundamental aspects of the onshore

refugee policy still remained, including the retention in legislation of the mandatory detention system; the temporary protection visa regime; and the 'Pacific Solution'.

Trajectories of change

All over Australia, asylum seeker and refugee organisations and groups had begun to assess the gains and losses of the period, evaluating priorities and determining future strategies. One of the questions being addressed in these various forums (particularly in lay or voluntary groups) was the extent to which the gains won in 2005 would affect ongoing involvement by advocates and activists on this issue. To what extent for example, would there be an ongoing concern with challenging not only the manner of administration and implementation of the policy, but also the logic and moral legitimacy of the policy (Gosden 2005a). In all social movement action, there will be differences in the degree of change which will be considered as adequate. Often these differences may not impact significantly on collective action, until some change is won. At such a point in the trajectory of a social movement, differences may become more apparent between those who are satisfied with what has been won, and those who pursue a need for much greater change. For all these reasons, in terms of social movement trajectories, there was at this point a shift in the nature and degree of involvement on the issue (Gosden 2005a).

The intense involvement of advocates with the trauma suffered by asylum seekers and refugees under Australia's onshore refugee policy, had produced for many a 'vicarious trauma' which has sometimes impacted upon advocates' physical and mental health (McInerney and McInerney 2005; Gosden 2005a; Surawski, Pedersen and Briskman 2008). For some advocates, the achievements of 2005 therefore provided a timely opportunity for a necessary lessening of the degree of involvement, or a temporary or permanent retirement from further involvement. Improvements that had been obtained for particular asylum seekers and refugees affected by the policy, also functioned to sometimes lessen the motivation of close supporters for continued struggle for further change (Gosden 2005a).

For other advocates at both a personal and professional level of involvement, the primary motivation may not have been an argument with the Australian onshore refugee

policy per se., but rather with the manner of its administration and implementation. For some of these advocates, the critical analysis of DIMIA in recent inquiries had provided an effective opening of the system to public inspection and departmental reform. In addition, the concessions in the *Migration Amendment (Detention Arrangements) Act 2005* may have satisfied the most pressing aspects of the perceived need for change, and may have resulted in a lessened degree of motivation for ongoing involvement. These factors plus a situation of increased potential for productive engagement between the Department of Immigration and a number of established NGOs, may have signalled an apparent lessening of need for the energies of the wider social movement.

Melucci has argued that a relationship often exists between the visible and less visible dimensions of social movement action (1989:6). This observation is pertinent in regard to the asylum seeker and refugee advocacy movement in Australia. In periods in which 'insider' NGOs are well placed to effectively progress the work of dialogue and lobbying for asylum seekers and refugees with government, other movement actors not so positioned can continue working on the issue at a less visible grass roots level; re-orient their advocacy and activist energies into areas of previous, ongoing or new concern; or re-energise without experiencing as great a necessity for intense engagement. Especially for advocates and activists with severe degrees of burn-out, such periods can provide an opportunity to 'catch their breath', resume some of the activities of 'ordinary life' or of previous commitments, and recover their energy. In its own way, this can be an effective strategy in terms of sustaining energy for future periods of need for action. For all of these reasons, there was a diminishment in wider social movement activity following the 2005 reform bills and a movement into a phase of latency or relative latency for some.

However, many other advocates remained involved in an ongoing capacity with the needs of asylum seekers in Australia's mandatory detention regime. Some remained involved in an even increased capacity with the needs of asylum seekers and refugees living in the community on visas such as Temporary Protection Visas and Bridging Visas, and with the mental health needs of asylum seekers and refugees suffering from the effects of various aspects of the Australian policy. Others remained involved in monitoring the changes won in the *Migration Amendments (Detention Arrangements) Act 2005*; in supporting asylum seekers released on Removal pending Visas; in

supporting asylum seekers who had been deported; and in continuing to advocate for policy reform. A number of groups which acknowledged the improvements gained, also noted the problems remaining. [107] Indeed, for some opponents of the policies, real reform was considered unlikely, despite the inquiries, and the arrangements for implementation of the *Migration Amendments (Detention Arrangements) Act 2005*. For some, the High Court decision in 2004 had already facilitated, as previously mentioned, a shift towards engagement on the issue as part of a wider human rights issue, with a number of advocates remaining engaged in advocacy for asylum seekers and refugees, but also engaged in advocacy for more general but fundamental human rights protection (Burnside 2004).

Significantly in late 2005, despite the earlier 'reform' bills, the government introduced legislation which further restricted the rights of those seeking asylum in Australia, excising thousands of islands in the northern areas of Australia from the Australian migration zone (Com Law 2005c). For some advocates and activists, this geographical exclusion was all too symbolic of a continued diminishment of moral responsibility in terms of the Refugees Convention and other international treaties. Following on from this, was the introduction of the *Migration Litigation Reform Bill 2005* (Prince et. al. 2005), with submissions by legal and human rights bodies opposing the legislation, pointing to further restrictions of the rights of those seeking asylum within Australia as well as increased challenges for those professionals and even lay people assisting them (see also Bartlett 2005; Newhouse 2005). By the end of 2005 therefore, despite the positive changes there still remained 'most of the key aspects of one of the toughest and most comprehensive anti-asylum seeker systems in the Western world' (Manne 2006:7).

2006: RE-MOBILISATION

As Manne has noted, 'the shape and trajectory of the reforms was always very fragile; very tenuous at its core' (Manne 2006:6). As he described the situation, it was:

> A situation where a harsh policy on paper could co-exist with a relatively benign practice because of the Palmer and Petro processes, at least for a short period. And

[107] See websites of advocacy groups such as RCOA; AIA; AJA; Chilout: RAR; Project Safecom; RAC; The Justice Project; Get-up.

> if, and only if, the external environment remained unchanged and benign (2006:7).

This was so, he argued, because 'there was never a true change of heart by the government in 2005' (Manne 2006:7). It had always, he argued, 'depended on the external environment' (Manne 2006:7). In 2006, the political fragility of those achievements was made painfully obvious with the arrival on the Australian mainland in January 2006 of a group of 43 West Papuans seeking asylum in Australia. Political imperatives (this time with the country of Indonesia) and international refugee conventions were again placed at odds with each other. In a reversal of the spirit of the 2005 reforms, the government subsequently introduced a Bill described by one of those who had initiated the 2005 reforms, as a 'severely regressive measure … (and) … the most profoundly disturbing piece of legislation' (Georgiou 2006:27). *The Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006* (DUA) would have not only undone the gains of the 2005 reforms, but would have expanded the offshore processing regime introduced in 2001 (SLCLC 2006: 1). Overall, in the assessment of the UNHCR, the Bill amounted to a 'set of proposals … not in accordance with the object and purpose of the 1951 Convention' (UNHCR 2006:2). This proposal, which threatened to undo what had been gained and to worsen the previous situation, galvanized the social movement actors and was responded to by an effective mobilisation. This mobilisation was illustrative of a combination of ongoing activities by many NGOs, and a return to action after a phase of latency for many others. Despite the degree of 'burn-out' (Gosden 2005a:29) among many advocates, a strong campaign was mounted across the sectors against the proposed Bill (Gosden 2006b; Taylor 2006). In the DUA campaign, as one interviewee noted, 'We brought our strengths to the issue' (Interviewee YB). As he described it:

> With the DUA Bill, our message was the same. It didn't matter if you were on one end of the spectrum or the other. It was on a specific Bill. The message was the same, and everybody could employ their different campaigning strategies to it. We'd worked out who our friends were, and who we weren't going to waste time talking to. We'd built all the bridges with the politicians, and with the media. A lot of politicians said it was the most coordinated campaign. I think focused is probably a better word (Interviewee YB).

In engagement around the issue, submissions were received by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee (SLCLC) with the committee noting that 'With

the exception of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural affairs (Department), all of the 136 submissions and witnesses appearing before the committee expressed complete opposition to the Bill (SLCLC 2006:13). In addition, expert evidence was presented to the investigating Senate Committee; thousands of personal and organisational contacts were made to lobby MPs and to support those MPs who might be inclined to disagree with the legislation; research evidence was publicised; a sophisticated advertising and media campaign was conducted; a national poll was conducted to measure attitudes; and 100,000 people signed an online petition.

The actions taken across the spectrum of sectors around this event revealed the level of expertise which the movement actors had acquired over the period of the previous years. They also demonstrated a level of collaboration in which resources held by more established groups were shared generously with newer groups well placed to gain publicity, for the greater purpose of defeating the proposed legislation. Over the previous years, the Australian asylum seeker and refugee advocacy movement had acquired a level of expertise such that the many diverse and dispersed groups had developed effective lines of communication (albeit through multiple and over-lapping networks); an appreciation of the niche roles which could be utilised by individuals and groups with different resources, skills and positioning; and an understanding of the way in which the parts of the movement could come together around a specific campaign to work effectively as a whole. The 2006 advocacy campaign also benefited from the additional resources of a number of new players who were well supported by the existing networks. Most importantly, more Australian citizens (including members of parliament) had been made aware of the harmful effects of the policies which this legislation would extend, and were prepared to oppose legislation which would further extend this harm.

While most previous amendments to the Migration Act 1958 had pioneered policies of containment and harshness, and had been passed with the support of both the government and major opposition party of the day, a different scenario was played out in this instance. Firstly, the Senate Committee which examined the Bill recommended that it should not proceed (SLCLC 2006:ix). Secondly, in the House of Representatives, although the Bill was passed, three Coalition members voted against it and a further two who were opposed to the Bill abstained from voting. Finally, in the Senate the vote

faced opposition from one government MP and possible abstention by some others. In addition, as well as opposition by these government MPs, the minor political parties of The Australian Democrats and The Greens, and some Independent MPs, the major opposition party The Australian Labor Party also opposed the legislation (see Gibson 2006 for a fuller account).

On 14 August 2006, the Bill was withdrawn by the Prime Minister (ABC 2006). This event was particularly noteworthy as it was the first such defeat for the Prime Minister in a ten year period in office, and a defeat on a Bill which he had personally endorsed. The withdrawal of the Bill illustrated a level of shift in public opinion (Newspoll Market Research 2006) which had taken place around this issue since 2001. In the parliamentary debate on the Bill for example, there were repeated references by government parliamentarians opposed to the Bill, to those Australians who supported their stance. This support facilitated the ability of the 'rebel' MPs to take a stand on the issue on principle rather than on a political party decision.

The defeat of the Bill can be related to a number of areas. [108] Ultimately, following the withdrawal of the Bill which was necessitated by the obvious lack of success it would achieve in being accepted by parliament, it would seem that in this instance, Prime Minister Howard's reputation for canny assessment of the Australian populace and of

[108] The issue of seeking asylum had been widely raised as a matter of debate within the Australian community in the previous years, and had again been raised effectively around this particular Bill. It had been raised as a humanitarian issue; as a human rights issue; as an issue of justice; and as an issue of values. In their parliamentary speeches, those government representatives who opposed the Bill made mention of a number of these factors. Secondly, this Bill raised historical issues especially for older Australians. Many remembered the assistance of the Papuan and New Guinean people to the Australian Defence Force personnel in World War 11 during battles in that area. Those seeking asylum on this occasion had not come from countries little known to Australians. They were neighbours, and for some Australians, their previous saviours. In that sense, because of the physical proximity of the countries concerned, Australia was also the 'country of first asylum' for people fleeing from West Papua. To discriminate against such asylum seeking was to radically depart from the requirements of the Refugees Convention, as well as from the government's own previous justifications for harsh treatment for asylum seekers as an argument against 'secondary asylum seeking movements'.

Nor did the fact that pressure for the return of the West Papuan asylum seekers was known to be coming from the Indonesian government, assist the popularity of the government proposal among the Australian populace. Prior events such as bombings by Indonesian extremists, which killed a number of Australians in Bali, had left lasting impressions on the Australian public. The concept of the Australian government being pressured into action by Indonesia was not received favourably (Newspoll Market Research 2006). All of these factors, plus the prior undermining of the credibility of the immigration department through media coverage of the 2005 scandals and inquiries, and the undermining affect of the proposed Bill on the concessions granted by the government in 2005, meant that a broad range of issues converged around this piece of legislation.

those in his own political party, was not well judged. In addition, in the absence of an overarching organisational body or bodies, very focused and affective action had taken place across the spectrum of the asylum seeker and refugee movement.

