Democratically Grounded Cosmopolitanism: Iraqi Refugees in Australia Since 2003

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

In the decade after 2003, Iraq’s prominence on Australia’s foreign policy and national security agendas diminished significantly. Australia and other ‘Coalition of the Willing’ states that had engaged in the US-led ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ campaign officially withdrew their troops from the country, leaving behind a complex legacy of war and little ‘freedom’ for Iraqis. Political and economic challenges, as well as multiple security concerns, including violent sectarian conflict and the devolution of power to militias, continued to plague the country’s population. Among the many challenges, as existed in 2010-11 at the outset of this project, was an estimated 4.7 million Iraqi civilians who were scattered beyond, or lost within the country’s borders; all of them dealing with the fallout of war and conflict and most living in an ongoing situation of displacement and uncertainty (Sassoon 2010).

In 2015, the security situation in Iraq has deteriorated further. Violence and insecurity has ensued in light of an ongoing civil war in neighbouring Syria since 2011, as well as widespread sectarian conflict raging in Iraq and the region. In this mix is the rise of an extremist, jihadist group called Islamic State (IS), which is waging a violent campaign of territorial expansion across Iraq and Syria, aimed at establishing an Islamic caliphate fashioned on an antiquated, fundamentalist reading of Sunni Islam. Killing, looting,
kidnapping, forced religious conversions, widespread destruction of cultural heritage and even public beheadings, which are carried out and filmed on the streets and in town squares, are some of IS’s violent tactics. Footage of their exploits is then distributed via the Internet for the world to see. IS are the latest in a series of pogrom-like groups with fundamentalist Islamic iconoclastic missions that are flaring up in the region. Their brutal methods and stark fundamentalist message have captured global political attention and elevated a sense of fear. IS effectively utilises modern communications technologies not just to spread its radical, reactionary ideology, and illustrate its convictions, but also to reach and recruit Muslims from around the world to join the jihadist cause. This has sparked renewed national security concerns in countries like Australia, which are now involved in characterising and addressing not just the threat of terrorism from without, but ‘home-grown terrorism’ from within the Australian populous, too. The Australian state has again beefed up its anti-terrorism rhetoric and laws in reaction to these events, as well as sending a small-scale military contingent back to Iraq in 2014.

As for displaced, civilian Iraqis in 2015, the UNHCR conservatively estimates their number at 4.1 million (UNHCR, 2015). That is, approximately one in six Iraqis is currently uprooted from their home, which is equivalent to the entire population of greater Sydney. The bulk of Iraq’s displaced live in unsafe conditions inside the country as internally displaced persons (IDPs). In June 2015, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimated Iraq’s internally displaced at upwards of 4 million people (IDMC, 2015), most of who live in unsafe, informal settlements. For those beyond the borders, the majority are currently in countries of first or second asylum in the immediate region, most commonly Turkey and Jordan. The 1.2 million Iraqis who had taken refuge in Syria after 2003 were forced to flee once again when the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011. Most are presumed to have fled back across the border to Iraq or on to countries of second asylum, such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

With no end in sight to the conflict in Iraq, the number of displaced doubtless continues to increase, though most are unaccounted for. Dire infrastructural shortages, such as poor access to basic shelter, water and sanitation, plague the
country’s displaced populations. The response mechanisms of agencies like the Red Crescent and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) remain ad hoc and insufficient, particularly given that their access to populations of concern is non-existent or extremely limited. Furthermore, in such a context of chronic insecurity, many Muslims in the region and beyond, people for whom the status quo has done little to break the cycle of militant identity politics, violence and poverty in which they have been stuck for years, if not their whole lives, are enticed by the pull of radical ideologies and reactionary behaviours. IS, for example, exhibits a notable demographic makeup, in that many of its members are young, disillusioned Sunni Muslims who were recruited over the Internet. Many are purported to come from the sprawling, displaced, unemployed and alienated swathes of Iraqi and Syrian youths living throughout the war torn region. Social psychologists working in the field of radicalisation contend that extremist causes, such as that of IS and other fundamentalist groups, represent a break from an endless sense of powerlessness, normlessness and hopeless desperation and humiliation that many young people in the Middle East region feel on a daily basis. By joining groups like IS, their “alienation is replaced by identification with the group, powerlessness is replaced by potency derived from being involved in group operations, while humiliation is mitigated by participation in actions” (Wright-Neville & Smith, 2009, p. 95).

Iraq has a long history of imperialism, violent wars, foreign intervention and sanctions, and military dictatorship, which provide context for the sectarian conflict and dire living conditions that prevail in 2015. Much about the current state of affairs, however, may be traced back to the Western intervention in Iraq in 2003, of which Australia played a part. The conservative Howard government’s decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 was primarily a strategic move designed to “strengthen the US-Australian alliance” (Cox & O’Connor 2012, p. 179). The government made the decision behind closed doors and subsequently marketed it to the Australian public as a dire national security issue. They framed their justification for military action in light of the ‘War on Terror’, Iraq’s links to terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and, most crucially, the Saddam Hussein regime’s possession of weapons of mass destruction.
Howard made the claim about WMDs despite a parliamentary inquiry, “Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction,” which drafted a report at the time advising the government to the contrary (Swieringa, 2013). The decision to intervene in Iraq also lacked parliamentary approval and majority public support. A series of polls conducted between August 2002 and March 2003 asked Australian citizens if they were in favour of a war in Iraq. An average of 54 per cent answered in the negative, with more than twice as many being strongly opposed than strongly in favour (Goot & Goldsmith, 2011). Furthermore, Australia’s military action in Iraq was waged outside the auspices of the United Nations (UN) and in contradiction to the vote of the UN Security Council.

