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The Construction of Borders:

Discursive representations of asylum seekers in Australian press

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Abstract

In Australia a succession of politicised and well-publicized incidents has highlighted the 'dilemma' of refugees and seekers of asylum. A number of desperate human tragedies and very questionable practices and decisions by the Australian government have caused the upset. However, instead of focusing on the humanitarian aspects of the arrival of asylum seekers by boat, their arrival has been framed as a security issue. This has provided a context where highly restrictive border control measures have been implemented that disregards some of the central tenets of Australian Democracy. This thesis rests on the belief that media play a highly influential role in the constructing of asylum seekers as a security issue and therefore also plays a decisive role in the way border policies are implemented. In order to shed light on this, a discourse analysis of letters to the editor in Australian will be done to examine the exchange of arguments through which such borders policies are justified and challenged.

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1995: 195).

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1. Introduction – “Operation Sovereign Borders”

In the last two decades arguments concerning who can claim belonging in Australia, and fears surrounding border security, have been at the forefront of Australian political and media debates, especially in relation to asylum seekers arriving by boat. Through political rhetoric and intense media reporting, the arrival of people seeking asylum by boat has been framed as a security emergency (Carrington, 2006). As a result of this, the current Australian government initialised “Operation Sovereign Borders” on 18 September 2013 after the election of the Abbot Government at the 2013 federal election. “Operation Sovereign Borders” has proved to be a highly restrictive and military-led operation that has been implemented to deter and prevent people arriving by boat to seek asylum in Australia by focusing on ending people smuggling, increasing Australia’s offshore processing capacities, turning back boats that are approaching Australia, and direct denial of refugee status to those who are believed to have destroyed their documentation (Australian Government, 2014:b). In their quest to deter asylum seekers arriving by boat, the Australian government have even distributed animated leaflets in Afghanistan. (The Guardian, 2014). These animated leaflets portray a young Afghan man that is persuaded by his parents to travel to Australia in the hope of a better life among lush green parks and skyscrapers. The reader then follows the man as he makes the dangerous journey to Australia, over land and stormy waters, only to be intercepted by Australian Navy. The man is ultimately placed in a detention camp on the remote island of Nauru. The animated leaflet ends with a sobbing man surrounded by other people in the same situation. This leaflet is directly targeting Afghan asylum seekers through a graphic campaign currently undertaken by the Australian Government under the slogan - ‘No way. They will not make Australia home.’ (Australian Government, 2014a). The message sent by the government is clear – Do not come to Australia, especially by boat. By actively presenting people seeking asylum as a security issue in public discourse, attention has effectively been drawn away from the humanitarian aspects of people attempting to seek refuge in Australia.

The focus on security issues and restrictive border measures instead of humanitarian aspects of people arriving by boat is problematic in a time where it is estimated that by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), that the world is experiencing its most serious refugee crisis for almost 20 years. It has been estimated that more than 45,2 million people are currently displaced, where countries such as Pakistan, is currently housing more than one million refugees (UNHCR, 2012:a). Calls for developed countries to take more responsibility for refugees are being aired. However, by actively contesting claims for asylum, which have been the case in Australia, it is increasingly losing its meaning as a human right (UNHCR, 2012:b). A situation where the meaning of asylum is being diluted fails to recognise the warnings by Arendt (1973) who have argued that when refugees live outside state borders and therefore without state protection do not have rights. She argued that although claims to human rights are international they are in fact the rights of citizens and without citizenship those rights will not be enforced (Arendt, 1973). This highlights the importance of recognising the right to asylum as a fundamental right protecting those that are among the most vulnerable.

The question of how borders behave to include or exclude, is a research area that attracts a lot of interests in the field of Human Geography. States have the power to decide who is permitted to legally cross its borders, but as this study will show, these borders are not just simple 'artefacts' on the ground (Agnew, 2008). Formerly it was held that: "Geography does not argue. It simply is." (Spykman 1938: 236). According to this type of reasoning borders are there simply for practical reasons and can therefore be clearly defined "... according to the purposes they serve and how they serve them." (Agnew, 2008:176). However, more recent research on borders emphasises that instead of looking at borders as 'natural', borders should be viewed as societal, political and linguistic constructions (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). Moving away from borders as 'natural', this perspective on borders emphasises how borders are produced and reformed through historical-geographical processes in given societies and their cultures (Engelstoft & Larsen, 2013). What constitutes inclusion and exclusion, here and

there are formulated through these processes, often referred to as ‘bordering’ processes. Massey (1999) argues that space and borders is the product of relations and since relations are materially embedded practices bordered space is always contested and in a process of becoming. What makes borders such an interesting research topic is because if borders are in fact relational, the way borders work to include and exclude can occur, change and even disappear depending on what the historical and geographical context believe is important for a group or society (Engelstoft & Larsen, 2013). This means that what constitutes right and wrong, us and them has great implications on how borders behave.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality...discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire—it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized (Foucault, 1970).