In 2007, Manne reviewed the situation, noting the continuing tension and inherent contradiction between a reform process of the kind recommended by the Palmer Inquiry, and Australian immigration policy as it affected the treatment of those seeking asylum. His conclusion was that although there had been some improvements, such a reform process was constantly constrained. This was because 'the fundamental planks of the government's Immigration policy' (Manne 2007:232) remained 'at odds with the principles of the Departmental reform process' (Manne 2007:232). As he observed, 'the reforms are potentially limited because, in many areas, we do not have fair and reasonable government policies' (Manne 2007:232). Basically, it could be argued that the events of 2006 showed the fragility of any political achievements unless they are written into law, protected by legislation such as Human Rights Charters and Acts, and matched by the support of the populace.

DISCUSSION

In a period in which incremental improvements continued to be made to the onshore asylum seeker and refugee policy, there was again a quiescence of wider movement activity, and a return to a major role being played by a number of larger NGOs in advocacy for changes to policy and practice and a role for large and small NGOs in terms of the needs of asylum seekers in the community. This could have signalled a return to state of watchful latency, or a deeper dispersion and dissolution of the energies of the wider movement. However, given the example of the effective re-mobilisation against *The Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 2006* (DUA), the former appeared more likely.

The establishment and the continuance of a number of state based welfare and service organisations devoted to the needs of asylum seekers; the establishment and continuance of a number of national advocacy, communications and policy development groups; the re-organisation of a number of previously existent national asylum seeker and refugee advocacy organisations in a way which has increased their

accessibility to a national audience, all provided withdrawing advocates and activists with an assurance that an enlarged advocacy sector existed compared to the pre 2000 period. In addition, the intense experience of a significant number of Australians in involvement in social action for asylum seekers and refugees; and the education of parts of the Australian population on this issue, provided hope that this period may have led increased sections of the Australian population to an improved understanding of situations of asylum and refuge seeking that might mitigate against similar future episodes.

The title of a publication by advocate Julian Burnside is *Watching Brief: Reflections on Human Rights, Law and Justice* (Burnside 2007). This title sums up well a state of watchful latency which can exist for non-active social movement actors who still remain alert to, and monitor the state of play of government, media and societal discourse, practice and policies affecting asylum seekers and refugees. This is what appeared to be the reality for the Australian asylum seeker and refugee advocacy movement at the end of the period studied in the thesis – a continuance of an enlarged number of local, state, national and international NGOs engaged on this issue, and a period of watchful latency for many who were previously intensely engaged as part of the movement.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this chapter, I argued that there were lessons to be gained from what was achieved. Complex societies assign a crucial role to information and cultural codes as sources of interpretation and direction. It is through the communication of these aspects that the degree of change in public attitudes and policies was achieved during this period. Indeed, there is a critical role for social justice actors in continuing to convey accurate information and alternative cultural imaginings and models into public debate and public space. This has relevance for citizens continuing this struggle for reform in Australia, but also for citizens in other countries with similar concerns.

There are also lessons to be gained from what was not achieved. The patterns of recurring external constraints and opportunities which have been explored in this chapter suggest an uncertain future in terms of any sustainable reform of these policies or practices, or even of public attitudes. Although a degree of success was achieved in

bringing change to discriminatory policies and practices, the period also illustrated the fragility of the political achievements. For theorists such as Melucci, this outcome would not be surprising. As he has observed, in a global society undergoing massive change, there exists a critical weakness in national and global political systems for the kind of social challenges that need to be faced, and the kind of rights that need to be redefined. It is this weakness or gap that requires a continued critical input from civil society.

Chapter 11:
Discussion and Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The primary intention of this research has been to produce an understanding, from an 'insider' perspective, of the social action of those who opposed Australian policies discriminatory of asylum seekers. Such an undertaking has required examination of a range of aspects, from the subjective and intersubjective factors influencing the social actors, to their positioning within systemic and structural regimes which impacted upon their social action. In engaging with the research through ethnographic methodologies, there has also been a focus on seeking to understand the perspectives of the research participants, not only from what is expressed by word, but also from what is signalled by action.

This chapter outlines the research findings from this examination, and discusses their contribution to the literature of collective action theories and refugee studies theories. The findings include the influence of global factors upon the local collective action in terms of structural aspects as well as subjectivities. The research supports the argument that there are distinguishing features in contemporary protest, especially in regard to the way in which local, national and global aspects interact to inform emotions, identities, motivations, strategies, and styles of action. However, it also documents tensions between the de-centred and fairly autonomous style of action which many individual participants followed, and more traditional styles of collective action by other participants. Significantly, it illustrates the potential for a pragmatic blending of innovative and traditional styles of engagement in collective action.

Analysis of the interviews and actions reveals a bridging of the divide between a priviliged population and a stigmatised one, through the actions of citizens and asylum seekers. It highlights, in the instance of this collective action, the interconnections and contradictions between global flows of asylum seekers, the defensive and punitive actions of a national government, and the intervention in support of the asylum seekers, by sections of its public. Finally, it situates the collective action which defended the

humanitarian needs and human rights of the asylum seekers, as a local manifestation of a global justice consciousness.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings reflect the influence of the methodologies used. The use of participant observation and in-depth interviews enabled the development of an ethnography which can be described as providing ' "thick description" ' (Gilbert Ryle quoted in Geertz 1975:6), i.e. a description not only of actors, actions and environment, but also of the meaning of actions as understood by research participants and as expressed to the researcher. The research provides this level of analysis in the examination of motivations to action; of relationships that developed between asylum seekers and supporters; of the depth of emotion involved in these relationships; and of the way in which all of this affected strategy, discourse and action. This level of description and analysis is also provided in elucidating the process by which trust in participants' focus on the well being of the asylum seekers, was constructed as social capacity within the collectivity, despite the significant differences in approach and strategy that existed amongst the participants.

The research findings also reflect the choice of Melucci as a guiding theorist for the research. His strong focus on the empirical aspects of any particular collective action, including micro-level subjective and intersubjective aspects, meso-level processual aspects, and macro-level historical, economic, political and social aspects, has been a valuable influence. At the same time, his injunctions for openness to what may be 'new' or 'particular' in collective action, have provided liberating theoretical possibilities for examining aspects of diversity, fluidity and creativity within the collective action, and for exploring aspects which might appear at first sight to not 'fit the mould' of expectations of collective action.

The research has been attentive to the above foci. For example, through participant observation as part of the research methodology, the emphasis on practical actions in this collective action endeavour, became evident. As well as actions of protest and lobbying, of communication and inquiry, and of appeals to courts and human rights bodies, these practical actions also included a significant extent of humanitarian actions,

and actions of solidarity with asylum seekers. They also included actions which role-modelled behaviours of a non-hostile relationship between Australian supporters and asylum seekers, and role-modelled values and principles associated for participants with their identity as Australians. Indeed, the very act of taking action appeared to hold a particular significance for participants. While obviously being responses to the urgency of need of the asylum seekers, these actions also appeared to physically express a repeated verbal message by participants, that 'I had to do something. I couldn't do nothing!' However small, however seemingly insignificant in obtaining the desired political reform, action appeared to express for participants, a manifestation of an inner obligation to themself and to their conscience. The emotion and impetus into action associated with that response, are explored in detail in the following section in this chapter.

In addition, although the research project was aimed at investigating the actions of Australians who were opposing the discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers by their government, another aspect that became clear from the interviews, was the extent to which the activism of the asylum seekers themselves had triggered or facilitated that involvement, and had also then deepened and often directed the actions of supporters. Though there was a range of diversity among individual asylum seekers, those who engaged in advocacy or activism were not positioning themselves as merely passive victims of global and national economic and political forces. Rather, they were acting with agency in their own cause, and in the cause of their human rights. Their activism often had negative repercussions in terms of government and media representations of their actions, but it also increased media attention and in that process, alerted more Australians. While the majority of public opinion accepted the government representations of the asylum seekers, a minority public opinion perceived their protest to be a just one. Ultimately, as supporters sought to make contact with them, the agency of the asylum seekers also affected the manner of interaction between them. These interactions and their influence upon the nature of the collective action, therefore became a significant part of the research, illustrating the way in which a supporter focus on the welfare of the asylum seekers, shifted the collective action into a more politically pragmatic but culturally radical mode.

Emotion

One of Melucci's arguments has been that the cultural phenomena developed within any collective action, and exhibited in the behaviours of the collective actors, must be adequately examined when seeking to understand aspects of meaning in collective action. With this guiding philosophy and the methods chosen for this thesis, i.e. of participant observation and in-depth interviews, I have consistently explored this aspect in the research. In this regard, I have documented and analysed the role of emotion within this collective action. In terms of factors which could predispose people to action on behalf of asylum seekers, it has played an informing and valorised role. Many interviewees and other participants repeatedly referred to the strength and centrality of their emotions as a guiding force in their responses to the issue. Though government discourse sought to disparage and de-legitimise advocates because of this phenomenon, advocates repeatedly challenged that representation and valorised their responses of distress, empathy and compassion at the suffering of the asylum seekers, and their responses of anger, shame and outrage at the discriminatory treatment of them by Australian governments, as the most appropriate responses to the situation of the asylum seekers (Every 2006: 144).

Nor did they separate their emotions from their cognitive understandings of the situation, as it was often from the embodied 'disturbance' of this affectivity, that their perceptions and understandings of the situation crystallised. Rather, their emotions provided for them a trusted pathway to those actions most appropriate to what Gaita has described as 'the expression of full responsiveness to the reality of another human being in need' (1999:276). Arising from this position of personal embodied authenticity, the derogatory labelling of these emotional responses, which was evidenced in government discourse and in discourse supportive of the government position, had little effect in halting the actions of supporters of asylum seekers. However, such discourse did illustrate the danger that was apparently perceived by the government in terms of the moral force of these emotional responses.

Not only did the emotional responses of individual advocates repeatedly highlight the discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers and their subsequent suffering, but these emotional responses also became cultural and strategic repertoires within the collective

action. As cultural repertoires, participants expressed these responses in terms of their identity as an Australian citizen, and in terms of their defence of what they perceived as traditional Australian values. As strategic repertoires, they highlighted the moral appropriateness of these responses for this grievance situation, and the inappropriateness of governmental bureaucratic responses in which human beings often become 'dematerialised into refugee statistics' (Hyndman 2000:xxii).

These emotions facilitated actions which resulted in a 'reaching out' in solidarity to asylum seekers, and led to the making of personal contact. Subsequent interactions and relationships led to a deepening of the emotional and moral aspects of the social action. As many of the interviewees have mentioned, and as is readily apparent in other accounts by collective action participants, these relationships of solidarity, friendship and care deepened supporters' commitment to action and intensified their level of involvement. This was so despite increasing levels of supporter fatigue in the process of a struggle which showed little signs of being politically successful. These interactions added emotional responses such as care and love (for asylum seekers who became personally known) to the emotional repertoire of advocates, whilst affirming and deepening already existing emotions such as distress and empathy at their suffering, and anger and shame at their treatment by Australian governments. From these responses, developed social action repertoires which, as documented in this thesis, became centred around the well-being of the asylum seekers, and often became more pragmatically oriented as a result. From these responses, also developed discourses which presented these interactions and relationships as role models for possible wider non-hostile societal interactions with asylum seekers.

Interestingly, emotional content had been a significant feature of both anti-asylum seeker and pro-asylum seeker discourse. The emotion of fear for example, was significantly utilised in government and media discourse which represented the asylum seekers as potentially threatening to the interests of Australians. At the same time, emotions of empathy and compassion played an opposite role in the discourse of supporters of the asylum seekers. Emotions of outrage featured significantly in both anti and pro asylum seeker discourses, though with very different foci and representations. While anti-asylum seeker discourses expressed outrage at unauthorised entry of asylum seekers, as a dangerous breaching of Australian territory and sovereignty, pro-asylum

seeker discourses expressed outrage at the obstacles placed in the way of that entry, which they upheld as a right authorised by the Refugees Convention.