The increasingly hawkish public statements made by Howard in the period leading up to the deployment of troops in 2003 were not ephemeral. Rather, they were the culmination of a distinct, nationalistic political discourse that characterized his entire prime ministership. Howard’s populist approach crystallized in 2001 in line with a rising sense of crisis over ‘unauthorized maritime arrivals’ and the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11. In this atmosphere, appeals to post-September 11 insecurity became sanctioned as legitimate grounds upon which a large part of Australia’s foreign policy and its increasingly restrictive asylum seeker policy were contextualized and justified. The prerogative to defend liberal democratic ‘freedoms’ – popularly dubbed ‘Australian values’- and the country’s borders were linked and became the driving logic behind political calculations in these areas (Wesley, 2002). The coupling of immigration and asylum seekers with terrorism in the children overboard affair of October 2001, and Howard’s view of the Australia-US alliance as “a relationship that is built upon common values” (Cox & O’Connor 2012, p. 183) stand as resounding examples of this. In terms of enabling military action in Iraq, Howard’s foreign policy discourse represented “an effort to find a new Australian synthesis between values and realpolitik” (Kelly, 2006, p. 41). Under these conditions, Australia’s participation in the war was conceivable and plausibly communicable to just enough of the domestic population (Holland, 2010).
By 2013, ten years on, Australia’s initial case belli was emphatically disproved. Indeed, Australia’s military foray into Iraq in 2003, as a partner in ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom,’ was largely characterised as an abject failure. Not only was the pretext for war false, but also the re-framed objectives, to “topple Saddam Hussein and bring peace to the long-suffering Iraqi people; to replace the autocracy of the Ba’athist regime with the Western liberal model of democracy; and to transform Iraq into a prosperous state governed by a free-market economy,” (Isakhan, 2013) remained largely unrealized. Peace and prosperity in Iraq were elusive, and the country’s democratic credentials improved minimally. Nevertheless, by 2013, Australian boots were off the ground and Iraq had slunk off the country’s pressing foreign policy agenda. Forced migration policy, however, remained central to the country’s political agenda. Indeed, regulation of migration, and especially symbolic attempts to display control over forced migrant arrivals, continued to develop in dialogue with a discourse of threat to national sovereignty, which justified the need for ongoing securitization and deliberalization (Gauthier et al, 2011).

Since Australia’s military intervention into Iraq in 2003, a number of scholars have pointed to the political and practical paradox faced by Iraqi exiles1 who seek refuge in the country. For they are at once victims of circumstances in which the Australian state played an active role, while being subject to, indeed the target of, the country’s deterrent, militarised, punitive and racialised forced migration policy and rhetoric (McNevin, 2007; Marfleet 2006; Dunn et al, 2007; Crock, 2010). As stated, more than four million Iraqi civilians have been uprooted in the wake of the 2003 war (UNHCR, 2015). This is the largest scale, protracted displacement situation in the country’s history, and one of the largest in the world’s recent history.2 It is the largest displacement of population in the Middle East since the Palestinian displacement, the Nakba

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1 Joseph Sassoon says, ‘Iraqis, in general, abhor the word ‘refugee’ (laji’) as they see it as a term indicating failure and the need to seek support from others. They prefer the Arabic term

2 According to the UNHCR definition, the term 'Protracted Displacement' refers to situations in which refugees have been in exile for five years or more since their initial displacement, and in which immediate prospects for solutions are bleak. By definition we are talking here about displacements for which there are no solutions in sight, which is definitely the case for millions of Iraqis.
of 1948, which is a phenomenon that continues to resonate politically and violently in the region and around the world to this day.

In response to the Iraqi displacement, Australia has granted protection to approximately ten thousand Iraqis over the past decade, refusing an average of 82 per cent of offshore applications over the five year period between 2006-11, a time when violence and insecurity in Iraq was rising (DIAC, 2012). The majority of onshore Iraqi applicants (that is, asylum seekers), whose numbers have on average been in the low hundreds each year, have spent upwards of three months in mandatory detention before being granted protection, and some remain in detention indefinitely. They have also “borne the brunt of government-reinforced, if not endorsed, hostility. The tenor and theme of media treatment has largely reflected the negative disposition of official government statements. Islamic asylum seekers have been constructed as less (than) human, incompatible and threatening” (Dunn et al, 2007, p. 582). The harsh political rhetoric around asylum seekers and Islam flared up again after 2013, as thousands of asylum seekers had begun to arrive by boat to Australian shores each year (this occurred under the watch of the Labor governments of Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard), hundreds dying along the way, and IS surged into Western media focus, capturing the Australian public’s attention and elevating a sense of fear and concern. Counter-terrorism and national security issues, as well as renewed calls to protect Australia’s borders, again took centre stage in Australian domestic politics.

Although Western authorities and intelligence agencies undoubtedly knew IS and other such militant Islamic groups existed in Iraq and the region before 2013, they were not deemed to constitute a significant national or international threat. Once IS’s brutal methods of territorial expansion became known in the global, public domain, however, Western countries again turned their political focus to the region. Quickly, the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric used to justify a number of national security and foreign policy measures in 2003 were repackaged and reiterated by the Australian state, and came back into play in the domestic arena. Whereas the apparent threats emanating from Iraq had all but disappeared from national dialogue in Australia in the years from 2008-
2012, these threats were reframed as resurgent and dire, in need of immediate action. Australia sent troops back to Iraq, pledged more funding, and, like clockwork, ratcheted up the national security rhetoric in justifying not just their foreign policies but also new, increasingly restrictive immigration policies and institutional arrangements, as well as a suite of anti-terrorism laws, many of which were designed to address the burgeoning threat of ‘home grown terrorism’.

This political flashpoint aligned with the coming to power in 2013 of a new conservative Australian government, under the leadership of Tony Abbott, whose hard-line approach to forced immigration – much of his policy built on the central axiom of “stop the boats” - was a major platform for his electoral victory. In the mould of Howard, though perhaps less deft at the political art of plausible deniability and more attuned to frank rhetoric, Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s early days in the role saw him immediately disband or rename a number of government policies and departments, in line with his more militant approach to protecting the border and Australia from the terrorist “death cult,” as he repeatedly labelled IS in public discourse. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship became the Department of Immigration and Border Protection: a semantic shift away from the notion of ‘citizenship’ - the potential inclusion of immigrants into Australian society – towards understanding of Australian society as exclusive, under threat and in need of protection at the border. ‘Operation Sovereign Borders’ was initiated, and is led by the Royal Australian Navy. In terms of policy changes, asylum seekers arriving to Australia are now interdicted at sea, and no longer accepted for settlement in Australia. From June 2015, the Border Force Act – prohibiting any entry via a maritime route, as well as gagging Immigration department staff and contractors into silence – came into effect. Furthermore, there are plans by the Abbott government to pass laws that strip dual nationals of their Australian citizenship – their political membership – should they be found colluding in a terrorist plot or act. Referring to the draft of the proposed legislation as it stood at August 2015, legal experts have argued “the status of citizenship in a democratic society should not be treated as a tool of punishment or protection from threats to society” (Chalmers, 2015).
33A of the draft proposal, which would see dual citizens lose their Australian citizenship without having any conviction recorded, provoked the deepest consternation and confusion.