This statement was made by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and lies at the very core of this thesis. Guided by Foucault’s notion of discourse as the power to be seized, the aim of this study is to examine the struggle over specific representations of refugees and asylum seekers currently waged in letters to the editor in Australian newspapers. Informed by the view that borders are not neutral but rather negotiated through relations, the specific aim of this study is to examine the discourses or “narratives” in letters to the editor. This will be done in order to analyse how the “narratives” in these letters to the editor reproduce or resist the discourses that contribute to the construction of restrictive Australian borders in

relation to asylum seekers arriving by boat. Hopefully, this can hopefully contribute to the field of political geography by highlighting the importance of studying the relation between discourses, power and spatiality.

In order to approach the chosen research topic two overarching research questions have been formulated:

- In what ways have asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat been represented in letters to the editor in Australian media between the 22 of may 2013 and 3 of may 2014?
- How can these representations contribute to the construction of borders?

2. Literature Review

Burr (1995), states that knowledge and understanding are social processes. Through this perspective, representations are "... transmitted through social institutions, cultural traditions and day-to-day interactions between individuals and groups." (Lea & Lynn, 2003:428). The effectiveness in spreading such knowledge lies in the breadth of coverage, and as such, media and politicians are powerful means through which certain representations are created and spread in society (Cartner, 2009). With access to a wide and mostly unrestricted audience, the media constitutes a very potent force in the production and construction of particular forms of representations (Fowler, 1991). This way media can play a large role in legitimizing the way nation states exclude a certain group of people by reproducing them as a threat to the "people" upon which legitimacy of a nation state is grounded. (Fernandez et al, 2006). As such Van Dijk (1991) have identified the need for "...more insight into the most complex question of the problem of reproduction, that is, the role of the press, and in particular of the detailed structures and meanings of its reporting, in the process of opinion and attitude formation among the public at large." (Van Dijk, 1991: 254).

Following the intense politicisation of asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat, a number of studies have demonstrated how media representation of asylum seekers and discourses of "the nation" are highly influential mechanisms that operate in the marginalization of asylum seekers. Pickering (2001) has analysed media discourses concerning asylum seekers and refugees in the Australian Press in order to argue that they have been routinely constructed not only as a "problem" population but also as a "deviant" population in relation to the integrity of the nation state, race and disease. O'Doherty & Augoustinos (2008) focuses on the "Tampa crisis" that occurred in 2001, when Australian military troops boarded a Norwegian shipping vessel, that had rescued a group of asylum seekers. By examining public discourse concerning the "Tampa Crisis" in media, the authors analysed how the use of arguments relying on the notion of nationhood and national identity worked to justify military action against a group

of civilians and ultimately marginalise asylum seekers. In another context, Lynn & Lea (2003) argue that media is playing an influential role in the social construction of asylum-seekers. The authors highlight that over time, the attitudes towards asylum seekers have varied which consequently has impacted their treatment in recipient countries. Identifying media as a powerful source in affecting such attitudes, they argue that ideas "...of citizenship, identity and Nation-hood are employed within a variety of discursive and rhetorical strategies that form part of an 'elite' discourse, one that contribute to a 'new Apartheid.'" (Lynn & Lea, 2003:425). Furthermore, Billing (1995) have argued that by using words that not necessarily grab our attention such as: "here", "us" he highlights the fact that media and mass communication is constantly referring to the reader as part of a national entity in contrast to something "other" (Billing, 1995).

The selection of literature relates in a concrete way to this study highlighting that the construction of asylum seekers in media can work as a mechanism through which restrictive and exclusionary border policies are legitimised in public discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frame for this study is divided into two sections. The first section gives an overview of how this study will view the relation between space and power while the second section more concretely concern theories that relate to the discourse analysis methodology.

3.1 Rethinking Space and Power

In *La Production de l'espace* (1974) Lefebvre challenges the idea of space as a 'container' where social processes take place. By looking at space as something made up of social processes he emphasized the need to consider space as both a product (a thing) and a determinant (a process) of social relations and actions. By demonstrating that space does not just exist naturally for us to discover as it "...is humans that decide how to represent things, and not the things themselves" (Barnes & Duncan 1992:2), Lefebvre argued that space should not be seen as neutral but as highly political. Lefebvre saw space at the centre of a continuing social and historical process, involving conflict and struggle over meanings and values. The significance of Lefebvre's work is that it reprioritises and radicalizes the role of space in social relations and provides a theoretical and conceptual foundation through which spatiality of power can be examined (Zieleniec, 2008).

In the early 1990s, there was a critical turn in the study of politics and space due to the increased interest in the spatiality of power at the end of the Cold War that broke the solid territorial structures that had formed geopolitical thought for over 40 years (Dodds et. al., 2013). The term "Critical geopolitics" was first coined by Simon Dalby (1990) and became the name used for the field of research that opposed the 'classical' view on geopolitics as a neutral and objectivist science and saw the need to denaturalize the global order by portraying it as socially and historically constructed. Agnew and O'Tuathail (1992) emphasised that there was an increasing need to critically assess how 'geopolitical reasoning' constructs representations of states, territories and political regimes through discourse and how people utilize these discursive understandings to explain

events, envision international relations and justify foreign policy actions (Hubbard et al, 2004: 227). Critical geopolitics thereby identified the need to give more flexible account of spatiality and power by unpacking common territorial assumptions that are constantly being used by government agencies, think tanks and mass media such as the antithesis East and West, Security and Danger and Freedom and Oppression. The importance of analysing these assumptions is the fact that many of these assumptions contributed to how interest and identities come into being (Dodds et. al., 2013). This way it can be argued that critical geopolitics was influenced by the previous work of Said, (1979) who examined the political and cultural dimensions of interregional power relations by examining the creation and maintaining of imaginative geographies of the Orient through discourse supported by institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines and colonial bureaucracies (Peet, 1998:229).