In this sense, the phenomenon of emotion has been at the centre of cultural constructions of both negative and positive attitudes towards the asylum seekers. I argue that it also played a significant role in the shift of public opinion which was achieved by the collective action. I have documented the way in which relationships between asylum seekers and their supporters often became the reverse of a relationship with a stereotyped abstract and demonised 'other'. The significance of these relationships and the discourse accompanying them, was that it enabled a fracturing of that stereotype of 'the other', and facilitated a view of the human being held captive within it. As an integral part of those lived relationships, the demonstration of emotions of trust, respect and care between Australians citizens and asylum seekers, helped more of the Australian public to see asylum seekers as the ' "intelligible beneficiaries of someone's love" ' (Gaita 1999:26 cited in Taylor 2001:195). For, as Taylor notes of the connection which Gaita posits for the role of love in the relationship between subjectivity and rights:

> We should not find it even intelligible … that we have obligations to those whom we do not love unless we see them as being the intelligible beneficiaries of someone's love (Gaita 1999:26 quoted in Taylor 2001:195).

In a number of collective action theories, emotional responses have been conceptualised as either unconscious crowd actions having 'little to do with individuals' own lives and goals' (Goodwin et al. 2001:4), or as the result of individual personality traits rather than responses to social situations and environments (Goodwin et al. 2001:4). In other collective action theories, they have been perceived primarily in terms of resources to be mobilised, but have received little attention otherwise. Phenomenological and feminist research have enlarged understandings of emotion and embodiment in social action, and collective action theories of Social Constructionism have returned aspects of subjectivity and intersubjectivity to centre stage in collective action analysis. However, theorists such as Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta argue that few studies of collective action still adequately explore the importance of emotions in protest and politics, in terms of the way in which they connect human beings 'to each other and the world around them'

(2001:10), as 'an unseen lens that colors … thoughts, actions, perceptions, and judgments' (2001:10).

In contrast, this thesis has analysed in detail, the role of emotion in this particular collective action. It illustrates its importance not only in regard to motivations for action, but also in terms of the style of action, the development of cultural repertories, and their strategic use in the struggle for social change. Ultimately, the research shows that aspects of emotion were significant in the growth and unfolding of protest, in the ongoing activities of the collective action, and in their maintenance as well as in their decline. In addition, the collective action participants were self-reflexively aware of the significance of these aspects in their motivations and actions. This documentation and analysis provides an empirical contribution to the theoretical literature of emotion in collective action and social movements. It also has significance for refugee studies theories, as is examined later in the chapter.

Embodied 'moral and cognitive liberation'

The centrality of the role of emotion in the collective action can be observed in its co-joined embodied and cognitive effects on participants. In earlier chapters, I examined the significance within the collective action of the phenomenon of an embodied 'cognitive liberation' in participants' movement into action. As noted earlier, the concept of 'cognitive liberation' (McAdam 1982:48-51), [109] has previously been used by theorists to denote a consciousness by potential protestors, not only that aspects in society are unjust, but that those aspects were also 'subject to change through their own direct efforts' (Buechler 2000:37). While the interviewees in my research were certainly in agreement with the former proposition, they did not necessarily see the latter proposition as achievable to the extent that they perceived necessary. Nevertheless, they still felt compelled to attempt to bring whatever degree of change they could. I therefore describe this phenomenon as an 'embodied moral and cognitive liberation' - a suspension of the normal constraints of analysis of potential costs and benefits of involvement, and a subsequent release or propulsion into action. It was, as Gaita expresses it, action which had become necessary to the extent that, ' "I must help. I can't walk past" ' (1999:276).

[109] See also discussion on this concept in Piven and Cloward (1979:3-4).

This aspect was intimately linked for participants with issues of personal integrity and identity, as well as with societal values which were perceived as threatened. Participants reported a felt violation of their personal and national identity, principles, and values by the government discourse and policies towards asylum seekers. These discourses and policies conflicted with their sense of Australian society as being one in which fairness and generosity to those in need, sometimes expressed colloquially as 'not kicking someone when they're down', functioned as a basic ideal of sociality. In ways resonant with the analyses of philosophers Gaita and Diprose, interviewees reported an experience of a violation of both their ideal of Australian society and their internalised identity as an Australian. That this touched on aspects at the core of their being, was evident in the immediacy and force of their embodied responses. In a deeply personal sense, the perceived threat to values and principles documented in the thesis, was experienced as a threat to the integrity of their own being, as the capacity of socially embodying those values and principles in the present or the future, was felt to be at risk. The resultant embodied moral and cognitive liberation which was experienced, provided the collectivity with a moral force which was utilised in communicational, mobilisational and dialectic strategies, and which was pivotal in the success (however partial and temporary) of the collective action, in reshaping the broader social perceptions and understanding of the grievance issue.

The agency of the asylum seekers

In regard to particular phenomena developed within collective action and exhibited in the behaviours of the collective actors, this collective action has been significantly influenced by asylum seekers themselves as both initiators of protest action, and as subsequent partners in action. Some of the asylum seekers discriminated against under Australian law, had been human rights activists in their countries of birth, and this had been the reason they had had to flee. Some others had fled because of the humanitarian assistance they had rendered to people suffering persecution. Others again had fled because of religious and ethic persecution. Others may have left for less pressing reasons. However, for all people fleeing from countries in which human rights are regularly violated, the ideal of democracy can become a cherished one.

For many asylum seekers who suffered discrimination under Australian law, it was a doubly bitter reality to experience breaches of human rights in a country which they had associated with a strong defense of both democracy and human rights. Yet from their experiences in their own countries, they were aware that the policies of the government of a country need not necessarily represent the views of the population of that country. The advocacy and activism by many asylum seekers on behalf of themselves and other asylum seekers, was therefore accompanied by their attempts to communicate to the Australian public. It was often as a result of these actions, that Australian supporters subsequently joined forces with asylum seekers, in combined attempts to inform the Australian public and to achieve protection for the asylum seekers' rights.

The advocacy and activism of the asylum seekers and their supporters illuminated flaws in Australian policies, in terms of inconsistencies with international refugee and human rights conventions. These aspects had been raised and contested in earlier periods by opponents of the policies. However, the extent of the activism by the asylum seekers, and their reaching out to the Australian population in appeals for justice and redress, in the period under study in this thesis, brought larger numbers of Australians into opposition to the policies, and into forms of joint advocacy and activism with asylum seekers. In this regard, this collective action has arisen from those who experienced discrimination and those who supported them. Though the collective action was small and local in terms of the global situation, it importantly attempted to bridge a gap between the needs of vulnerable people such as asylum seekers in a globalised world, and their representation at the political as well as the humanitarian level.

A defence of the self

Yet, at the same time, the collective action has also been 'self regarding' for the Australian participants, in that it has involved a passionate defense of their own identity and integrity, as constituted in their conception of their national identity. Involvement in action had arisen from desires to assist and alleviate the suffering of asylum seekers under Australian policies and practices, and to change those policies so that future asylum seekers would not suffer similarly. But participants also often experienced a 'crisis of self identity', as cherished Australia values and identities were perceived to have been denigrated, and respect for a 'common humanity' breached by these policies.

In this regard, the social action taken often appeared to hold a redeeming aspect - a taking of personal responsibility as an Australian citizen in order to symbolically as well as practically counter the negative effects of Australian government discourse, policies and practices. A defense of personal identity was often interwoven with a defense of an internalised national identity and associated traditions and values, which were perceived to be at odds with the discriminatory and demonising treatment of the asylum seekers. This defense then also became interwoven with a struggle for the future direction of Australian values, culture and politics, the moral and cultural threats to which, the situation of the asylum seekers brought sharply into perspective, for these participants.

In its particularity in the Australian environment therefore, the collective action has opposed legislation, practice and discourse which impacts negatively on people seeking asylum in Australia, where they do not possess entry documentation, and therefore enter in an unauthorised manner. At another level, it has been a struggle for cherished values and identities in Australian society, and for the future cultural and political direction of Australian society. At a broader level again, it has been a response to a call for help at the level of 'being human', and a struggle for that centrality of human experience to be respected. In this sense, the social action has been both 'other' and 'self' regarding. I argue that this phenomenon can best be understood as activated by issues of identity, but in a way which is different to social movement concepts of 'identity movements' or 'politics of identity' (Burgmann 1993; Young 1990; Melucci 1989). In this case, the identity at risk for the social actors is not only a personal one, not only a national one, but also an identity constituted around 'being human'. It is an identity activated and grounded through the particularity of this issue, in the self as constituted in interaction with, and in relationship with, 'the other'.

Shifts in collective action

In the early part of the thesis, I posed a number of questions for myself. Could contemporary protest be adequately explored by using established collective action and social movement approaches? Could collective action which was concerned with the interconnections of global and local aspects of an issue, be adequately studied as simply smaller or larger versions of traditional collective action? Or, as theorists such as McDonald argues, did particularities in contemporary collective action require very

different approaches to analysis? The findings of my research agree with arguments that there have been profound transformations in the styles of engagement of contemporary protest in line with shifts in globalised subjectivities. However, these aspects of cultural innovation have also been points of contention within the collective action I have studied. These tensions between more cultural or more traditional political styles of engagement in collective action, have therefore proved to be a significant aspect of investigation in the research.

In consequence, though using Melucci's work as the major analytical orientation to the empirical data of my research, I have also accompanied that analysis with a parallel conceptual scrutiny using the range of established collective action theories mentioned in the early part of the thesis. Sometimes this parallel scrutiny has confirmed my main analysis. At other times it has illuminated gaps in my analysis. While my findings agree with McDonald in terms of shifts in contemporary protest, I have also found much of value in examining the historical collective behaviour, collective action and social movement literature of empirical research and theory building, especially since I have been studying a collective action entity in which there is a blending of innovation and tradition.

This has particularly been the case in regard to the collective action theories of Resource Mobilisation, within which, 'issues of power, conflict, and the variable distribution of political resources' (Zald 1992:331) take center stage in analysis. Analysis of the collective action using these theories, vividly illustrates the paucity of both the material and authoritative resources available to the collective action participants, as well as the minimality of the political opportunities they enjoyed. Both of these aspects are understood within these theories as serious constraints on the development of collective action past an initial emergent phase.

In the political opportunity version of these theories, the essential elements of collective action are considered to depend on the structures of political opportunities (McAdam 1982:36-59; Buechler 2000:37). In the analysis of the collective action, and in agreement with these theories, when political process opportunities did begin to increase for advocacy for asylum seekers, during the later part of the period studied, that opening did give opponents of the policies increased 'leverage to pursue their goals through

"proper political channels" ' (Marx and McAdam 1994:83). At the time, these opportunities appeared to present possibilities for legislative reform and for sustainable improvement of the situation of many asylum seekers. Following the 2005 Inquiries, openings also appeared to increase for more effective dialogue between immigration department officials and refugee advocacy NGOs on a continuation of incremental improvements to practices affecting asylum seekers.

Yet, in disagreement with these theories, this particular collective action arose and developed strongly within the earlier period of a hostile political and social environment. Indeed, the force of government action has been described by an interviewee as 'one of the most significant constraints' (Interviewee YR):

> Because of the government's power and the energy that it put into justifying its position, and politicising the whole refugee and asylum seeker issue, it was very hard for any sort of civil society groups to compete with it. … They understood what the politics were and the political advantage they derived from it (Interviewee YR).

As a result, participants' notions of success for much of the period under examination, were often formulated in terms of breaking through the constraints of censorship and isolation; in gains for individual asylum seekers; in small interim steps in a reform process; or indeed in terms of 'holding a line in the sand' against the introduction of harsher policies. The combination of a government acting in full knowledge of the electoral appeal of its discriminatory policies against asylum seekers, and a major opposition party in support of those policies, was enough to have produced despair amongst the collective actors, except that the urgent needs of asylum seekers demanded continued engagement.

If those who opposed these policies and supported asylum seekers, had waited until the structure of political opportunities had improved, before taking individual and collective action, that later opening of political opportunities may not have occurred. It had been the constant raising of awareness of the situation of asylum seekers over the preceding years, through action, evidence, and discourse, that had provided the Australian public with information which countered negative government and media rhetoric, and exposed government mis-information. This knowledge then allowed trigger events such as immigration department scandals, to engender more community support for

investigation and for reform. As a number of parliamentarians supporting reform, mentioned in the 2005 parliamentary debates on the issue, that kind of community support was an important factor in the moral authority which they, as individual parliamentarians, were able to bring to the legislative reform campaign.