It is such moves by the executive, which are yet to be tested in court, that readily illustrate the extent to which deliberation measures taken in the name of border protection and counter-terrorism are also affecting the fundamental rights of Australia’s domestic population. Human rights and civil liberties defenders, in particular, tend to depict such policies and laws as undemocratic, amounting to an unnecessarily exaggerated and egregious attack on the fundamental strength of the nation’s liberal democratic socio-political system. This manifests as heated and highly polarised political debate in the public sphere, as well as an obvious tension between the objectives and rhetoric of the executive government to protect its borders, and the responsibility of the courts in Australia, particularly the high court, to ensure the rule of law and uphold human rights principles in the country.

Such political contention and the polarisation of community attitudes on issues pertaining not just to foreign policy, global terrorism and counter-terrorism, but also to forced migration and immigration policy and rhetoric more broadly, tend to inform the naturalisation of nationalistic and chauvinistic attitudes towards forced migrants in the Australian context. Popular depictions of forced migrants, particularly of Muslim and Middle Eastern refugees arriving to Australia by boat, are consistently negative and designed around notions of threat and insecurity. Such widespread representations of Muslim refugees as the threatening ‘other’ have the propensity to corrupt the capabilities of forced migrants who are granted protection by the Australian state and live in the community, as well as Australia’s Muslim population more broadly, to feel substantively included in the socio-political fabric in Australia. It potentially disrupts their willingness or capability to voice their opinions, and participate in public discourse as valued political members, as per the fundamental tenets of a functioning, liberal democracy. That is, populist rhetoric about “Australian values,” which is used to justify foreign intervention in Iraq, the exclusion of certain types of refugees from the Australian polity, and
unprecedented counter-terrorism measures against Australian citizens, is a double edged sword insofar as it has the potential to alienate refugees resident in the Australian community, and corrupt their ability to act as full democratic members in the Australian context. In so doing, such rhetoric operates to corrupt the functioning of the country’s liberal democracy as a whole. Indeed, the potential for the sustained marginalization of forced migrants after arrival in the community in Australia represents a democratic dilemma for a nation concerned with reconciling the vision that stands behind human rights principles “with the institutional and normative necessities of democracy, as a form of government based upon public autonomy, namely that those subject to their laws also be their authors” (Benhabib, 2004, p. 221).

In light of such discussions, this study seeks to explore the experiences of Iraqis who have arrived to Australia and been granted humanitarian protection since 2003. Broadly, it aims to look at their settlement experiences and reflect on whether they feel included in the Australian milieu, and whether they behave as full democratic members in their new context. Such was the impetus for the following literature review, the development of research questions and a theoretical framework, and the subsequent fieldwork, analysis and findings presented in this thesis.

1.2 Thesis Structure and Research Questions

Before presenting the research project, it is worth outlining the basic structure of the following thesis and stating the project’s research questions, so that they are familiar to the reader from the outset. Chapter two presents a thorough, multi-disciplinary literature review. After completing this multi-disciplinary literature review covering both empirical and theoretical aspects of the research topic introduced above, the following research questions were proposed, and are addressed throughout the remainder of the thesis:
1. What are the socio-political behaviours and attitudes of individuals in this sample group of Iraqis refugees?

2. Are individuals within the sample group of Iraqi refugees engaged with the socio-political system in Australia, or are they alienated from or disaffected by the very system that is meant to be their primary means of inclusion?

3. In light of the results of the first two research questions, to what extent does the Australian political system, as perceived by the sample group, foster conditions that progress a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism?

Chapter three presents the theoretical approach of the study, which outlines the main theoretical concepts used to inform the research design and provides a framework for meaningful discussion of the empirical data elicited during the project. This leads into chapter four, which presents the precise methodology used to investigate the project’s research questions, from sampling, participant recruitment and data elicitation and analysis, to ethical issues encountered during fieldwork. Chapter five presents the results of the quantitative data analysis, followed by the results of the qualitative data analysis presented in chapter six. Chapter seven, then, presents the discussion, which looks at the major themes to come out of the data analysis and discusses them in terms of the theoretical approach of the study so as to reflect upon the project’s research questions. This is followed by the conclusion chapter, which briefly sums up the overall findings of this research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of theoretical and empirical, multi-disciplinary academic and other literature about forced migration from Iraq to Australia. For the most part, it reviews literature extant at the initiation of this project in 2011-12. The review aims to survey and critically appraise research on the topic of forced migration generally, and the issue of forced migration from Iraq to Australia since 2003 more specifically. By doing so, it teases out the central academic debates playing out in this field of study and hones in on particular aspects of the research topic that are not adequately dealt with already in the corpus of literature.

Any approach to the vast body of literature on the topic of forced migration requires a clear, initial starting point. Given this study’s concern with refugees in the Australian context, where the politics of forced migration is readily and widely recognised as contentious (Klocker & Dunn, 2003; McNevin, 2007), it was deemed appropriate to begin by seeking out common theoretical understandings and explanations for such political contention. It particularly looks at theoretical discussions playing out among scholars working in political philosophy, political science, sociology, and to a lesser extent, social psychology. It goes on to review empirical literature dealing with Iraq’s mass displacement since the Iraq War began in 2003, and discusses the particular socio-political dynamics of this phenomenon and how it is playing out in the global context. It then outlines a history of the Australian nation-state’s approach to forced migration so as to illustrate the development of contemporary politics associated with refugees and asylum seekers arriving to Australia. Finally, it gives an overview of the Australian state’s contribution to the protection of displaced Iraqis since 2003, before looking at literature about the settlement experiences of Iraqi refugees in the country. It concludes by
summarising the findings of the literature review and positing the precise research questions that inform the design and aims of this research project.

2.2 Understanding the Politics of Forced Migration

“Forced migration” is one of the central political issues currently playing out in Australia and other liberal democratic nation-states of the “global north.” Political discussions about how to ethically and practically respond to human displacement and forced migrant arrivals to countries like Australia tend to revolve around issues of nation-state obligations within a global political order, state border control, national identity, social citizenship rights, human rights and the norms of national and international law. For many scholars, the political debate surrounding issues of forced migration brings into relief “a conflict between the claims of refugees and those escaping desperate situations to a secure place of residence and the claims of citizens to act together to limit access to the territory and resources of their community” (Gibney, 2004, p. 2). The underlying issues in this debate, then, are concerned with defining the boundaries of belonging in national polities and determining the extent to which constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ continue to be naturalized (Yuval-Davis, 2011). The subject of forced migration, as such, may be seen as a fertile ground for exploring divergent claims related to politics, power and ideology.