The value of the theories proposed by critical geopolitics for this study is that it critically reconceptualises geopolitics so that the analytical focus is not directly set on territories, borders and actors, but rather on texts and their respective discourses as processes by which these categories are produced. (Agnew & O'Tuathail, 1992).

3.2 Theoretical Framework for Discursive Approach

Michel Foucault developed a theory of power/knowledge that greatly contributed to an increased understanding the interrelation of power and discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 1999:20). Power, according to Foucault, does not belong to a specific agent such as individuals, the state or other groups of people with special interests. Power according to Foucault should not be seen as an oppressive 'tool' that specific agents exercise in relation to passive subjects (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). According to Foucault power should instead be seen as productive (Jorgensen & Phillips, 1999). Foucault argues that:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1980:119).

This view of power holds that power is both productive and restrictive as it produces a particular perspective on what constitutes our social world and thereby excludes alternative ways of viewing the world. There for the power/knowledge relation emphasise the need to study discourse as it is in many ways discourse that form the subjects we are and the objects we can know anything about (Jorgensen & Phillips, 1999).

The elaborative work of Foucault on the power/knowledge nexus also has certain consequences how truth is perceived. Foucault refers to truth as a “regimes of truth” where truth constantly reinforced through institutions, such as the education system, the media, but can also be redefined due to changes of political and economic ideologies. It is through the nexus of power/knowledge that Foucault saw discourse as a framework forming social practice and therefore systematically forming its objects (Alvesson&Sköldberg, 2000:225). A key point about Foucault’s approach to power is that it is constantly being created, exercised and resisted as he sees discourses as: “... temporary, materialistic expressions of diverse wills of power, not necessarily governed by reason. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:224). Although Foucault gives few guidelines on operational approaches for conducting research, he gives an invaluable insight in the working of power and especially in how knowledge and norms can become so embedded that they go beyond us, and discipline us through the mechanisms of power/knowledge.

Inspired by Foucault, Norman Fairclough has provided some insight how discourse can be approached and analysed. He holds that discourses should be seen as social practices as discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially

shaped (Fairclough, 1992). In order to examine this dialectical relationship, Fairclough (1995) has developed a three-dimensional model through which the use of language is analysed by dividing it into three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice. The analysis of text focuses on the formal aspects of text such as vocabulary and grammar in order to analyse how discourse is created linguistically. The analysis of discursive practice is concentrated on how the author builds on already existing discourses and genres to produce texts and how receivers of text uses the established discourses and genres in the consumption of text. Social practice is the wider social practice, which the communicative event is a part of and in order to analyse social practice, Fairclough suggests that one should go beyond discourse and instead move into sociological theory or cultural theory. While Fairclough covers all three dimensions, this study will only focus on the discursive practice as it is in the discursive practice that the relations between texts and social practises is mediated (Jorgensen & Phillips, 1999: 75).

In order to analyse how discursive practices contribute to a certain way of looking at borders - the “argumentative” approach developed by Maarten Hajer - will be used. What makes Hajer’s approach valuable to this study is that Hajer wants to analyse how the definition of a political problem relates to the particular *narrative* in which it is discussed. For example, the arrival of boats with refugees seeking asylum is not a social construct but a real occurrence. The point is how one makes sense of the arrival, how one describes it. During a seminar at Stockholm Resilience Centre Hajer said that:

To me, discourse is more important than institutions, because you may go to your institute everyday, but it makes a hell of a difference, whether you work on green growth or sustainable development or something else ... discourses inform, they are the software that makes the computer meaningful (Stockholm Resilience Centre TV, 2012).

To relate this statement to this study, discourse has an impact on how border should “behave”. For example, the dominant discourse can either see asylum

seekers that need protection or they can be framed as “illegal immigrants” that are violating the Australian Sovereignty. Framed according to the “illegal” narrative they signify a structural problem that needs to be resolved. This way a narrative constructs a particular problem and according to the way in which it is constructed, the measures to correct this problem will vary as well. According to Hajer (1995) language is not seen as a set of passive tools but as a specific communicative practice, which influences the perception of interests and preference. Inspired by Foucault, discourse is seen to be somewhat structured, but not entirely static as the interaction of active human beings form a particular discourse through interaction. By using Hajer’s approach, discourse can be viewed as something formulated through human interaction, where an exchange of arguments and contradictory suggestions constructs the way one is to make sense of reality take place. Through this perspective actors are constantly in a process of "achieving, selecting and adapting thoughts, mutating and creating them, in the continued struggle for argumentative victory against rival thinkers" (Hajer, 1995:54).