In addition, political opportunities which open, can just as quickly close. For this collective action in the period studied, this latter scenario was confirmed in 2006. Political process opportunities for social change, as analysed by many refugee studies and social movement theorists, are dependent on domestic and external environments. As these alter, so can political opportunities. Overall, in regard to asylum seeker issues which are strongly influenced by global as well as local forces, political opportunities are situated firmly within the shifting parameters of both of those influences. Patterns of alternating international and domestic political opportunities and constraints, within which asylum seekers, advocates and activists are required to adapt strategically to changing circumstances, whilst endeavouring to sustain and further core principles and visions, are therefore the most likely outcomes.

In the entrepreneurial version of these theories, the basic principle is that the accumulation of resources is crucial to the growth of collective action. In agreement with these theories, participants in the collective action repeatedly referred to the constraints within which they acted, i.e. of an inadequacy of financial and infrastructure resources. These constraints affected assistance to asylum seekers. They affected the capacity of the collective actors in public communications. They affected the capacity of national mobilisations across the advocacy and activist sectors. They also affected the development of national organisations. Indeed, a commonly voiced perception by interviewees has been of the collective action as resource poor and disadvantaged in regard to financial and material resources, infrastructure and organisational resources, and hegemonic resources.

For many interviewees, this was perceived as an important factor limiting the development of the collective action as a social and political force. It was also perceived as a crucial factor limiting the assistance which could be provided to assist asylum seekers. Compounding this situation in the same period, was the reality of federal government defunding, or threats of defunding, of refugee advocacy and service

organisations (Vas Dev 2008: 193-195). The financial and infrastructure resources for services assisting asylum seekers in need were thus diminished, at the same time that the numbers in need of assistance increased. Yet, I suggest that because of these constraints, as well as because of the shifts in subjectivity I have already referred to, the collective action evolved in a manner different to what might have been the case if there had existed more opportunities for political influence through insider lobbying, or more adequate funding resources for asylum seekers' humanitarian needs.

The advocacy and service work that would have normally been performed by those organisations, increasingly needed to be attended to by NGOs with more independence of funding (often from religious organisations), or by NGOs which functioned primarily through volunteer labour, including pro-bono professional work. As a result, the energies of opponents of the government policies were often strongly engaged in helping to provide urgent basic services for asylum seekers, with less energy available for political or policy work. In consequence, the focus of many of the collective actors involved came to be centred around a close practical knowledge of the needs of asylum seekers. As examined in this thesis, this then in turn imparted a strongly intense but pragmatic flavour to the collective action.

In addition, as many interviewees noted, the diminishment of political opportunities for effective 'insider' advocacy influence, especially in the early part of this period, affected perceptions by a number of new advocates and activists around the effectiveness of those long-established organisations in this struggle. This then increasingly directed their engagement towards more direct personal action. It also pushed the collective action more firmly into the sphere of seeking to influence change through external pressure and public opinion. When faced with unmet areas of action and need, new advocates and activists began to construct their own actions, and their own organisations. This importantly added more diversity to the collective action. It also encouraged more personal commitment and personal responsibility in action. This aspect therefore functioned as an additional resource for the collective action, at the same time that it increased the complexities of possible unified actions.

In turn, the reality of a hostile political situation with diminished opportunities for effective political lobbying, functioned as an impetus for overt actions of solidarity with

asylum seekers. This in turn led to the development of relationships between asylum seekers and their supporters, and to an intensified focus by supporters on the well-being of the asylum seekers. I suggest that the pragmatism of much of the collective action entity, which often positioned itself strategically in terms of what might be potentially winnable in such a restricted political environment (however small and incremental), was influenced by both this focus, and by the political constraints which made even small interim steps in a reform process, appear advantageous.

Similarly, organisational development of the kind usually associated with Resource Mobilisation Theories, did not follow the traditional path suggested in these perspectives. Within these theories, collective action, as it develops, will take an increasingly institutionalised path towards fuller and more influential formal political participation. Yet, I have documented within the thesis, the environment of urgency that permeated the development of this collective action; the financial constraints within which established organisations functioned; and the resulting gaps in adequate services and advocacy for asylum seekers. Because of this, while some new participants joined and strengthened existing organisations, others surveyed the resources and skills available to them personally, and began new groups and new actions, filling in areas of need and in the process creating a kaleidoscope of activities, groups and networks.

However, this form of growth often relied heavily on volunteer labour, and did not necessarily lead to substantial growth of long-term financial and infrastructure mechanisms dedicated to the development of the collective action. Within Resource Mobilisation Theories, without the development of such financial and organisational resources, the capacity of collective action to achieve sustainable political and social change, is less likely. In this regard, it could be argued in agreement with these theories, that the mis-match of the urgency of need of the situation of the asylum seekers, and the limited nature of the resources available to the collective actors within the politically and socially hostile environment of the period, constituted an impediment to the long-term growth and success of its endeavours.

Yet despite this, and despite the absence of well-resourced central coordinating organisations such as would be typical within these theories, this scattered 'archipelago' of established and new NGOs, small groups and individuals, achieved over a period of

years, sufficient communication within the Australian public, to facilitate a degree of shift in public opinion. It also achieved sufficient community support on the issue, for a minority of parliamentarians to be enabled to achieve some degree of reform through parliament. Indeed, it could be argued that these achievements occurred because of the decentred nature of the collective action, in that responsibility for agency was more squarely placed onto the shoulders of every individual participant supporter, rather than resting with a distanced and professionalised central organising body. In the resource situation which existed, the extent of creativity in communication; the degree of personal agency and responsibility; the degree of personal interaction and development of relationships between asylum seekers and supporters; the extent of shared activism and advocacy between the two groups; and the moral influence of emotional repertoires, are all remarkable aspects of this collective action, and perhaps ones which would not have developed in other circumstances.

In regard to political and material resources, the collective action began at a disadvantage. However, over time, through the activism of the asylum seekers; through the range of the collective action participants' actions and discourse; through the opportunities which came from the government's own self-produced scandals; and through the moral force of the emotional responses and cultural constructions role-modeled by participants, some degree of success was achieved, however partial and temporary. The extent to which that success might have been enlarged if additional resources had been available, is unknowable. If more advantageous political and financial circumstances had existed for the development of the collective action, perhaps the collective actors may have achieved more in ongoing structural political and social change. At the same time, it is also possible that the extent of innovative cultural constructions and personal commitment may have been less forthcoming and less impacting. Ultimately, sustainable social and structural change requires shifts in both culture and politics.

CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY

Contribution to Collective Action Theories

The research has shown the influence of global factors upon the local collective action. These global aspects included structural factors influencing flows of asylum seekers

around the world, and the responses of receiving countries. They also included influences on the subjectivities of the collective action participants. In the former, there was evidence of contradiction between the stance of the Australian government in having signed and remaining a signatory, to a number of international human rights conventions, whilst at the same time administering national and local policies which arguably breached those conventions. In the latter, there was evidence of communicational and cultural sensibilities connected with awareness of the linkages between the global and local issue.

In addition, the research showed evidence within such subjectivities, of an awareness of a self identity which was constituted in a relationship of 'self' with 'other', and which was therefore engaged in a defense of both. In this regard, there was evidence of an awareness of personal responsibilities in a communal identity which extended beyond national borders in a conception of a global citizenry. This in itself is not new, and has been manifested in numerous forms for many years in the actions and discourses of various environmental, economic and global justice campaigns. In this particular case however, it was explicitly focused on a group of people who constitute a particular section of 'others' in modern globalised society, i.e. those who seek asylum, but who encounter segregation or repulsion.

In the investment by the collective action participants in emotions, values and identities associated with that relationship between 'self and other', similarities can be observed between this collective action and past humanitarian collective actions. At the same time, in terms of relationships between citizens and stigmatised or excluded populations such as asylum seekers, refugees, 'irregular' migrants, and other 'sans papiers' people, issues of contemporary global-local connections and global justice concerns also appear centre-stage, and inform that relationship. These research findings have relevance for analysis of collective action by, and in support of, many stigmatised or excluded populations in many countries.

Importantly, the research has shown that the 'other' in this instance, as embodied in the asylum seekers discriminated against by Australian policies, was not an 'other' without agency. This is another significant contribution to collective action theorising and literature. There are many recorded instances of collective action based on humanitarian

principles and directed towards benefiting a suffering 'other'. There are also many recorded instances of collective action primarily based around the rights and action of one group and the support of another group. However, this research provides an empirical example in which collective action resulted from the combined perspectives and agency of the two groups. In this regard, the construction of relationship and action functioned in a double sense between the asylum seekers and their supporters, whether the position of 'self' and 'other' was located from the asylum seeker's or the citizen's perspective.

The research findings point to the way in which the plight of the asylum seekers embodied for the collective action participants, global injustices and inequalities as well as a national failure of political responsiveness and responsibility. In this sense, not only the theories of Melucci, but also those of Touraine and McDonald have proved resonant with the research findings, and have helped to inform the analysis. McDonald's arguments concerning a marked ' "personalisation" of commitment' (2006:74) in contemporary collective action, and an orientation towards recognising a shared experience with other human beings rather than the boundaries of a particular group, have been clearly relevant to analysis of this collective action. Touraine's and Melucci's arguments concerning the impact of a globalised subjectivity in contemporary collective action have also been relevant, as has Touraine's argument that in a world of global and national inequalities, we must look increasingly towards those who suffer those inequalities and those who support them, for action in defense of absent human rights.

Aspects noted by all of these theorists in terms of shifts towards increasingly decentred and dispersed forms of collective action, and increasingly non-hierarchical roles for participants, were resonant with the analysis of this particular form of social action. However, while these aspects were clearly evident, tensions were also evident between the de-centred and fairly autonomous style of action which many individual participants followed, and more traditional styles of collective action and political engagement by other participants. The research therefore highlights the challenge of studying contemporary collective action. This finding supports the arguments of theorists such as Melucci on the plurality of perspectives co-existing in contemporary collective action. It also supports the findings of theorists such as Della Porta and Diani, who have

emphasised the diversity of styles found in actions concerned with global justice issues, and their blending of innovation and tradition.

Importantly, the research adds to collective action theory, an explication of the way in which such tensions can be bridged, when a common concern for those whose rights are being defended, facilitates a pragmatic modality of collective action. It provides analysis of the tensions in the collective action between such strategies and styles of innovation and tradition. However, it also provides analysis of instances of co-existence of those modalities of innovation and tradition. In these instances, in this collective action, a common concern for the welfare of the asylum seekers, allowed for cooperative and collaborative modes of action, which utilised the range of resources and styles of the collective action. For a collective action possessing limited material and political resources, these were the most effective campaigns, in which seemingly disparate and contradictory styles of action could be utilised strategically towards the same goal.

Described by a research participant as 'practical advocacy and activism', i.e. as a hybrid blend of humanitarian and political responses and strategies, this style of engagement developed from the connections between the collective action participants and the asylum seekers. For interacting collective action participants, it represented a foundation of shared experience with which they could identify, and on the basis of which, ascertain the trustworthiness in action of other collective action participants. Although the asylum seekers themselves were not a homogenous population, and tensions were still engendered by differences in particular asylum seekers' situations and preferred strategies, as well as by larger ideological differences between collective action participants, the nature of this shared experience and identification in action with the lived reality of the asylum seekers' situations, remained a central pivot for the collective action.

Overall, the research into this collective action supports the argument that there are distinguishing features in contemporary protest, especially in regard to the way in which local, national and global aspects interact to inform participants' emotions, identities, motivations, strategies, and styles of action. However, it also directs attention towards the potentiality within contemporary collective action, of a blending of innovative and

traditional styles of engagement, and towards exploration of the central premises within any particular collective action, which may facilitate or forestall such interaction.

Contribution to Refugee Studies Theories

The thesis analysis, while utilising collective action theories, has been specifically centred around social action supportive of asylum seekers and refugees. Examining the Australian collective action in support of asylum seekers has contributed to the theoretical literature of collective action and social movements. At the same time, the examination of the collective action and its location within larger structural social, political and economic aspects, has also contributed to the refugee studies literature.