A number of scholars have situated the emergence of discourses and policies that have at once contributed to and evolved as a response to the movement of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people across borders to processes associated with globalisation, modernity and the political system of nation

3 ‘Forced migration’ is an imperfect turn of phrase used to describe the social processes involved in human displacement. The term “forced” is misleading as it deprives the fleeing migrant of human agency over their flight, and whitewashes the social complexities of human displacement. Nevertheless, in the absence of an alternative, widely recognized term, “forced migration” and “forced migrant” are used throughout this thesis. Other terms employed are “displaced,” and more specific terms that have come to denote international legal categories but are also used in academic and popular lexicons, such as refugee, asylum seeker, internally displaced person (IDP), and stateless person (SP).

4 Generally, the ‘global north’ denotes a loosely defined socio-economic and political divide between countries in the world. To an extent, it unites the concepts of the West and the “First” “developed” or “industrialized” world. It refers loosely to more economically developed and liberal democratic countries, such as in Western Europe, North Americas, some countries of East Asia, as well as Australia and New Zealand in Oceania.
Adelman conceptualises refugees as “products of modernity.” He argues that refugees’ “plight became acute when the processes of modernity became globalized, when the political system of nation states first became extended over the whole globe and efforts were made to sort the varied nations of the world into political states” (Adelman, 1999, p. 83). Such arguments contend that the “modern” effort to divide the socially complex and stratified world into bureaucratically, rationally defined, territorially delineated political communities such as nation-states inevitably marginalises or excludes some individuals or socio-cultural groups. Such exclusion and marginalization is commonly justified on the basis of distinguishing identity markers such as ethnicity, culture, language, religion and/or class, constructed and/or perceived as inimical to an abstract or “imagined” national identity (Anderson, 1991). That is, certain individuals or groups who are seen not to belong within particular national communities, such as the Jewish populations of Eastern Europe during WWII, are either repressed by or excluded from said nationally framed communities all together. Such exclusions are commonly orchestrated through mechanisms of statecraft, often by militaristic or coercive means. This potentially places such individuals and/or groups in contexts of chronic marginalization and state repression and control, or even displaced within nation-states. Alternatively, such persons may be stateless and/or displaced outside of their self-recognized homeland and unable to return due to well-founded fear of persecution; fallen through the proverbial cracks of international order. The vast majority of forced migrants are persecuted humans in a state of limbo, caught between nation states and their territories, and with no legal status or recognised membership in any established polity (O’Neill, 2010).

In light of such understandings, controversy over forced migration in liberal democratic states of the global north may be seen as part of a ubiquitous international problem in which displaced persons are the vanguard of a world where life chances, socio-political rights and entitlements, and economic opportunities are distributed with marked inequality. In a world of unequal nation states, the key principles that determine membership in disparate
political communities, *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*, preserve starkly different opportunities of “well-being, security, and freedom for persons” (Shachar, 2009, p. 262). Recognition of such power differentials lends to an understanding of forced migration as not “the result of a string of unconnected emergencies, but an integral part of north-south relations” (Castles, 2003, p. 9). In other words, forced migration is part of a historically entrenched, complex and ongoing dialectic between all political communities, those of the wealthy, powerful global north, which are the historical, key stakeholders in the contemporary international world order, and those of the less wealthy, less powerful south.

Hannah Arendt, a refugee herself in the wake of the Holocaust, described refugees as “the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics” (Arendt, 1951, p. 277). This comment, made more than half a century ago but nonetheless germane to the contemporary moment, refers to the implications that a lack of citizenship - the primary politico-legal institution that confers upon an individual membership in a national political community - has upon an individual in a world carved up among sovereign states. Perhaps Arendt’s contention is even more relevant in the current age of globalisation, given that “it is only since 1945 that the nation-state has become the global norm – and then more as an aspiration than a reality, for only a minority of countries can lay claim to a durable democracy” (Castles, 2001, p. 93). Further evidence of Arendt’s contention is the huge and growing number of displaced persons globally. In 2015, if the world’s approximately 60 million known displaced persons – those accounted for by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and more than half of whom are children - were to form their own nation state, they would represent the 24th most populous country in the world, ranked just behind Italy (UNHCR, 2015). Instead of having a nation state of which they are members, however, the vast majority live in poor conditions in countries of first asylum in the global south or in makeshift camps run by the UN or the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

In a political sense, globalisation – the development of a world order - should be understood as both descriptive and normative. Sociologist and philosopher,
Pierre Bourdieu, contends that globalisation is to be conceptualised not as “a fate, but a politics... conscious and calculated” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 1). A politics that is both constructive and constitutive of “the rise of an international human rights regime and the spread of cosmopolitan norms,” among other phenomena (Benhabib, 2007, p. 17). “Cosmopolitan norms”, in this sense, may be understood as distinct from international norms. According to political philosopher, Seyla Benhabib, “While norms of international law emerge through treaty obligations to which states and their representatives are signatories, cosmopolitan norms accrue to individuals considered as moral and legal persons in a world-wide civil society” (Benhabib, 2009, p. 695). The politics of globalisation, then, may be characterised on one level by a dialectic between age-old Westphalia state sovereignty norms (with its sacred trinity: nation, territory and state) and increasingly popular universal human rights norms, which conceive of people as rights-bearing by virtue of their humanity, rather than their membership in a sovereign polity. Refugees and asylum seekers represent a unique position within this political dialectic, as they claim entitlements and privileges (or, liberties) that are instituted at the nation-state level as citizenship rights, yet they do so on the basis of universal human rights norms. This is a consequence of the forced migrant’s social reality as a displaced, stateless and therefore citizenship-free human. In the contemporary age, then, forced migrants are the living, breathing claimants and champions of “the right to rights” (Arendt 1958).