4. Methodology

4.1 Theory of Knowledge

As a theory of knowledge, social constructionism hold that our understanding of things, concepts or ideas that we take for granted are not *natural* or *pre-given* but rather is the product of human actions and interactions, human history, society and culture. A social constructionist approach allows a questioning of the things one might take for granted - our identities, practices, knowledge and understandings that are relatively quite locked in concrete cases (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2000: 12). In Burr (1995), the fundamental principles of social constructionism have been outlined. She sees this approach to understanding knowledge as a critical approach towards universal and taken for-granted knowledge and understanding by arguing that our knowledge of the world is both historically and culturally specific. This means that our knowledge and way of constructing reality is relational in the sense that social processes structure the way our conceptualisation of the world is created, sustained and renewed. Social constructionism also highlights the relationship between knowledge and social practice. In a determined world order, some practices becomes normalised while other unthought-of. This means that different conceptions of world order leads to different social practices, which means that the social construction of knowledge and truth results in concrete social consequences. In other word, our knowledge and actions are intimately related and reproduces each other (Burr, 1995).

The broader research field of social constructionism has its roots among French poststructuralists (Jorgensen & Phillips, 1999:12). Poststructuralism is often understood as a complete break with Structuralism, but “post” in this case refers to a continuation of Structuralism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Postmodernism takes certain properties of Structuralism, especially the Saussurian thesis of language as a structural play with signs but breaks with:

The conception of a dominating centre which would govern the structure, and with the conception that the synchronic, timeless, would be more important than the diachronic, narrative, that which goes on in time. The text becomes a 'free play' with signs, without anchoring in either a producer of texts (subject) or an external world. (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: 148)

As such, Poststructuralism opposes the metaphysical claims of objectivist science and instead argues that objectivism is tainted by rhetorically coloured, dominant discourses in society. As a theory of knowledge, it insists that researchers should as far as possible avoid definite viewpoints and claims at the theoretical and interpretive level in order to avoid the harm that can result from this. Secondly, it radically breaks with the realist view of science by emphasising that research must be alert to notorious ambiguities, differences and divergent views involved when describing a given phenomena. To poststructuralists, use of language in depicting social realities is never seen as neutral, as the researcher cannot detach from previous experiences (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 202). Thirdly, it emphasises the problem of authority - that research can ascribe a certain definite to a phenomenon, and thereby legitimize a particular meaning, which can uphold the authority of the researcher in relation to other voices or, a political definition to a problem (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:185).

With its focus on, investigating power aspects, frictions, contradictions and cracks that unavoidably emerge in any discourse, Poststructuralism, provides a good point of departure for the objective of the study. It should be noted that however, that while poststructuralists have a tendency to move towards relativism, this study emphasise that there is a reality outside the scope of this study. This way, it can be said that although the study is influenced by poststructural ideas, the study places itself more towards Critical Realism, as it seek to identify how discourse influence social events through a discourse analysis, while recognising that there is a social world independent on the way that we formulate it in words.

4.2 Discourse analysis

In this study discourse analysis was chosen as a method for analysing the letters to the editor in order to answer the research question. It is a suitable methodology for answering the chosen research questions as the analysis of this thesis moves away from a reduction of dissimilarities and ambiguities and instead will instead emphasise the variations in language. Following Foucault's notion that 'truth' is essentially something that is formed by discourses, the focus of discourse analysis is essentially how people engage in constructing discourses and thereby how we see the world, by examining the use of language (Jorgensen & Phillips, 1999:20). There are usually three aspects of how one use language. First, people formulate themselves and create account on the basis of already existing linguistic resources. Secondly, people actively chose certain words and meaning constructions available and thereby reject others. Thirdly, the selection of particular words and constructions of meaning has consequences as they influence ideas and generate responses towards given phenomena (Alveson & Sköldberg, 2000:205).

In order to make the discourse analysis operational in relation to the research question this study will primarily be influenced by Hajer's "argumentative" approach as discussed above. This approach gives some valuable concepts through which one can operationally analyse how particular perceptions of a asylum seekers arriving by boat gain dominance. According to Hajer discourse is: "... an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer, 2005:300). In the Australian case, as discussed in the introduction, the arrival of asylum seekers has been framed as a security issue in politics and media. What Hajer implies with his definition of discourse is that the frame of security issue is not built by itself but that there is a number of ideas, concepts and categories that gives this particular meaning to the social phenomena of asylum seekers arriving by boat. By including the concept of "practice" he argues that discourses must be carried out. The identifiable set of

practices in this study, where discourses are carried out, is the letters to the editor and how they argue the way the arrival of asylum seekers arriving by boats should be perceived.

Hajer sees discourse analysis as a: "...the method of finding and illuminating that pattern, its mechanisms and its political effects." (Hajer, 2009: p.60). In order to analyse these practices, the concept of a "story-line" is important. A storyline is "...a condensed form of narrative in which metaphors are used." These story-lines forms what Hajer calls discourse-coalitions. Hajer's definition of a coalition is quite different from how the concept of coalitions is used in politics. In Hajer's view "... story-lines, not interests, form the basis of the coalition..." (Hajer, 1995: 66). The coalition members use these story lines in for example media, aiming to "... impose their view of reality on others, suggest certain social positions and practices, and criticise alternative social arrangements" (1995: 71). In order to show how the arrival of asylum seekers by boats is framed as a security issue the analytical concepts that will guide my analysis are: *metaphors*, *storylines* and *discourse - coalitions*.