Bridging a divide

One contribution concerns the question which Agier has raised on the need for critical reflection on global practices of exclusion of refugees and other 'outcast' populations (2008:viii). As noted in an earlier chapter, he has asked whether we can still imagine that these separate worlds of the privileged and the excluded can open to one another; that a common present can still exist; that a face-to-face encounter could take place in reality? The findings of this research have answered Agier's query in the affirmative, and have provided a detailed documentation and analysis of the process by which that phenomenon of opening and interaction occurred in this particular time and place. In this particular instance, emotion, personal interaction and relationships between the asylum seekers and their Australian supporters were core aspects in the process of mutual identification and joint action that ensued. This documentation and analysis is an important contribution to refugee studies literature, as it brings to centre-stage the human-to-human dimension of common humanity, which remains central in any bridging of the current divide between priviliged and excluded populations in the world.

Agency of asylum seekers

Another related contribution concerns recognition of the agency of those in such excluded populations. In this research, it has concerned the agency of asylum seekers in Australia. This finding is supported by the research of other theorists who have documented the way in which groups such as refugees, migrants and their allies have actively challenged, and in some cases overturned, restrictive immigration and refugee

policies (Lowry and Nyers 2003a and b; Nyers 2006). In addition, this research has analysed not only the agency of the asylum seekers involved, but also the way in which their agency facilitated the wider involvement in social protest by supportive citizens, and the joint advocacy and activism which resulted. In this regard, it illuminates a process of initiation of political engagement on the issue, through asylum seekers' advocacy and activism, communication and interaction with supporters, acting alone and acting in solidarity with supporters. This finding supports the arguments of theorists such as Agier (2008, 2011) and Nyers (2006) on the potential and actuality of the political agency of those in such excluded populations.

Agency of citizens

At the same time, when excluded populations such as asylum seekers become negatively represented and demonised in national discourse, and subjected to discriminatory treatment by a national government, as has occurred in Australia, the opposition of citizens to these representations and regimes, is crucial for bringing change to the situation. The politics of injustice to strangers is unlikely to change if citizens are not prepared to defend the human being and rights of those populations, and to recognise and respect the subjectivity of asylum seekers in a consciousness as shared global citizens. This research has documented and analysed such a defence. It has illustrated the process by which citizen supporters engaged in deconstructing the national discourse on asylum seekers, and in constructing one based in concepts of common humanity, relationship and friendship. It has also illustrated the actions by which supporters challenged and breached the physical and communicational segregation of groups of asylum seekers in Australia. Significantly, it has shown that relationships of solidarity and care, were at the centre of these processes of deconstruction, challenge, and reconstruction.

State resistance

The examination of the Australian situation of this period has illustrated the way in which asylum seekers and refugees continue to be mis-represented and mis-used as political scapegoats and distractions in national politics. Australian government policies and practices have functioned to deter and obstruct many of those arriving with refugee claims, and government discourse has contributed to the concept of people seeking asylum being associated with negative connotations in public opinion. In addition,

policies such as indefinite mandatory detention have continued to provide political domestic signals which reinforce public attitudes of fear, intolerance and rejection of those seeking asylum, while more newly introduced policies in this period, further reduced asylum seekers' rights. In documenting and analysing the resistance of a minority of Australians to those policies, practices and discourse, the research supports the findings of previous analysis, i.e. of a progressive dismantling by States of the international asylum regime (Crisp 2003a, 2008; Crisp and Dessalegne 2002; Gibney 2004).

In his 2004 analysis of such a process, Gibney argued that the principle of humanitarianism holds potentiality for an improvement in this situation. However, in the period studied in this research, the implementation of this principle of humanitarianism was subjected to an intense resignification by the Australian government. In terms of practical assistance to asylum seekers, a 'bureaucratised humanitarianism' (Every 2006:135) focused primarily on quantification and categorisation. In terms of the kind of discourse envisaged by Gibney, in which adherence to the principle of humanitarianism might require efforts by States to 'create a more favourable national and international environment for refugees' (2004:231), a reverse scenario of demonisation has been observed. In addition, government defunding and threats of defunding negatively affected welfare and advocacy services to asylum seekers during this period. Consequently, this situation made citizen action in support of asylum seekers, even more pertinent for the well-being and rights of those affected by the reconstruction of such principles.

Seeking just solutions

The research has recognised the way in which global inequalities of resources, opportunities and rights, underlie and maintain the inadequacy of political representation of the needs and rights of excluded populations. It has also explored the way in which inequalities within a nation can be similarly manipulated to deny the needs and rights of stigmatised populations, and to obscure the connections between causation and suffering. At the same time, it has analysed the manner by which an awareness by citizens of the occurrence of this process at national and global levels, can lead to the taking of individual responsibility for 'righting this wrong'. In attempts to communicate connections between global and national interventions and related

suffering caused, and in the joint advocacy and activism with affected asylum seekers and refugees which ensued, the actions of these Australian citizens support Chimni's call for a 'just humanitarianism' (2000:16), one which is informed and directed by the knowledge and experiences of those in need.

However, the challenge of achieving a political efficacy which could effectively communicate these interconnections and responsibilities against the superior resources and legitimacy of government discourse, proved difficult. A 'just humanitarianism', as I understand the concept would require 'the combination of the traditional humanitarian impulse to alleviate another's suffering *with* address of the various levels of causation of that situation' (Gosden 2007a:165). Even in regard to specific Australian policies which have been repeatedly documented to cause physical and mental suffering for asylum seekers, the challenge to achieve that objective still remains. However, the documentation and analysis of this particular instance of collective action, which involved not only national and international refugee rights, human rights and humanitarian NGOs as could be expected, but also ordinary Australian citizens acting in conjunction with asylum seekers, makes a unique contribution to the refugee studies literature.

That endeavour followed the process outlined in an earlier chapter of 'democratic iterations' (Benhabib 2004), i.e. ongoing processes of public debate through which universalist and particularist rights claims were debated not only through political and legal spheres, but also in the public sphere. While human rights claims possessed more persuasive power in some arenas than others, in general the process of advancing universalist right claims was made more difficult in the Australian situation by the absence of a strong public human rights structure and culture (Gosden 2007a). Nevertheless, in the period of this study, by invoking traditional societal values and principles in addition to universalist rights claims, and by role modeling those values and principles through actions as well as discourse, the collective action achieved a degree of shift in public opinion as well as a degree of legislative reform.

It has been argued that democratic states draw their legitimacy from their allegiance to both national and universal principles of rights, and that national identity is formed by continuing debates on the way in which universalist and particularist concepts compete

and intertwine (Benhabib 2004). Participants in this collective action engaged in this process. They drew attention to the breaches of the former whilst also advocating interpretations of national concepts, which they argued more accurately represented traditional values and principles. They challenged national legislation which ignored the human rights of non-citizens. The dilemma in utilising institutional politics to protest the exclusion of what was not recognised within it, was one which was ever present. However, the collective action followed a premise articulated by philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler, in that 'the right to have rights … comes into being when it is exercised, and exercised by those who act in concert, in alliance' (Butler 2011). The thesis contributes to the refugee studies literature, the documentation and analysis of these processes of 'democratic iteration' and action for the right to have rights, in this particular place and time.

THE MESSAGES OF THIS COLLECTIVE ACTION

Melucci has argued that collective action by the fact of its existence, broadcasts a message to the rest of society (1996:1-10). What then is the message of this collective action? Distinctive aspects of any particular collective action, may be exhibited in the behaviours of the collective actors, and in the shape and form of communicational and organisational modes of the collective action, as well as in specific discourse. Even when political objectives of collective action have been met, there can exist an additional achievement of the collective action in terms of the development of cultural phenomena. This is also the case in instances where political objectives may not have been met. In both instances, collective actors may still be seen to live the changes that they desire, and to communicate the significance of the changes they still seek, through the example of their own lives.

Personal responsibilities in a common humanity

Some of the orientations within this particular collective action have been concerned with humanitarian principles of care. Some have been concerned with human rights. Other orientations developed through relationships between asylum seekers and Australian citizens, in which 'the other' became friend and fellow-advocate and activist. But an underlying conception in these actions and discourses has been an awareness of a common global humanity, and of personal responsibilities to others within that

awareness. This is the central message communicated by the collective actors in their discursive and non discursive actions.

I have elucidated a range of motivations and actions within this collective action entity. However, for me, the clearest insight to emerge from the research is that in terms of the international asylum regime, there is a significant role for local action, one that supplements the role of NGO action at the international level. This role lies not only in supporting those international NGOs in their work, but also in direct action in restoring a zone of common humanity between citizens and locally excluded asylum seeker populations, and in role-modeling the potential of those contacts and the values that they demonstrate, to local publics. This role is allied with that of ordinary citizens taking part in continuing public debate on the way in which these exclusions are used politically to cover social inequities, and in public debate to redefine the relationships and rights of citizens and strangers in need.

Global-local interconnections

The multiple layering of identity, which was apparent in the activation of many of the individuals involved in supporting asylum seekers and in opposing the policies and practices of their own country towards those people, points importantly towards the way in which personal identity is increasingly constructed in a globalised technologically connected world. Such constructions are facilitated from multiple overlapping and interactive points of reference of subjectivity and sociality, including that of the local, the national and the global. There is a consequence of that phenomenon in particular social actions, even when an issue is seemingly initiated from a local or national location.

I have positioned the specificity of the collective action entity that I have examined in this thesis, as a local manifestation of a global justice consciousness concerned with the contradictions and interconnections between global refugee flows and the actions of democratic countries. I argue that the message of this particular collective action transcends the particularity of the situation of asylum seekers under Australian law. Though more extreme than many other Western countries in terms of policies such as mandatory detention for asylum seekers not possessing entry documents, Australia is far

from alone amongst Western democracies in terms of modes of deterrence, anti-asylum seeker discourse and the scapegoating of asylum seekers for electoral opportunity. The success, however partial and temporary, of this particular collective action therefore has resonances for citizens in other countries with similar concerns.

Though each instance of support and defense of asylum seekers' rights may have its own particularities, its own histories and constraints, I suggest that at the core of any such protest, is a non-hostile reaching out towards those who are excluded by national definitions and interventions, but who are also recognised as connected through common humanity and global interdependencies. From this awareness flows the subsequent taking of personal responsibility by citizens in defense of the human rights of those who seek asylum and justice. From this awareness also comes the reaching out by those discriminated against, to citizens of receiving countries, who are capable of providing support. Though States may not always respond responsibly, individuals acting alone and collectively can still point the way towards a politics of justice to non-citizen strangers.

A pragmatic political agenda but a radical cultural message

At one level, this collective action could hardly be called revolutionary or even radical in nature. Much of its orientation centred around traditional principles and repertories of humanitarianism and human rights, and was welded to what were perceived by supporters as traditional Australian values, principles and identities. Yet, at another level, a radical concept was nurtured, of a communal identity - a 'We', which included both citizens and asylum seekers within that concept of collectivity. Within this concept, rather than an identity of 'us' and 'them', similarities and respect within a common human identity were perceived, were lived and experienced in daily life, and were expressed within the various discourses of the collectivity. The creation and nurturance of this concept of communal identity was, I argue, the most radical aspect of the collective action, and one with potential for wider application in global asylum seeker and refugee support movements, and in global justice actions. Constructions of discourse, practice and policy which position asylum seekers as 'problems', and which stigmatise them as illegal or undesirable, demonstrate technologies of control which shape not only the restrictive responses to global flows of populations such as asylum

seekers and refugees, but also the imaginations of populations in western democracies (Wonders 2006:78). This collective action was a localised struggle against such a process.

The research supports Touraine's contention that in a global situation where 'the expression *one world* has become a reality' (2002:398), the capacity to act as 'a Subject … gives a major importance to the recognition of the other and to the consciousness of alterity' (2002:397). As expressed in his argument:

> Our world, in constant movement … in which the number of migrants is increasing and will increase rapidly, can neither break down into closed communities nor be left to a 'free for all' organisation which would bring catastrophic clashes (2002:397).

Here, these aspects have proved equally valid for both asylum seekers in their journeys to seek refuge and their protests at the obstruction of this process, and for those Australians who responded to their protests and who joined in solidarity with their struggle.