The millions of displaced humans or political non-members across the globe, those who are disenfranchised by or excluded from the international political order of rights-bearing citizens, may be seen to expose a fallacy or a certain imperfection that is built into the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and capitalism, and its associated liberal democratic ideals and institutions. Indeed, the plight of individuals seeking refuge in liberal democracies of the global north, such as Australia, is symptomatic of a broader political conundrum facing liberal democracies in an age of globalisation and universal legal norms, as bounded nation-states are increasingly challenged to articulate and legitimate the limits of their particular political community (Chandler, 2009). Indeed, there is an inherent contradiction, a ‘fatal tension’ (Cole, 2000, p. 2)
between the expansive and inclusionary principles of moral and political universalism (as anchored in human rights norms and their legal expression in domestic legislatures) and the particularistic and exclusionary conceptions of democratic closure and sovereignty. Political scientists have dubbed this the ‘liberal paradox’, which is most clearly borne out in the exclusionary asylum procedures of liberal democracies such as Australia (Gigauri, 2006; McNevin 2008; Hollifield, 2004).

Recognising this ‘liberal paradox’ manifest in a range of contexts, “social theory since the 1950s has developed a strong analysis of modernity as being constituted through totalitarianism and the destructive impact of rationalisation and bureaucratisation” (O’Neill, 2010, p. 2). That is, a number of scholars argue that it is the rationalistic and bureaucratic international political order itself, which tends to be relatively uncritical of, or assigns secondary importance to issues of power and culture, that constitutes the existence of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people across the globe. Scholars working in the field of critical theory, who tend to adopt an interdisciplinary materialist approach to analyse totalitarianism and anti-democratic trends in modern societies, view the predicament of asylums seekers, refugees and the stateless as intimately related to and enabled by dominant discourses on rights that emanate from political elites in powerful countries such as Australia (Pulitano 2013). For critical theorists, such dominant discourses play a fundamental role in constructing and reconstructing collective identities, which operate in practice to include or exclude individuals from particular national communities for a range of reasons that tend to shift over time (Laclau & Moffe, 1985; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Indeed, the question of what human rights are and how they are instituted depends on the social, ideological and philosophical system of various movements in various historical periods.

In sovereign, liberal democratic polities, then, the interpretation of basic rights is a political project; “in the sense that such interpretations concern how a people that wishes to live by certain principles in the light of its own changing self-understanding, rearticulates the binding principles under which it has
constituted itself as a polity” (Benhabib, 2013, p. 4). In other words, it is a fundamental mistake to assume that rights are inherent or static. To the contrary, and as noted above, rights are principles that are continuously interpreted, articulated, then reinterpreted and rearticulated through self-governing polities. The tension that arises, then, when particularistic interpretations of nominally “universal” rights principles, begets profound questions that come to bear upon how supposedly democratic and liberal nation state systems adapt in a globalizing world. It calls into question the cosmopolitan project when to bear rights foremost requires that an individual be a member of a sovereign polity that can protect one’s “right to have rights.” It further invites cynicism about the spread of human rights norms being an achievement of human kind, and casts it instead as a manoeuvre undertaken by the victorious nations of WWII to entrench their own narrow visions of the human through a so-called Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Reticence in contemporary scholarship to explain human rights in universalistic terms can be traced back to the fear that they would be instrumentalized for political ends (AAA 1947; Arendt 1951, 1958; Bourdieu, 2002; Benhabib, 2013).

Acrimony over the codification of universal rights norms existed at the inception of the UDHR in 1947. A famous example of this is the objections that came from the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The anthropologists, concerned with respect not just for individuals but the diverse cultural groups of which they are part, saw in this document a dilemma; the illegitimate universalizing of Western visions of order to the rest of humanity. The AAA’s statement on Human Rights pointed at the paradox inbuilt into the UDHR, arguing,

“It is a truism that groups are composed of individuals, and human beings do not function outside the societies of which they form a part. The problem is thus to formulate a statement of human rights that will do more than just phrase respect for the individual as an individual. It must also take into account the individual as a member of the social groups of which he is a part, whose
sanctioned modes of life shape his behaviour, and with whose fate his own is thus inextricably bound” (AAA, 1947, p. 539).

The statement went on to question what the AAA’s executive felt was the central issue not addressed by the UDHR, and which was integral to its potential effectiveness on a worldwide scale: “How can the proposed Declaration be applicable to all human beings,” the anthropologists asked, “and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America?” (AAA 1947, p. 539). The sentiment behind this statement is very much alive and debated today. So too is the social reality underpinning their fundamental concerns, as is evident in the predicament of the world’s chronically displaced and stateless people.

Engaging with the unique challenge thrown down to contemporary political arrangements by refugees and asylum seekers, and examining the role of the state in trying to govern this process, Aleinikoff writes,

“It is sometimes said that states have complete authority to regulate the movement of persons across their borders— that anything less than complete authority would undermine their sovereignty and threaten their ability to define themselves as a nation. Against this claim, it is regularly asserted that migrants have fundamental human rights that state regulations of migration cannot abridge.” (Aleinikoff, 2003, p. 1).

Some scholars argue that there has been a decline in state power since WWII – a “hollowing out of territorial politics” (Chandler 2009, p. 53) - that may be attributed to the increasing relevance of an international human rights regime that overrides state decisions about border crossings (Jacobson 1996; Soysal 1994). It is argued that international normative pressure has been exerted to “supersede the strength of state institutions and their monopoly on rights and the distribution of public goods” (Gest, 2010, p. 641).

Conversely, a number of scholars concede that apart from the sovereign nation-state there are few other providers of public goods and care, no other bodies that monitor border crossings, and no alternative judiciaries to appeal to
about residency or nationality (Brubaker, 1994; Joppke, 1998; Gest, 2010). According to this perspective, the role played by the state may be seen to be particularly relevant to the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, a politically disenfranchised group who seek protection from nation states. Guiraudon and Lahav argue, “As long as the nation-state is the primary unit for dispensing rights and privileges, it remains the main interlocutor, reference and target of interest groups and political actors, including migrant groups and their supporters” (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000). Supporting this perspective, Heikki Mattila argues that governments, as the assenting parties to international human rights instruments, and the principle financial donors to the UN system, remain the principal actors as guardians of the human rights of all individuals residing in their territories (Matilla, 2006). Although the range of international arbiters of global migration is broadening (for example, UNHCR, IOM, airline carriers), the democratic state’s sovereign control of its territory and its subjection to the politics of its society remains the supreme ‘legitimate’ authority over all migration streams, humanitarian or otherwise.