Metaphors are generally two- or three-word phrases and here metaphors are understood as word combinations, which stand for something else (a broader concept, belief or idea). For instance, in the Netherlands in the 80s, Dutch politicians and activists frequently used the term 'acid rain' to stress the impact of environmental pollution. As such, 'acid rain' came to be used in reference to a multitude of negative consequences, some of which had nothing to do with environmental pollution. (Hajer, 2005:301) *Story-lines* consists of statements, often in the form of a narrative. The story-line has a certain structure and describes cause and effects such as If X then Y. Hajer states that when analysing texts one "...quickly realizes that in any field there are a couple of such narratives or story lines, which fulfil an especially important role" (Hajer, 2005:301). It is around these reoccurring narratives that *discourse-coalitions* form. *Discourse-coalitions* is then "...a group of actors that, in *the context of an identifiable set of practices* (i.e. letters to the editor), that shares the usage of a particular set of story lines over a particular period of time (Hajer, 2005: 302).

4.3 Data Collection

The initial step was to identify media reports that were useful in answering the research questions while at the same time be manageable through the method chosen. In the beginning stages of the research a wide scope was adapted to find relevant media reports. To get a general picture of how the issue of asylum seekers were portrayed in media, television news reports were examined. The news channels that were examined were: ABC news, SBS news, 7News and Sky news. A special focus was on news reports on the following issues: immigration, offshore processing, and the deal Australia is making with Cambodia to process Australian asylum seekers. This initial examination of media reports concerning the arrival of asylum seekers by boat showed that news channels portrayed the issue quite differently as the language used in the representation of asylum seekers varied considerably. This fact was further illuminated while going through news stories, editorials and especially letters to the editor in different Australian newspapers.

After the general overview of media reports concerning asylum seekers arriving by boat it was decided that the analysis would focus on letters to the editor. As Lea & Lynn, (2003) has pointed out it is interesting to study letters to the editor for two reasons. They “constitute a site within which people may articulate their views in public...” while the “...editor still mediates the selection and editing of such letters.” (Lea & Lynn, 2003: 430). After a decision had been taken that the analysis was to be focused on letters to the editor the first task of the data collection was to find a large corpus from which an small manageable body of material could be chosen. In order to find relevant letters to the editor, the archives provided by the newspapers were thoroughly searched. Many newspapers were available through electronic collections like ProQuest ANZ Newsstand and ANZ Reference Centre that were been made accessible through the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. However, the final tool that was used was the Dow Jones Factiva database, which is a search tool that includes all major publications in Australian media and supply a very easily manageable interface

where you can delimit your research in an effective way.

Concretely, the corpus of letters to the editor available through Factiva was delimited by the following search terms. The search text “Asylum OR Refugees OR Genuine Refugees OR Illegal Immigrants” was used and on the content type filter, letters/letters to the editor was chosen. In order to make the data contemporary and study the recent move towards even more restrictive measures through “Operation Sovereign Borders” the time span between the 22th of may 2013 until 3 of may 2014 was chosen as this would allow the study to get a good overview of the time before the Abbott government came into power and also how discourses have developed under its time in office. The sources or newspapers chosen were the following: The Age (Melbourne, regional), The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, regional), Herald Sun (Melbourne, regional), The Australian (Surry Hills, national), The West Australian (Perth, regional). These specific newspapers were chosen for a number of reasons. First of all, the newspaper gives a good geographical spread, which is important, as Australia is a very large country, where some areas are mainly rural such as west Australia and other areas are more densely populated. Furthermore, they were chosen because of their political standpoint. Although it is hard to give a definite standpoint of a newspaper as they often represent more than simply the “voice of the owner” due to the fact that newspapers are often large machineries where competing professional values and political views of journalists, editors and producers all contribute to the end result. However, on a general note The Age and Sydney Morning Herald owned by Fairfax media can generally be seen as Centrist/Leftist while The Herald Sun, The Australian, and The West Australian belonging to News Limited are seen to be more Centrist/Conservative (Crikey, 2007).

The search in Factiva with Search text “Asylum OR Refugees OR Genuine Refugees OR Illegal Immigrants”, Content type: Letters/Letters to the Editor and Sources: The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, Herald Sun, The Australian and The West Australian returned 658 letters to the editor in Factiva. To make the number of letters manageable for analysis a selection of 53 letters to the editor were selected. The selection was primarily based on their relevance for the

research questions but also that the selection would consist of an even spread over the five newspapers, to reduce newspaper bias. Each of these letters were analysed individually. First, the focus was put on variations between the letters to the editor, how arguments were constructed using metaphors and whether they contributed to the discourse of asylum seekers as a security issue or if they contested it. Secondly, recurrent story-lines were identified in order to examine themes that formed discourse – coalitions (as outlined by Hajer, 1995, 2005). Finally, a sample of 11 letters to the editor were selected out of the 53 that made up the main corpus of material, in order to have a small and manageable body of material that could be used for the in-depth analysis.