The research also supports Melucci's argument that social actors can be seen to live and to role model in their lives the changes that they desire. Through interaction, solidarity and relationship, these social actors have embodied the societal values that they sought. Between the global flows of humans beings seeking asylum and refuge, and the resistance of national political forces to those flows, they have come to embodiment as 'Subjects' within this collision. In the collective action engaged in for the support and defence of asylum seekers discriminated against by Australian legislation, an expanded communal identity developed for the citizen participants. This was a communal identity which they attempted to communicate to their fellow citizens - one which constructed the 'we' of the identity of the participants, in terms of the commonalities between asylum seekers and Australians as interconnected human beings, with all the potential positivities as well as disappointments of that engagement. In this movement towards an 'other' without violence, there has been an embodied enactment of the interactions that are possible between asylum seekers and Australians, and an embodying of the values and visions desired by these participants. In the close relationships that often followed these interactions, 'the other' became fellow advocate and activist as well as friend, and

no longer 'other'. In that process, there has been a furthering of the non-violent interactions of openness that are possible between citizens and strangers in any country, as fellow human beings.

A critical role for the carriage of information and cultural codes

In this struggle for asylum seekers' rights, attempts in public discourse to elucidate the interdependent nature of the local and national levels of this struggle, with the intertwined global histories and geographies of the asylum seeker journeys and motivations, or with the global forces at play, were conducted in a politically charged environment in which such interconnections tended to be either ignored, electorally exploited for negative representations, or narrowed to personal experiential levels only. The communicational and political challenge to have asylum seeker rights, and their appropriate explanatory placement within the flow of globalisation, acknowledged by the wider Australian society, rather than being used negatively for electoral distractions and political scapegoating, is one which remains for the collective action to resolve. From the perspective of the research having been informed by Melucci's theories, this outcome is not surprising. As he has argued, in a global society undergoing massive change, there is a gap between what is actually occurring 'on the ground' and the capacity for representing it at the political level, as well as in developing more adequate definitions of human needs and human rights (1996:193). I agree, and I concur with his and other theorists' exhortations for a greater role to be played by civil society in these national and global challenges. As both Touraine and Melucci have always argued, complex societies assign a crucial role to information and cultural codes as a primary resource and source of power, and there is a correspondingly critical role for collective actions and social movements as carriers of that information and those cultural codes.

CONCLUSION

Studies of contemporary collective action need to take account of the way in which global aspects have become intimately intertwined in contemporary life with national, local, and personal aspects. Analysis of contemporary collective action can be assisted by examining the ways in which this intertwining may affect any particular collective action, at any level, and that established collective action theories need to be open to modification in this regard. Here, I reflect Melucci's continuous advocacy for collective

action analysis which specifies the distinctiveness of its features and messages, as well as the divergent and multiple layers of approaches and positionings which may exist within any particular collective action. I do not suggest abandoning established theories, but I do argue for awareness of and sensitivity to aspects such as those identified in this research, and in other research on contemporary protest (Della Porta 2007, McDonald 2006). These aspects include the significance of factors such as emotion, personal identity, relationships and values in collective action, and the way in which these factors and other unexpected aspects can be a 'fluid, sensitising device' (Buechler 2000:50) for exploring contemporary protest.

At the same time, the range of innovative and traditional approaches co-existing within the collective action I studied, not only exhibit distinctive signs of 'expressive' collective action, but also desires for more traditional 'political' approaches to the attainment of social change. The research illuminated the tensions which remained unresolved between these approaches within this collectivity. This finding is resonant with that of a number of other researchers of contemporary collective action, i.e. of the presence of a blending of innovative and traditional approaches (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Della Porta 2007). Importantly, the research illuminated the accommodations made in a number of instances between these two orientations, and the way in which this led to a particular form of combined humanitarian and political action. These accommodations illustrate the evolution of action which is significantly grounded in the reality of those whose rights are being supported and defended. However, they also indicate the challenge in such collective action of adequately acknowledging the diversity within that population.

The research has provided a particular example of social action in which the defence of rights and values has been enacted through emotion, embodiment and relationship, as well as through more traditional collective action modes. The manifestation of these former aspects within the social action, proved particularly significant in this social action in enabling a bridging of the divide between these asylum seekers and citizens, and the development of interactions and relationships in which asylum seekers and citizens recognised each other as individuals in their common humanity. This finding puts flesh onto the bones of theories of emotion and corporeality in social action. It demonstrates the way in which the recognition of emotion, embodiment and relationship

in social and political engagement for justice, opens core spheres of exploration and explanation in social research. In this regard, the analysis adds to and develops further many of the theories utilised in the research.

It also provides an expanded perspective on social action supportive of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations such as asylum seekers and refugees. In this instance, the recognition of the agency of the asylum seekers by their supporters, whilst not perfect, enabled mutual recognition of a common humanity and solidarity, and effective joint actions between the two groups, which neither group could have achieved alone. Attainment of recognition of such political agency remains a challenge for all humanitarian and human rights oriented social action with asylum seeker and refugee populations. In addition, as tensions within the collective action entity revealed, recognition is required not only of the commonalities of need within such populations, but also of the variation and diversity within them. The findings of this research importantly illuminate the way in which recognition of such aspects can facilitate effective pathways for joint strategy and action.

Overall, I argue that contemporary collective action in support of stigmatised populations can only be adequately understood within the larger economic, political and historical environments within which they are situated. International responses to refugee flows have shifted over time depending on domestic and international political orientations. Economic epochs such as the current ongoing period of globalisation, have had an impact upon refugee flows and country responses, as well as upon collective action mobilisations. This scenario brings me full circle in terms of both the collective action and refugee studies literature I have utilised in this thesis. I position the collective action which I have studied, as a particular example of actions which are in defence of the humanitarian needs and human rights of populations which suffer exclusion within a partioned world of priviliged and marginalised populations. A global justice consciousness has been exhibited within the collective action, and it can be understood most appropriately in those terms, as a local manifestation of that consciousness. Importantly, the messages of this particular collective action have significance for wider global justice action.

Appendix A: Mapping the social action

I began the process of mapping the social action and categorising groups by collating lists of all the groups that I knew from participant observation, from advocacy and activist email networks and from websites. I then categorised groups into sectors in terms of similarities such as commonalities of association and action, as well as by the self-identifiers they used of themselves as groups. Advocates and activists locally and in other states and territories were invited to comment on, correct, and add to the list. This was done on an individual basis, and also at a national RAR conference in early 2005. In presenting the compiled lists to advocates and activists for comment, I described them as a living document, with the request 'Please treat this presentation as a work in progress and add other groups and comments to the lists in this book'. In an initial diagram of the mapping of the social action, which I presented at the 2005 RAR conference, I also drew sub-categories of particular categories.

In terms of the categorisations, in some instances geographical location was an identifying and unifying point for particular groups. This was particularly so for rural groups such as those which associated under the title Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), with groups in all of the Australian states. For example, at the time of that 2005 conference presentation, 85 groups were associated with RAR, the largest number being in the eastern states of NSW and Victoria.

Similarly associated under a geographical categorisation were small urban neighbourhood advocacy groups in some cities. This was particularly the case in the city of Sydney in which a number of groups developed around local community place identifications, such as Balmain for Refugees, North Sydney Friends of Asylum Seekers and Refuges, North-West Friends of Refugees, Inner West Refugee Action Group, Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group, Bundeena and Maianbar Support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees'. I classified these self-identifying geographical groups separately as *Rural Groups* and as *Suburban/Urban Local Groups*, because of the different circumstances pertaining in the different locations, and the different actions which developed from that. For example, immigration detention centres were located in some capital cities, and advocates and activists who lived there could visit asylum seekers detained in them. From rural locations, supporters had much greater difficulty with physical access, but because of that, developed other methods for communication such as letter writing campaigns which provided support for asylum seekers.

Other groups had formed around a core professional location, in which the social action exhibited was oriented around a particular professional skill base and ethics. Examples of such groups included numerous medical and legal groups across Australia, as well as groups originating from educational, academic, journalistic and other professional locations. This concept of a professional skill base location also informed groups based around a creative skills location or occupation, such as Actors for Refugees, Artists for Refugees, PEN Australia, and many other groups from across the creative arts community. I included all of these groups within the categorisation of *Professional Groups*.

Another categorisation which distinguished between groups, concerned the focus of their social action. Some groups had identified themselves in terms of the specific social action they were focused on, for example, the group Chilout had formed with a particular focus on the situation of children in detention and on bringing change to that situation. The group Spare Rooms for Refugees is similarly self evident in its focus on obtaining accommodation and support for those asylum seekers released from detention but with no support system in place. I classified a diversity of such groups which self-identified with a particular social action or advocacy focus within the category of *Groups With A Specific Focus*.

The focus and scope of social action also distinguished groups which could be classed as *Agencies*, which focused on providing a range of welfare services and advocacy for asylum seekers and refugees. Examples of these were found in each state. In some instances they had been established earlier. In other instances, they had developed in response to the current situation of need. Similarly, the focus and scope of advocacy and lobbying distinguished other groups which could be classified as *Advocacy NGOs*, some of which held already long established positions as peak advocacy organisations.

The presence of church based social justice groups was very evident in the advocacy community. In some cases, these advocates were part of a religious order. In other cases, they held positions of importance in church organisations. In other instances they were part of a church group, or a church based social justice group, or a religiously based or spiritually based social justice group. I classified all of these contributions under the category of *Religious Groups*.

Within a classification of *Political Groups*, I included those elected national parliamentary organisations which advocated for asylum seekers and refugees. These included political parties such as the The Australian Democrats and the Greens. I also included sub-groups located within elected national parliamentary organisations, which self-identified as a group advocating for asylum seekers and refugees (as distinct from the stance of their parliamentary organisation). These included groups such as Labor Coalition of Friends of Refugees and
Labor for Refugees. Within the classification, I also included the organisation Socialist Alliance which campaigned in national elections strongly advocating for asylum seekers and refugees, but which was not electorally successful. Maintaining a political focus as a criterion for inclusion in this category, I also included those groups which self-identified a primarily political agenda and focus to their social action. These included groups such as the Refugee Action Coalition and Refugee Rights Alliance Network and other associated groups in various Australian states. This category generated the most discussion from advocacy and activist comments, eg. one advocate objected to the Labor for Refugees being listed, since the ALP had not contributed to advocacy as a political party. Another objected to Socialist Alliance being listed, since they had not won electoral support.

I included a category for the social action of *Unions* in the diagrammatic representation. Some unions, especially educational unions, were particularly active in social action. In others, support came more from the union leadership, as compared to the grass-roots union members. Unions also provided background support to other advocacy groups.

Although I was well aware of the role of individual action in the overall advocacy, I had not initially included individuals in a separate category, since my focus was on group categorisation and mapping. This absence in the diagrammatic representation was pointed out to me at the 2005 RAR conference. I subsequently included a separate category of *Individuals* in the diagrammatic representation, and this category is indeed a particularly significant aspect of the whole social action.

Similarly, I had not originally included a category titled *Refugees' Groups* for the social action of asylum seekers' and refugees' own self-established groups, in the diagrammatic representation. Again, I was well aware of the high degree of activism and advocacy by asylum seekers and refugees within immigration detention centres. Indeed, it was this activism which had pre-dated and been the direct cause for the involvement of Australian advocates and activists. The high peak of the visibility of this activism, however, tended to occur during the period of detention and to become gradually less visible following release.

I had visualised this activism along a spectrum of continuity, and found that I was not well informed of the work of asylum seekers and refugees after release from the detention centres, or in the community. Subsequently during the process of the research, the absence of this category became obvious as a gap in the representation, and I included the category. These groups in the Australian community have included particular ethnic group organisations which have been formed specifically following the release of particular groups of people from immigration detention centres, such as a number of Hazara and other ethnically based organisations, which have advocated for improved situations for their asylum seeker and refugee compatriots still in detention and in the community without adequate support. They have also included already existing ethnic community organisations which have advocated for improved situations for their asylum seeker and refugee compatriots. The category has also included advocacy groups such as AUSNEWS and SAVE-Australia which had been developed by an asylum seeker on his release from detention, in order to inform the wider community and advocate on these and other social justice issues.

A second reason for the addition of this latter category, was for its unique perspective on the advocacy movement. In my initial research design, I had planned to include among the selection of interviewees, a number of people who had been in locations which formally positioned them in some opposition to the advocacy movement, or, who had publicly or privately expressed that opposition. An oppositional perspective can be very valuable in gaining insights into social action, in that opponents of a particular social action and its actors may often possess a particularly clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of those involved in it. As the research project developed in more detail, the focus on producing an ethnographic 'insider' perspective and the scope and size of the interview regime I developed, meant that this aspect was not followed. Instead, I sought to draw on existing analyses and other research analysis which was being conducted in that area, for that perspective.