The globalization of politics and the politics of globalization may be seen as converging upon one another to “challenge our most basic ideas of the nature of political community and of membership within it” (Kymlicka, 2007; Cited in Benhabib, 2007, p. 128). In a world of global mobility, transnationalism, international migration and what Castles and Davidson (2000) have coined the “Asylum-migration nexus”, global north states have come to invest a huge amount of energy, time and money on securing the borders of their country, both symbolic and physical, erecting stronger and stronger barriers to entry (this trend is discussed at length below). The right to control over membership and entrance in such liberal democratic countries remains grounded in the entitlement of political communities to give public expression to their collective identity; a politics of belonging (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Castles, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2011).

It may be seen that under current global political conditions it is “not the loss of rights… but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity that has befallen ever-increasing
numbers of people” (Arendt, 1968, p. 297). Arendt (1968, p. 297) further contends, “Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity”. This is a pressing issue in light of the increasing number of forced migrants, internally displaced and stateless persons across the globe whose very existence and movement across borders challenges fundamental understandings of how the outer limits of political communities may be practically and ethically delineated. The implications of such a global political dialectic for forced migrants themselves are many. With their multifarious experiences, identities, perspectives, interpretations and expectations, refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people, crudely speaking, appear to embody the border zone between citizen and human.

2.3 Shifting Tides of Global Mobility – A Contentious Politics

This section briefly outlines the institutional arrangements of the international refugee protection system that was established in 1951 and the global patterns of human displacement since that time. It goes on to explore the popular political responses to this phenomenon that are evolving in liberal democracies of the global north. It looks at the language used in both academia and everyday public discourse to conceptualise, discuss and debate forced migration as a socio-political phenomenon. It then explores the relationship between popular rhetorical patterns that crop up in these dominant discourses and the design of a suite of policy and legal approaches implemented in recent years by developed liberal democracies to deal with the issue of human displacement both at the border and in the world more broadly.

The contemporary international refugee protection system is based on the legal precepts written into the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951 (which entered into force in 1954) and the Protocol of 1967. Signatory states share responsibility (or “the burden”) for processing asylum seekers’ claims worldwide and offering genuine refugees effective protection through this system. Whereas earlier agreements on displaced persons were confined to particular refugee groups, the 1951 convention was the first effort to give a
universal definition to the term refugee, which it declared as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UNHCR, 2010). This remains the central, legal definition of a genuine refugee to this day.

Although the convention was and remains the most comprehensive effort to codify the rights of refugees at the international level, it was initially limited in scope and designed as a post WWII instrument to address protection for individuals fleeing before January 1951 and within Europe. Notably, it was felt at the time that this could be achieved within three years (Cook, 2015). More than sixty years later, however, a task that was once deemed temporary is now so complex and entrenched as to appear impossible. After the Convention came into force, the prevalence of forced migrants kept increasing, particularly in light of the huge number of Palestinian refugees protractedly displaced after the Palestine War in 1948. In response to this, the 1967 Protocol removed the geographic and temporal limitations of the Convention, thus giving it universal coverage. Of the 193 member states of the UN, there are currently 145 contracting states to the 1951 Convention, and 146 contracting states to the 1967 Protocol (UN, 1970; UNTC, 2015).

States of the global north that are signatory to the Refugee Convention and Protocol contribute to addressing human displacement through the formal system of international refugee protection, spearheaded by the UNHCR. This system is made up of three key elements or protection mechanisms. The first is ‘preventative measures,’ which refers to efforts to assuage the risk of potential displacements through conflict prevention, diplomacy, international aid and community development efforts, and monitoring environmental factors. The second mechanism is ‘temporary protection in a country of first asylum,’ which refers to measures established in countries of first asylum, usually in the global south, to shelter and nourish people fleeing persecution, often in ad hoc camps. The third element of international refugee protection is ‘durable solutions.’ The UNHCR framework offers three durable solutions, which are
said to provide for the long-term protection needs of people displaced by humanitarian crises. The first is ‘voluntary return (repatriation)’ to their home country in conditions of safety and dignity. The second is ‘local integration in the country of first asylum,’ which depends on the host state in question. The third durable solution is ‘resettlement in a third country.’ This third option is a key measure in the system of international refugee protection and is the only viable durable solution for a number of forced migrants caught in protracted displacement (those displaced for more than five years), often as part of mass movements of refugees from chronic conflict areas such as Iraq.

The final element of the international protection system is asylum. Any person may legally seek asylum in the territory of UN Refugee Convention signatory states. It is based on the principle of non-refoulement laid out in the 1951 Convention, which states,

“No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR 2010).

Asylum is the most contentious element of the refugee system, and often receives the lion’s share of attention in political debates about forced migration that are playing out in Australia (discussed at length below).

The number of forced migrants worldwide has been rising since the 1950. The movement of displaced persons across political borders then grew dramatically in the post-Cold War period. Using figures that account for refugees that were under the UNHCR mandate (not those who were displaced but not registered with the UN), Castles surmises, “The global refugee population grew from 2.4 million in 1975 to 10.5 million in 1985 to 14.9 million in 1990. A peak was reached after the end of the Cold War with 18.2 million in 1993. By 2000, the global refugee population had declined to 12.1 million” (Castles 2003, p. 14). The latest UNHCR reports on global trends of displacement and asylum show that this decline in global refugee numbers was temporary, and increasing human mobility is an empirical reality and a significant challenge in the
globalizing world. In 2012, for example, there were 35.8 million people of concern to the UNHCR – the second highest number on record at that time. In the same year there were 7.6 million newly displaced persons, with another 6.5 million being internally displaced (IDPs), the second highest number in the previous ten years (UNHCR, 2013). Just two years later, at the end of 2014 there were 59.5 million people of concern, including refugees, stateless people and IDPs. This is 8.3 million persons more than the year before (51.2 million) and represents the highest annual increase in a single year. Indeed, 2014 saw the highest displacement on record for a single year (UNHCR, 2015). Of the estimated 59.5 million displaced worldwide, just 14.4 million or 24 per cent are under the UNHCR’s mandate (UNHCR, 2015). Of these mandated refugees around the world, less than one per cent is submitted for resettlement annually.