5. Analysis – Storylines and Representations of Asylum Seekers

5.1 A Perceived “Threat” and the “Other”

Extracts 1: THIS invasion may well turn out to be a critical turning point in Australia's history, as it will lead inevitably to the creation of an underclass of people who are unable or unwilling to integrate into Australian society.

Extract 2: Islam does not integrate with our Western culture, so why should we allow such an alien culture a foothold in our country? Some silly socialist embarrassment about wealth?

(**Extract 1 & 2.** (2013). Talking Point: Smugglers are the brutal ones, not our citizens. *The Australian*, July 31.)

In **Extract 1** the author uses the if X then Y logic that is symptomatic when using a story-line in order to convey a certain argument. As the arrival of asylum seekers in boat is not an invasion in literal terms, the word ‘invasion’ is here used as a metaphor where war imagery is used to convey the idea that something currently being threatened or under attack. These kinds of story-lines form discourse-coalition that frames the arrival of asylum seekers as a security issue. This refers back to the theoretical section where critical geopolitics seek to dissect security statements as they actively produces certain identities and interests that are important to recognise in order to understand the spatiality of power. By invoking a feeling of fear this discourse coalition is a powerful tool in legitimizing the exclusion of asylum seekers arriving by boat as it gives a very narrow account of the complexity involved in the issue of asylum and refer to the need to overarching need to protect the “nation”.

In **Extract 2** the author explains that Islam is not able to integrate with Western Culture and thereby the author sees no reason why asylum seekers (who may and may not be Muslim) should be allowed to seek asylum in Australia. This argument refers to what Said (1979) expands upon in his book *Orientalism*, where he argues that the sense of superiority of Western values derives from romanticizing images of the Middle East and Asia as uncivilised. To Said, these

imaginary geographies of the “Orient” have been highly influential in forming foreign policy, but also how false cultural assumptions of the superiority of the western world have resulted in western prejudice against Islamic people and their culture. So one could argue that the author uses these images of the culturally alien “Orient” in order to legitimize the exclusion of asylum seekers. Furthermore by using ‘we’ and ‘our’ he wants to portray that the Australian identity as uniform in relation to the external “other”.

Extract 3: NO sovereign nation can allow people smugglers to decide who is entitled to live in that country.

(**Extract 3.** (2014). HOT TOPIC: The fear of losing sovereignty to people smugglers. *Herald Sun*, 11 January.)

In **extract 3**, the author argues that “people smugglers” is a direct threat towards the sovereignty of the nation, as it is up to the nation itself to decide who can enter and who cannot. This highlights the point made earlier by Fernandez, (2006), that by retaining the right to exclude the nation state can ‘construct’ the people upon which its legitimacy is grounded. The author therefore argues that a legitimate reason to exclude asylum seekers is that it might challenge this notion of “the people”. This shows how borders is ultimately a highly political construction that allows certain groups of people that are seen as beneficial for the country to enter while excluding others.

Extract 4: Many asylum seekers are not fleeing political persecution but economic circumstances. The average cost of one asylum seeker to the taxpayer is over \$2 million, over their life. This is the gap between their tax paid and costs of social welfare, health benefits, education and infrastructure. Australia is facing a bill of at least \$90 billion in this century, yet the country has 90,000 people awaiting public housing, with many living in shelters, cars or with friends. If Australians want more asylum seekers, they must give up their large housing blocks for medium and high-density housing. And pay far more tax. Only then can they say they want to settle asylum seekers.

(**Extract 4.** (2014). Letters: Ready for more tax? *The West Australian*, 25 January.)

In **Extract 4** the author develops a story-line that is often articulated in letters to the editor. There seems to be a deep held belief that asylum seekers arriving by

boat seek asylum for economic reasons and that it ‘threatens’ the wellbeing of Australian economy. Although there are no sources references informing the reader where the data is collected, the author presents them as ‘facts’. The combination of the fact that we live in an age where economy to a large extent dominate how people live their life and the presumption that a majority of people living in Australia do not have insight into these “costs”, this discourse coalition articulating economic cost of asylum seekers has proved to be highly effective legitimizing the exclusion of asylum seekers. Arguably one reason why this discourse – coalition is particularly articulated in letters to the editor could be because scapegoating asylum seekers for internal economic ills is a particularly convenient method of shifts the blame for internal economical ills towards the external “other” asylum seeker.

Extract 5: This realistic action will send a clear message to the boatpeople that they are no longer welcomed in Australia, full stop. Genuine refugees must be required to apply through nominated embassies in their country, and must be able to provide checkable identification documentation and a full description of their circumstances, so embassy staff can properly validate or reject their application. It would also be more realistic to promptly send all illegals back home by plane, so that the billions of dollars being spent greeting them off Christmas Island, building and maintaining detention centres and all the other costs could be redirected towards our own homeless, elderly and needy.