I continued however, to appreciate the importance of perspectives situated outside of the perspective being primarily studied, and to seek intuitively for ways to broaden my understanding from different viewpoints. The inclusion of the above category provided that broadening via a particularly appropriate perspective. It was because of the situation and activism of asylum seekers that activists and advocates became aware of

the issue and continued to engage in it. How did asylum seekers themselves view and assess the activism and advocacy that was taken on their behalf? Nothing could be more pertinent in an evaluation of the style, scope and success of advocates' social action than the perspective of asylum seekers/refugees themselves.

A visual representation of 'the whole'

From the document which I had circulated with lists of groups and categories, I produced a diagrammatic representation of the advocacy and activism that was occurring (see Appendix B). In making the diagrammatic representation, I conceptually positioned the Australian government policies affecting asylum seekers at the centre of the diagram. This central area was titled 'Australian Onshore Refugee Policies', to indicate that the policies referred to were those which affected asylum seekers arriving in Australia without entry document, both those who were unsuccessful in being recognised as refugees, and those who were successful in being recognised as refugees. I then positioned the various categories that I had determined, around that centre, with connecting lines in order to indicate that the groups and individuals in these categories were focused on bringing change to those policies, and on assisting the asylum seekers negatively affected by them. Although not explicitly shown in the diagram, at the centre of the social action were the asylum seekers themselves, affected by the policies, acting to protest the injustice of their treatment and communicate their situation to an Australian public, and joining in joint actions with their supporters in attempts to bring change.

A multiplicity of roles and a fluidity of movement within and across sectors

Significantly, of those people interviewed, many had membership of more than one of the designated categories. Many of the interviewees moved across roles both within and across a number of sectors, and their category identification was often a fluid or multifaceted entity.

Additional interviewee data

Personal demographic data was not requested from the interviewees since the selection process was organised on the basis of their sector and geographical location. However, 55 were female and 42 male, and ages ranged from young adults to retirees. Of their geographical locations, 34 were from NSW, 24 from Victoria, 19 from South Australia, 10 from Western Australia, 5 from Queensland, 4 from Tasmania and 1 from the ACT. In terms of my categorisation of their primary sector involvement, 18 were located in *Professional Groups*, 15 in *Advocacy NGOs*, 13 in *Political Groups*, 11 in *Agencies*, 10 in geographical group locations in either *Rural/Regional Groups* or *Suburban/Urban Groups*, 10 in *Religious Groups*, 9 in *Groups with a Special Focus*, 5 in *Refugees' Groups*, 4 in the *Individuals* category, and 2 in the *Unions* category.

In the category of *Political Groups*, interviewees included people identified with roles in the Australian Democrats and The Greens; in individual advocacy within the LNP; and in the sub-groups within the ALP such as the Labor Coalition of Friends of Refugees, and Labor for Refugees. The category also included people identified with political activist groups such as Refugee Action Coalition and Refugee Rights Alliance Network.

In the category of *Religious Groups*, interviewees included people identified with roles in the Uniting Church, the Catholic Church, and the National Council of Churches, Australia.

In the category of *Agencies*, interviewees included people from the Ecumenical Migration Centre, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre, Hotham Mission, the Romero Centre, The Coalition Assisting Refugees and Detainees, Anglicare Tasmania, and others.

In the category of *Advocacy NGOs*, interviewees included people from the Refugee Council of Australia, A Just Australia, The Australian Refugee Association, Justice for Refugees SA, The Health Alliance, the Australian Refugee Rights Association, the United Nations Association of Australia, and others.

In the category of *Professional Groups*, interviewees primarily included doctors, lawyers, teachers, academics, media and arts professionals across the country.

In the category of *Groups with a Special Focus*, interviewees included groups such as Children out of Detention, Actors for Refugees, Spare Rooms for Refugees, Baxter Mums, Australians Against Racism, and International PEN, and others.

In the category of geographical groups, interviewees included members of rural support groups listed with *Rural Australians for Refugees*, and in urban areas, participants in *Circles of Friends* in Adelaide, and *Urban Support Groups* in Fremantle, Sydney and Melbourne.

In the category of *Refugees' Groups*, interviewees included people who had been detained as asylum seekers in Australian immigration detention centres, and people who were a member of one of the ethnic society groups advocating for asylum seekers in Australia.

In the category of *Unions*, interviewees included members of national and state unions.

In the category of *Individuals*, interviewees included people who either did not hold roles in other sectors, or whose individual actions were considered by me to distinguish them more than did their sector categorisation.

Appendix B: Social action maps

The following two diagrams represent different stages of the research. The *first diagram* was presented at the 2005 Rural Australians for Refugees conference. It therefore included an expanded view of the sub-groups within Rural Australians for Refugees. All of the other sectors could have been expanded similarly. However, these were not developed in the diagram. At this stage of the research, I was intending to represent visually not only the sub-groups of the various sectors, but also the alliances and networks within and across the sectors. The research design subsequently changed, as discussed in Chapter 4. However, I continued to utilise the diagrammatic representation for the selection of interviewees, and for a representation of the diversity of engagement.

Before the conference, I had developed a document that listed many of the larger organizations and smaller groups involved in either support services or advocacy or activism for asylum seekers. I described this document as a 'work in progress', and attendees at the conference were invited to comment on and add to it. The document accompanied the early diagrammatic representation of groups and sectors of involvement, and the diagrammatic representation had developed and continued to evolve from it.

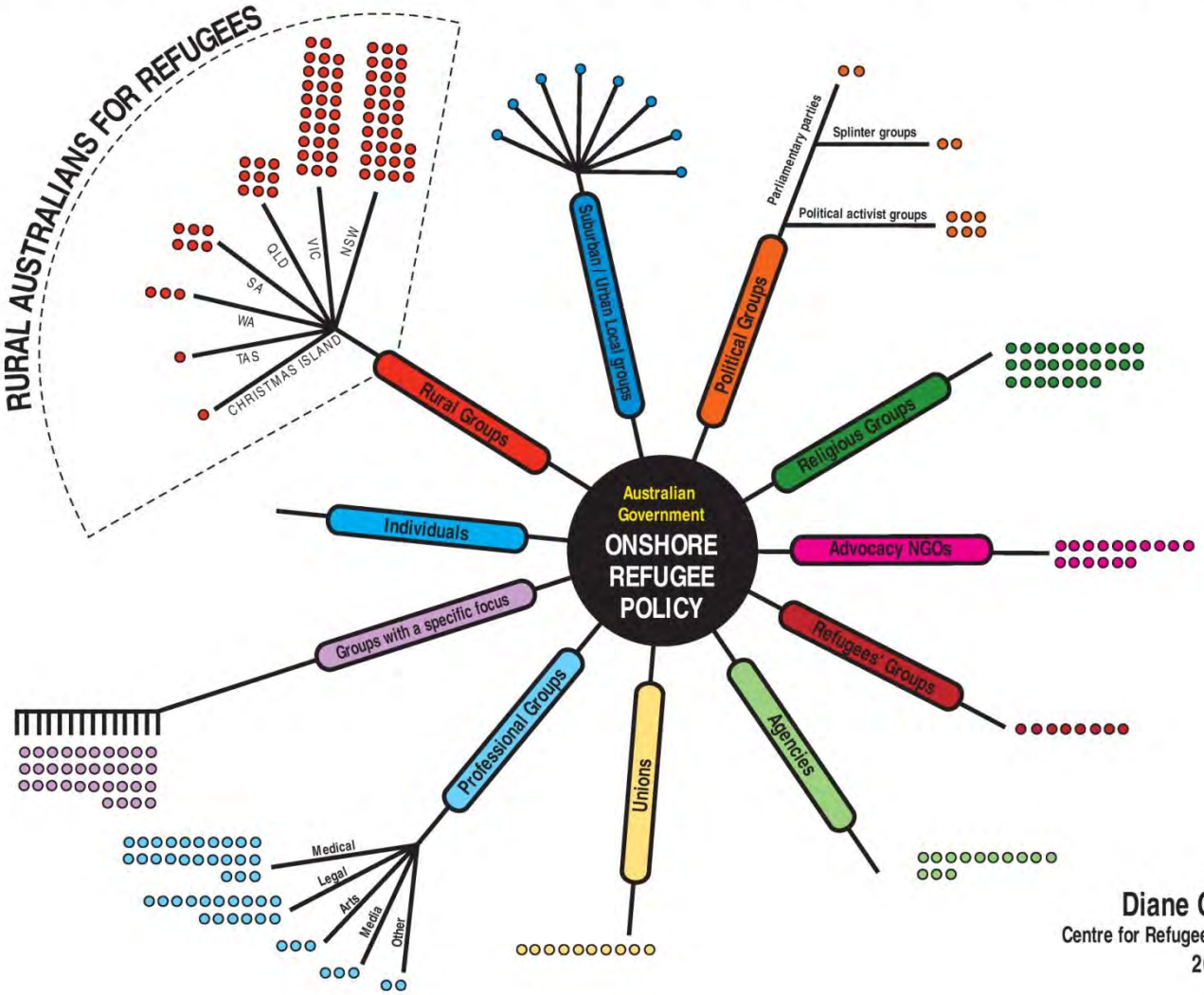
Some of the organizations listed were involved in service provision to asylum seekers. Some were involved in advocacy for asylum seekers. Some were involved in professional work with asylum seekers, eg. legal and medical. Other groups were variously involved in community support, advocacy, activism and communication.

Some of the organizations were part of an alliance, such as the medical colleges that were listed as part of *The Alliance of Health Professionals for Asylum Seekers*. Some groups were also part of broader organizations such as the many suburban groups of *Circles of Friends*, and the 82 regional and rural groups that then formed *Rural Australians for Refugees*.

244 large organisations and small groups were listed within the document. However, the list was not a complete representation of the full extent of involvement at the time.

The *second diagram* is a simplified version of the original one, and became a working diagram from which I continued to conceptualise the fluidity of networks, multiple role taking by individuals, and shifting alliances within the whole entity, but without further visual representation of them.

The Australian Asylum Seeker and Refugee Advocacy Movement



Diane Gosden
Centre for Refugee Reseach, UNSW
2005

The Australian Asylum Seeker and Refugee Advocacy Movement

Diane Gosden
Centre for Refugee Reseach, UNSW
2005

Appendix C: Interview process information

The selection process of potential interviewees

Potential interviewees were selected so as to obtain a spread of perspectives across the categories which I had mapped, and across the Australian continent (see Appendix A).

Purposeful sampling

I began the selection of potential interviews in geographical areas closest to me in NSW, selecting purposively across the categories and across sectors within the categories. For example, within the category I had named professional groups, I selected people from various medical and legal locations, as well as in academic, educational, research, media and creative arts locations. When I began selecting in areas more geographically distant, I followed the same pattern, albeit aiming for as broad a coverage of categories and sectors in categories as possible. Because of the number of groups involved and the geographical dispersion across Australia, the interviewees were situated mostly in capital cities of Australia, though the advocacy and activism of some of these interviewees had been previously situated in rural and regional areas.

Snowball sampling

A small number of interviews were organised in a snowball sampling pattern during my visits to Australian states other than NSW. These interviews were suggested and facilitated through independent third party connections. These interviews added to those which had been previously organised.

Informed Consent

An ethics approved University of New South Wales *Participant Information Statement and Consent Form* (see Appendix D), was provided to interviewees before the interview, as well as an *Interview Topic Schedule* (see Appendix D). Interviewees were informed in the *Participant Information Statement and Consent Form* that their confidentiality would be protected, and that they would not be identified in the thesis or in any publication. They were also informed of their right to revoke consent, and their right to terminate the interview at any time if it became distressing for them.

Face to face/ one to one interview format

I considered that the format of face to face interviews would be the most effective method for ascertaining advocates' thoughts on their involvement and experience, since a face-to-face, one-to-one in-depth interview has the potential to provide time and space within which an individual interviewee's perspective can be produced and reflected upon.

A semi-structured interview format

I chose a semi-structured interview format. This format provided interviewees with a certain amount of structure for the interview session. A number of topic issues which could be discussed, were provided before the interview in the *Interview Topic Schedule*.