As stated above, global south countries host the vast majority of the world’s displaced. In 2013, over 80 per cent of the world’s refugees (compared to 70 per cent ten years earlier) were hosted in the developing world (UNHCR, 2013a). In 2014, developing countries hosted some 12.4 million or 86 per cent of the world’s UNHCR mandated refugees. The top six refugee-hosting states in 2015 are Turkey (1.59 million), Pakistan, Lebanon, Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia and Jordan. That is, “in absolute terms and per capita, developing and socially unstable countries carry a disproportionate share of the burden in hosting and resettling refugees. There is a deep imbalance in international support for the world’s displaced” (Gauthier et al, 2011). Of those who seek asylum in one of the 44 industrialised economies of the global north, such as Australia, most seek protection in Europe and North America. In 2014, a record high of nearly 1.7 million individuals submitted applications for asylum or refugee status. UNHCR offices registered 245,700 or 15 per cent of these claims (UNHCR, 2015).

It is in light of such phenomena that Bauman describes the contemporary era as “liquid modernity,” marked by the increasing global mobility of persons (Bauman, 2000). Castles and Miller, meanwhile, have utilised figures such as those given above, as well as figures on international voluntary migration
more broadly, to conceptualise the contemporary era as the “age of migration”, arguing that there are more people on the move now than at most times in history (Castles & Miller, 2009). In regards to forced migration specifically, the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres stated in 2014, “We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before” (UNHCR, 2015, p. 3) Such characterisations draw attention to international migration as one of the most significant global phenomena since WWII. Moreover, most scholars working in the field of migration contend that increased migration will continue to be a reality of 21st century life (Castles, 2003; Marfleet, 2006, O’Niell, 2010).

Sociologists Hania Zlotnik and Hein de Haas analyse and portray this statistical picture differently. They argue that characterisations of the contemporary age as marked by unprecedented human migration tend to be ahistorical and therefore perpetuate a myth (de Haas, 2007; 2008; Zlotnik 1998). De Haas posits that the number of migrants relative to the total world population is almost on the same level as it was a century ago, at about 2.5 to 3 per cent (De Haas, 2007, p. 821). In light of this, he argues, “the magnitude of contemporary international migration is not really unprecedented” (de Haas, 2007, pp. 821-822). De Haas contends that complimentary to a tendency to underestimate levels of past mobility, there is a tendency to overstate the current scale of international migration. Although the share of international migrants in the world population did increase in the 1990s, the argument goes, “there were periods of equal if not more dramatic international migration during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Zlotnik, 1998, p. 14; Cited in de Haas, 2007, p. 822).

The claim in the UNHCR’s 2014 Global Trends report that “the global humanitarian system has been severely stretched” (UNHCR 2015, p. 5) is self-evident in the statistics. It is not, however, a new observation. Indeed, by the early 1990s the international refugee protection system that had been built on the 1951 Convention and then expanded over four decades was purportedly stretched beyond capacity (UNHCR, 1993). Some argue that this assertion was
made by states of the global north, which are the key stakeholders and donors in the United Nations system, for their own domestic political reasons, and is something of a discursive exaggeration (Ghosh, 2000; Turton, 2003; Haddad, 2008). It was in the early 1990s, they contend, that the number of onshore asylum seekers to global north states increased, and the machinery of immigration legislation in countries such as Australia and the US became markedly more complex, securitized and restrictive; extraterritorial immigration detention, for example, was enacted for the first time in the US in response to the Haitian refugee crisis in 1991 and was soon followed by mandatory immigration detention in Australia in 1992.

In light of such nationally framed political and legal manoeuvres, Zlotnik and De Haas argue that the salient factor in understanding patterns and responses to forced migration is not necessarily the absolute quantities of migrants themselves, but the direction of migration flows - namely, a reversal of trans-continental migration flows that occurred throughout the second half of the twentieth century (De Haas, 2007). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the directions of international migratory flows were predominantly North-North (Europe-North America), South-South and North-South (Europe to colonies). That is, South to North migration was limited. After WWII, however, international migration has tended to flow from South to North (certain anomalies exist, such as the Gulf oil countries). “The change has not been the relative change of international migrants,” Zlotnik argues, “but in the number of developing countries that have become incorporated within migration systems that link them to industrialized countries” (Zlotnik, 1998, *Cited in* de Haas 2007, p. 822). That is, migratory pathways became open and available to people in the global south; more persecuted and displaced people were now potentially able to reach the geographically distant, developed, bureaucratised global north states in search of asylum, and without the need for official papers or visas for entry. Such pathways, though legal under international law if used for the purpose of seeking asylum, were quickly dubbed as “irregular” or “unauthorized” and criminalized by global north states such as Australia, which preferred to maintain strict control over arrivals to their national political communities.
Whether the global mobility of humans in the contemporary age is accounted for as a net increase or a static rate in terms of global population, both statistical pictures cover a much more complex and politically contentious social reality. As scholars such as Zlotnik and Vertovec point out in their discussion of increased viable migration networks and pathways in a globalised world, another fundamental factor underpinning the statistical picture of global mobility is “the increased possibility for migrants and their families to live transnationally and to adopt transnational identities through revolutions in communication and transport infrastructure” (Vertovec, 1999; Cited in De Haas 2007, p. 823). In a similar spirit to the discussion above, De Haas has argued that, “this de facto transnationalization of migrants’ lives challenge assimilationist models of migrant integration and the modernist political construct of the nation-state and citizenship” as exist in countries like Australia (de Haas, 2005, p. 273). He contends that the sedentary populations of global north nation states, historically and rhetorically characterised by Western cultural norms and an underlying Christian ethos, “are now confronted with the challenge of receiving significant numbers of non-elite, transnationally oriented immigrants who do not necessarily share the majority culture and religion” (de Haas, 2007, p. 823). It is in light of such socio-cultural realities that migration, then, is perceived as problematic and an issue of public concern.