Extract 6: IF someone broke into your home, would you call it illegal? If you tried to enter another country without their permission, would you call that illegal? I bet they would, and I bet you would.

(**Extract 5 & 6.** (2013). Letters: Morrison is right to use strong terms. *The Australian*, 23 October.)

In **extract 5 & 6**, the authors actively choose to use metaphors such as: “boat people”, and “illegals” instead of using the term asylum seeker when referring to the asylum seekers arriving by boat. This way the author actively shifts attention away from the legal claims of the 1951 UN convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This way, metaphors is effective rhetorical device in stripping asylum seekers of their proper title and thereby works to legitimize current border policies.

Extract 7: BUILDING an expensive facility for asylum-seekers complete with multi-bedroom units, library, gymnasium, prayer rooms, phones and internet at Manus Island seems to be an attraction rather than a deterrent, regardless of whether the occupants ever gain permanent residency here. The thousands of genuine refugees who have been pushed back in the queue can only look on in frustration and envy at the indulgence given to those who can afford a fare to Indonesia and then pay a people-smuggler to get them a few kilometres offshore before calling the navy's taxi service to take them to their accommodation.

(**Extract 7.** (2013). Letters: Manus Attractions. *The Australian*, 18 October.)

In **extract 7**, the author depicts asylum seekers arriving by boat “non-genuine” in relation to so-called “genuine” refugees. The idea that asylum seekers, arriving by boat, are jumping the “refugee queue” is a commonly occurring story-line. This story-line refers to the maximum quota set by the government in the number of accepted asylum seekers. Referring back to Van Dijk (1997), it is highly persuasive to construct the immigration of “non-genuine” as a threat to the interests of “genuine refugees” and as such the discourse – coalition that is grouped around this storyline is highly influential in legitimizing current border policies as it relates to the notion of “fairness”. What it fails to recognise is that Australia has only recently combined the quota of asylum seekers accepted by plane and boat.

5.2 Resistance – A Call for a More Humanitarian Approach

Extract 8: Both Labor and the Coalition's policies on asylum seeker policies are inhumane. The reality is that there are no easy solutions to the refugee crisis facing the world. However, the government can be at the forefront in bringing together our region's nations, and indeed the United Nations, to talk through possible ways forward. This will be a long process, and while it is taking place it is essential that Australia shows compassion to those who are fleeing war, persecution and terror.

(**Extract 8.** (2013). Letters: It's time to talk and show compassion. *The Age*, 27 July.)

Extract 9: I am extremely disturbed by your report of behaviour by the Australian navy that must surely violate international maritime law ("Indonesia tells Abbott: boats policy a failure", May 7). Is it legal, not to mention humane, for Australian personnel to "turn back" what may have been an unsafe boat, and then to sail away from it, leaving its twenty-odd passengers at the mercy of the elements? Had the asylum seekers not been

saved by Indonesia, would the Australian navy have been held responsible for their deaths? What kind of an international citizen has Australia become when our government orders such callous, life-threatening actions to be carried out in our name?

Extract 9. (2014) Opinion. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 8 May.

Extract 8 and 9 portray story-lines that are regularly referred to in order to criticise the current policies on Australian border protection. These story-lines highlight that the current stance towards asylum seekers is unacceptable. They highlight that they are inhumane and that they fails to recognise the problem as a major international crisis, which was discussed in the introduction of this paper. Often these story-lines urges Australia to take a lead the region by showing compassion to those fleeing war, persecution and terror.

Extract 10: As the daughter of two incredibly hard-working people who fled Vietnam in 1980 in terrifying conditions, I regard the current asylum seeker policy as an insult to us and anyone else who has endured similar hardships. Leaving your home in dangerous circumstances and risking your life is only undertaken when death is more appealing than staying alive in a state of horror. This cowardly policy tells me that my family is not welcome here and that despite everything we have contributed, we hold less worth in the eyes of the government because of who we are. My parents were welcomed here with openness and have become outstanding members of society. If they arrived now in the same circumstances, they would not stand a chance. The ghost of the White Australia Policy has reared its ugly head. This a shameful time for our nation..

Extract 11: When Australian authorities redirect asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea, will they also direct them to the official Australian government website that states "exercise a high degree of caution in PNG because of the high levels of serious crime" and "high possibility of violence"? Yet the government assures Australians that the new policy has been developed for "humanitarian reasons". The callousness of the politicians is matched only by the hypocrisy of their actions.

(**Extract 10 & 11.** (2013) What are you talking about? *The Age*, 22 July.)

In **extract 10**, the author puts forward a frequently occurring story-line. Considering that many of Australian citizens that are part of, the “people” as discussed above, have in fact arrived to Australia they argue that by not recognising peoples claim to asylum they are actively affecting peoples attitudes towards asylum seekers repositioning these groups in relation with other social

groups as discussed by (Lea & Lynn, 2003). In **extract 11** the author refers to the story-line that current policies are hypocritical in the sense that while the Australian government refers to Papua New Guinea as a criminal and violent country, it is good enough for the processing of asylum. This relates to how the self-interest of the nation- state can lead to a situation where people are left no man's land without basic human rights as discussed by Arendt (1973).