Interviewees were informed that the topic list could be used by them as either a complete option, or as simply a starting point to speak about their own experiences. This format provided flexibility for an interviewee in that they could choose to speak about all of the issues which were listed; or they could speak about one or more particular issues listed; or they could speak without referring to the question items at all. However, in all interviews, I endeavoured before the interview ended, to seek interviewees' responses to three questions on the topic list which most interested me, i.e. those relating to the advocacy and activism in terms of its functioning as a social collective.

Length of interviews

The time period for interviews was planned to be between 1-2 hours. This was presented as an option for the interviewee. For most interviews, the interview period which resulted was between sixty and ninety minutes. Some interviews went for the full two hour period. Some interviews were previously known to be time limited in terms of the amount of time for which the interviewee was available, and were within a thirty to sixty minute period.

The location of the interviews

The majority of interviews took place in the home or workplace of the interviewee. Some interviews were also conducted in public places which were convenient for the interviewee, such as cafes and parks. All of the interviews occurred in a place designated by the interviewee. For areas geographically distant from my home location, this involved a large amount of travelling.

Number of interviews and interviewees

Ninety four interviews were conducted. The majority were one-to-one semi-structured interviews. A small number of interviews were joint interviews with two, and in one instance three interviewees. Of the ninety four interviews, three were repeat interviews in order to follow up on particular issues over time. Within the format of the interview schedule, ninety seven people were interviewed. This number of interviews was spread across the research defined categories and across geographical areas in order to provide a sample of the actual diversity which existed within each category and each region. The interviews were also conducted over a number of years.

Coding of Interviewee names

Interviewee names were coded to maintain their confidentiality.

Technical format of interviews

The majority of the interviews were face-to-face interviews. The exceptions to this were two telephone interviews. The majority of interviews were audio-taped. There were three exceptions to this, where researcher notes were taken, but the interview was not audio-recorded.

The time period covered by the interviews

The first interviews began in late 2004. The majority were conducted in 2005 and 2006, with additional interviews and some repeat interviews in 2007. Final interviews were conducted in 2008 and 2009. In one case, a change of staff had occurred in a senior management role in an NGO during this later period. In other cases, additional issues of

concern which had come to my attention through engagement in an iterative research process, were followed up with individual advocates and activists.

Appendix D

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

Australian Asylum Seeker and Refugee Policy: A Contested Area

You ..... are invited to participate in a study of the contested area surrounding Australian asylum seeker and refugee policy.

I hope to learn about the influences and processes involved in the development and implementation of the policy by Australian government; about the impact of asylum seeker and refugee advocacy upon the government policy and upon public awareness; and about the impact of this policy and this advocacy on Australia's national and international identity.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your experience in this area. If you decide to participate, I will organise a semi-structured interview with you, which would require between 1-2 hours of our time. The interview would be focussed around key topics, and I will provide you with the interview schedule outlining these topics, before the interview. The interview itself will be loosely structured, so as to allow your knowledge and experience in the area to be articulated. If you permit, I will record the interview on an audio-tape. If you do not wish the interview to be audio-taped, it will not be. Audio-tapes and data arising from them will be stored in a secure location.

If, at any time during the interview, you are distressed, the interview can be terminated. If, in the unlikely situation of your distress continuing after the interview, the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW), at UNSW, will make available to you the services of independent counsellors.

I cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. However, the hoped for benefits from the study include analysis of Australian government motivations for and process in the development and implementation of this policy; evaluation of the impact of the asylum seeker and refugee advocacy groups which have arisen around this issue; and exploration of the implications of this policy and this advocacy for Australia's national and international identity.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, except as required by law. If you give me your permission by signing this document, I plan to discuss and to publish the results. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Complaints may be directed to the Ethics Secretariat, The University of New South Wales, Sydney 2052 Australia (phone 9385 4234, fax 9385 6648, email ethics.sec@unsw.edu.au).

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the University of New South Wales. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me. If you have any additional questions later, I (Ms. Diane Gosden ph. 02-9544-4983), or my supervisor (Dr. Eileen Pittaway ph. 02-9385-1961) will be happy to answer them. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

Australian Asylum Seeker and Refugee Policy: A Contested Area

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the Participant Information Statement, you have decided to take part in the study.

.....	.....
Signature of Research Participant	Signature of Witness
.....	.....
(Please PRINT name)	(Please PRINT name)
.....	.....
Date	Date
.....	.....
Signature of Investigator	Nature of witness
.....	
Please PRINT name	

REVOCATION OF CONSENT

Australian Asylum Seeker and Refugee Policy: A Contested Area

I hereby wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in the research proposal described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** jeopardise any treatment or my relationship with the University of New South Wales.

....
Signature Date

.....
Please PRINT Name

The section for Revocation of Consent should be forwarded to Ms. Diane Gosden, Centre for Refugee Research, School of Social Work, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2502.

TOPIC ISSUES FOR FACE TO FACE IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEWEES WILL BE INVITED TO COMMENT ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES

1. Issue: The integrity of national boundaries versus the integrity of human rights obligations.

2. Issue: The role of expert professional knowledge in the development and implementation of asylum seeker/refugee policy.

3. Issue: The process of policy development and implementation in regard to asylum seeker and refugee policy.

4. Issue: Government discourse about asylum seekers and refugees.

5. Issue: Media discourse about asylum seekers and refugees.

6. Issue: Asylum seeker/refugee advocacy discourse about asylum seekers and refugees.

7. Issue: Issues arising from mandatory detention of children.

8. Issue: The response of the Australian public to these government, media and advocacy discourses.

9. Issue: The impact of asylum seeker/refugee advocates on asylum seeker/refugee policy.

10. Issue: The impact of asylum seeker/refugee advocates on public awareness.

11. Issue: The effectiveness of asylum seeker/refugee advocates as a social collective.

Post-Script: Commentary on events since late 2006

This section summarises political and social change in asylum issues in Australia since the end of the period studied. That period extended from 2001-late 2006. It ended on a potentially positive scenario for reform, following the parliamentary withdrawal of the Designated Unauthorised Arrivals Bill in late 2006; increased openings for effective dialogue between government departments and welfare and advocacy NGOs; and the findings of the Inquiries of 2005 (Palmer 2005; Commonwealth Ombudsman 2005).

The period following has not been part of this research project. However, developments since late 2006 indicate a continuing trajectory of alternating periods of progress and regression on the asylum seeker issue, in terms of the political and social change sought by the collective actors studied in this thesis. Indeed, by late 2011, reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission on the number of suicides, self-harm and attempted self-harm by asylum seekers detained in Australian immigration detention centres (AHRC 2011a, 2011b, 2011d), illustrate the ongoing adverse situation of asylum seekers under Australian policies, despite some earlier periods of incremental reform and a period of governmental visions of larger and more substantial reform (Phillips and Spinks 2011:8; RCOA 2010a). A brief summary of this period is therefore offered.

With the electoral defeat of the then LNP government in late 2007, and an incoming ALP government, a period of incremental reform followed (see RCOA 2010a for a summary of these reforms). In mid 2008, with the announcement of a new policy direction in regard to mandatory detention, this reform process appeared to be gathering momentum, with new policy directions indicating that asylum seekers would be detained 'as a "last resort", rather than as standard practice' (Phillips and Spinks 2011:8). This period from 2007- 2009 also included a brief period of lessened anti-asylum seeker political rhetoric on the issue, and some bi-partisan movement towards reform (JSCOM 2008), before it again became an issue of adversarial political contention.

However, while the incoming ALP government abandoned a number of the harsh policies of the previous period, it retained others, including mandatory detention (RCOA 2010a). In addition, in 2010, in response to an environment of increasing numbers of boat arrivals (Phillips and Spinks 2011:11-12); increased political agitation on the issue from the LNP, now the major opposition party (RCOA 2010b; RCOA 2009); and increased concern in the Australian community as expressed in polls (see Phillips and Spinks 2011:5 for surveys showing a shift in pubic attitudes from 2009-2010), the ALP government began introducing harsher measures (RCOA 2010c-f for a summary of these measures).

There has also been an intensified focus on punishing 'people smugglers', and on attempting to prevent the journeys of asylum seekers by boat from Asian-Pacific regional areas to Australia. While not pursuing the overtly hostile and demonising discourse of asylum seekers which was so evident in the period studied in this thesis, the discourse and actions which accompany this focus produce a covert negativity of

representation of asylum seekers. This time the representation is a more complex one. However, it is one which still focuses on finding solutions which would minimise the number of asylum seekers arriving in Australia without entry documents, rather than on honouring Australia's obligations under the Refugees Convention, [110] and one which continues to fail to educate the Australian public in the importance of honouring those obligations. In addition, despite a discourse of compassion for asylum seekers at risk from those journeys, this focus does not adequately concern itself with actions to protect the well being and rights of asylum seekers who will make that decision.

By late 2011, a situation similar to that faced in the late 1980 and early 1990s could be said to exist again, in terms of cycles of harsh government policies and practices followed by contesting litigation; and when such litigation was successful, followed by the actuality or threat of over-riding parliamentary legislation. As mentioned in the early part of the thesis, it was from the earlier late 1980s and early 1990s period of recurring cycles of legislation, litigation and legislation, described by one of the interviewees as 'a chain of court wins and legislative amendments to overcome the court wins' (Interviewee XS), that the Australian government treatment of 'boat people' continued its shift to increasingly harsher policies (JSCOM 2008:Appendix D). In the current situation, I refer to 2010 and 2011decisions by the High Court of Australia (RCOA 2010g and 2011e respectively) according and protecting asylum seeker's rights, which were then followed by policy and legislative attempts to neutralise or overturn those decisions (RCOA 2011c and 2011a respectively).

In July 2011, the Australian government signed a negotiated agreement with Malaysia, of an exchange of '800 asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat' (AHRC 2011c:2) for '1000 recognised refugees from Malaysia per year for up to four years' (AHRC 2011c:2). By late August 2011, the High Court of Australia had found that the Minister's declaration of Malaysia 'as a third country to which "offshore entry persons" can be removed was invalid' (AHRC 2011c:2; HCA 2011). Subsequently, the government formulated parliamentary legislation to overcome this obstacle, though this was later withdrawn when it became apparent that it would not succeed in parliament. However, the agreement with Malaysia remains a preferred option for the government. In the meantime, in view of the High Court decision, and the unsuccessful attempt of the government to pass legislation over-riding that decision, the government has indicated that groups of asylum seekers arriving by boat without entry visas will be 'given bridging visas similar to those granted to people who arrive by plane and overstay' (Coorey 2011). In this instance, by default, a degree of reform in policy towards these asylum seekers has been achieved.

Yet, with both major Australian political parties utilising political campaigns which obfuscate and manipulate the issue of people seeking asylum in Australia (RCOA 2010h-i; 2011b, 2011d), little fundamental and sustainable change is likely to occur. Meanwhile, the human damage inflicted upon these asylum seekers continues. Though this damage can be multiplied many times by the number of asylum seekers involved, it can be best understood in the particular, in the life of each individual moving into mental illness, self-harm and suicide. At the time of the writing of this PostScript on the 2nd. November 2011, the latest person to suicide had done so a week earlier (Chan

[110] This lack of focus on protection of asylum seekers rights, applies to asylum seekers who arrive in Australia without valid entry documents, and also to those in transit to Australia, who are in countries in which their rights are not protected.

2011; Gordon 2001; Editorial 2011; Keneally 2011). He was 27 years of age. He had been detained in Australian immigration detention centres for more than two years. He had already been assessed as meeting the criteria of the Refugees Convention. Yet he still remained in immigration detention. This was so despite the large body of evidence referred to earlier in the thesis, which has been in existence for many years, documenting the mental harm produced by long-term immigration detention.

It could appear that the asylum issue in Australia has come full circle, and that little has been gained, since asylum seekers and their supporters campaigned for their rights in the late 1980s. However, this conclusion would ignore the gains made in public education since those beginnings; the greater numbers of Australian citizens mobilised in support of asylum seekers' rights during that period and especially during the period studied in this thesis; the strengthening of many refugee advocacy and welfare organisations since those early beginnings; and the continuing accumulation of evidence of the harm caused by Australian policies. Social change does not usually come easily. The challenge which the collective action participants struggled with during the period studied in this research, remains.

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