6. Conclusion

Through the theoretical framework and the method of discourse analysis chosen this study has analysed in what ways asylum seekers arriving by boat have been represented in letters to the editor in Australian media. On the basis of the theoretical framework and the analysis seen above this paper has emphasised the importance of identifying how asylum are commonly represented in media. The study identifies a number of discourse-coalitions (as developed by Hajer) that represent the arrival of asylum differently. In the beginning of the analysis discourse – coalitions that reproduce the current border policies were identified. First, it was identified that the arrival of asylum seekers were often described by using metaphors such as "invasion" to represent asylum seekers as a security issue. It was then argued that through this frame of security, the account of the complexities of asylum seekers were disregarded by the overarching need to protect the "nation".

Furthermore, it was identified that many story-lines were grouped around the discourse-coalitions that legitimize the exclusion of asylum seekers arguing that the culture of asylum seekers was "alien" to that of western culture. Specifically, Islam was targeted which related to the work of Said, who argues that a sense of superiority of Western values derives from romanticizing images of the Middle East and Asia as uncivilised. By referring to these perceptions of the "Orient", Said argues that have been highly influential in forming foreign policy, but also how false cultural assumptions of the superiority of the western world have resulted in western prejudice against Islamic people and their culture. Influenced by Said (1979) it was therefore argued that the author make use of these images of the culturally alien "Orient" in order to legitimize the exclusion of asylum seekers. Next, the study identified a discourse-coalition that shared the story-lines that in order to be sovereign, Australia had to be able to "construct" the people on whom its legitimacy is founded upon. This highlighted the fact that borders are highly political constructions that regulate how certain groups of people are allowed to enter while others are restricted.

In addition to this, a discourse-coalitions consisting of the story-lines articulating the cost of asylum seekers was identified. It was argued that this was a particularly influential story line in legitimizing the exclusion of asylum seekers as was actively scapegoated economic ills on the external "other" (i.e. the asylum seeker) in a time where a big part of our lives is determined in economical terms. Next, the importance of how metaphors such as "boat people" and "illegals" were commonly used when referring to asylum seekers as "boat people" was identified. By using metaphors instead of the name asylum seeker, it was argued that attention was actively shifted away from the legal claims of the 1951 UN convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Thereby it was argued that metaphors provides an effective rhetorical device in stripping asylum seekers of their proper title and thereby works to legitimize current border policies. The final discourse-coalition identified from the data was the discourse-coalition that identified asylum seekers as "non-genuine". By referring to Van Dijk, (1997) it was argued that defining a refugee as "non-genuine" is a highly persuasive way of construct the immigration of "non-genuine" refugees as a threat to the interests of "genuine refugees" as it relates to the belief in "fairness".

The analysis of discourse - coalitions also identified numerous story-lines that resisted the restrictive border policies set out by the Australian Government. One such discourse-coalition was grouped around the story-lines that argued that border policies were inhumane and that they were severely failing to recognize the issue of asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat as a major international issue. Many of these story-lines urged Australia to take a lead in the region by showing compassion to those fleeing war, persecution and terror. Furthermore, another discourse-coalitions that many story-lines grouped around was that current border policies failed to recognize the many current Australian citizens have themselves found a safe haven in Australia by seeking asylum in Australia. Many argued that current policies were insulting as they questioned their presence and actively repositioned them in contrast to other social groups in Australia. Yet another discourse-coalition identified that was critical to current border policies, was that the policies were highly hypocritical as he Australian government refers

to Papua New Guinea as a criminal and violent country, but insists that it is good for the processing of asylum. This relates to how the self-interest of the nation-state can lead to a situation where people are left no man's land without basic human rights as discussed by Arendt (1973).

In conclusion the study found that how borders "behave" in relation to asylum seekers is a highly political issue. The analysis of this paper has highlighted numerous discourse-coalitions that are actively reproducing and resisting current policies on asylum seekers. This way, the analysis of letters to the editor has shed light on the fact that the way we represent asylum seeker, has a big role in how borders are constructed. As the literature review outlined the power of media in spreading specific representation, there is a critical need to further evaluate how media representations acts in order to marginalise asylum seekers. Hopefully, the resistance towards the current border policies shown in the letters to the editor can eventually lead to a change in border policies but ultimately it is the responsibility of the Australian government and Media start representing asylum seekers for what they really are - human beings in desperate need of help.

7. Summary

This study has shed light on the importance of evaluating how media representations play a major role in the way asylum seekers are represented and thereby contribute to how borders are constructed. In order to answer the research questions formulated a theory of knowledge that sees reality as both constitutive and constituted by discourse have guided the study. The study has been informed by the theories developed in the research field of critical geopolitics that have emphasised the importance of rethinking the spatiality of power in terms of discursive practices. Furthermore, Foucault has provided invaluable ideas of how one should discourse as power. Fairclough (1992,1995) and Hajer (1995) have provided insight into how one can go about approaching discourse where especially the latter was important as it supplied valuable analytical tools that were useful in the analysis. By analysing the diverging discourse – coalitions in letters to the editor the paper concludes that there is a need to further evaluate the role of media in the marginalising groups.

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