Indeed, after WWII, and especially since the 1970s, the increased mobility of culturally distinct people from poorer countries was increasingly perceived in developed countries as a problem in need of control. Mass migration was at once desirable in light of major labor shortages after the war, yet also represented the potential for a major disruption in national cultural, religious and linguistic continuity and delineation, and the associated socio-political change and economic burden this represented to the relatively wealthy, settled, domestic communities. By the early 1990s, such nationally framed perceptions and political logic came to uncritically trump the logic of refugee protection and substantive human rights principles in the design of forced migration policy and legislation.
What may be seen in this widely popular interpretation of migration as a deep problem in need of control is, to an extent, a discursive exaggeration of the whole issue of international migration, and particularly forced migration, for socio-political reasons that are centred on the interests of the global North. The language used to conceptualise forced migration may be seen as a case in point for this discursive exaggeration. The discourse of forced migration, as emanates from global north political communities, particularly executive governments, is often constructed around aquatic metaphors. Turton (2003, p. 5) argues, “We speak of flows, streams, waves and trickles of migrants. We speak of “asylum capacity”. Some speak of being flooded, inundated and swamped.” It is also spoken about in capitalist materialist terms such as “products of conflict,” “migration stock” and the characterisations of people smugglers as businessmen “trading in human misery”. Asylum seekers represent are “economic opportunists” “seeking entitlements” not safety, an “economic burden” to the nation. Political elites in particular draw upon notions of “illegality,” “irregularity,” and the existence of an orderly “queue,” in which “good” migrants – those in UNHCR camps - line up so they may enter through the “front” not the “back door.” “Bad” or opportunistic “economic” migrants, such as onshore asylum seekers, unfairly ignore the orderly “queue” and “illegally” enter a country in violation its sovereignty (Crock et al 2006; Robertson 2013).

Such metaphorical language, Turton contends in the manner of Pierre Bourdieu, is not innocent but is calculated and cultivated. He points to three main factors to justify his claim. Firstly, he argues “it is not the language of migrants themselves – it is spoken from a sedentary or state-centric perspective; ‘We’ use to talk about ‘them’.” Secondly, he contends, “the metaphorical language of migration requires us to think of it as some kind of natural event, an inexorable process with its own logic and force” (Turton, 2003, p. 5). And finally, “metaphors we use to talk about migration require us to think of migrants as an undifferentiated mass”. The language used particularly in the global north tends to de-personalise and de-humanise forced migrants, ignores the forced migrant’s personal narrative and ascribes them a narrative tailored to state, domestic political interests.
As political elites and national populations, such as in Australia, try to understand, conceptualise and formulate appropriate responses to forced migration the approach tends to depend on what “they” – migrants – are to be used for, whether they will be good for the economy or a burden, and how well they enable people in a particular cultural or institutional context to achieve their objectives and satisfy their needs. Forced migrants, then, fleeing their homelands for fear of persecution and seeking sanctuary in countries such as Australia, have been embroiled in such dominant political discourse emanating from powerful global north states, and must attempt to orchestrate their social lives against such a global political backdrop.

The language that has been formulated to conceptualise forced migration may be seen to have arisen out of relatively ad hoc responses to a series of domestic policy concerns aimed at restricting access for forced migrants, particularly onshore asylum seekers. As such, there has been a discursive exaggeration for political purposes, which leaves the vast majority of the world’s displaced persons where they are - displaced and without a political community willing to render them substantive spatial security rights. This is despite the forced migrants’ quest for “security spatial rights,” which tends to take precedence over any economic, political and civil rights or any other such entitlements they may receive from a national polity subsequent to their initial protection (Yuval-Davis, 2011). De Haas has observed,

“The primary response of governments in the global North to unwanted migration since the 1970s has been the imposition of increasingly restrictive immigration laws and regulations (restrictive issuance of visa and residence permits), intensified border controls, carriers’ sanctions, deterrent policies and return migration policies… (de Haas 2007, p. 824).

The failure of restrictionism to curtail or adequately address the phenomenon of human displacement as a whole has been well documented (Crock & Ghezelbash, 2010; de Haas, 2007; Czaika & DeHaas, 2011). Instead of reducing the number of forced migrants worldwide (Hatton 2011), it tends to have the dual function of obscuring the complex socio-political factors that
contribute to and perpetuate human displacement, as well as enabling leaders to shirk responsibility in finding solutions for the world’s displaced who are cast largely as unwanted, burdensome, abstract entities that threaten state sovereignty.

Nonetheless, concerned foremost with domestic systemic outcomes, “elected leaders and bureaucrats increasingly have turned to symbolic policy instruments to create an appearance of control” (Massey et al., 1998, p. 288; Cited in de Haas, 2007, p. 826). As part of the harsh political response to asylum seekers in particular, wealthy signatory states have designed and implemented a range of policies aimed at limiting access to their territories via irregular and onshore channels. Such policies include extraterritorial detention, naval interdiction, excision of official migration zones, a reduced protection regime in the form of bridging visas and temporary protection visas for those found to be conventional refugees (Effeney & Mansouri, 2014). Such measures are commonly justified domestically in terms of the ‘deterrence’ and ‘border protection’ imperatives. Although border controls and “restrictive immigration policies have undoubtedly had an effect on the number of legitimate arrivals, they have also generated the unintended effect of encouraging irregular migration” (de Haas, 2007, p. 824). Ironically, smuggling is a reaction to border controls, rather than a cause of migration.

One of the more controversial deterrence measures, instituted by countries such as Australia and the USA, is extraterritorial detention for the purpose of offshore processing, which is designed to prevent and deter access to statutory and judicial safeguards in the destination country (Francis, 2008). Offshore processing often incorporates “interdiction, transfer and processing practices and standards that are deliberately isolated from the national, legal and institutional protections within either the intercepting state or the third country where processing occurs” (Francis, 2008, p. 253). It has been argued that extraterritorial long-distance processing assists states in obfuscating international legal responsibilities to asylum seekers, by enabling them to exercise control covertly, and to place their targets outside the reach of the law (Dastyari & Effeney, 2013; Effeney & Mansouri, 2014).
As part of instituting and marketing offshore processing policies (and other deterrence measures) to domestic publics, border protection assumes a heightened symbolic and politicised dimension in the debate about forced migration; constructed as a social, cultural and economic frontier, where the battle between nationally framed prerogatives is waged against human rights obligations to displaced people. Indeed, since 2001, securitisation and deliberalisation are the foremost determinants of northern states’ approaches to asylum seeking (Hyndmann, 2012), with immigration and border control being inextricably linked to risk, insecurity and the need for strong exclusionary measures.

The centrality and symbolism of borders in domestic and global politics cannot be underestimated, as borders constitute a hallmark feature of the international system. As was noted above, the Westphalian state’s right to control movements across its borders is perceived as a fundamental element of state sovereignty. Furthermore, the importance of borders is not confined to political, economic and security realms but transcend them to play an intrinsic and symbolic role in defining the nation state itself. As Rudolph (2006, p. 207) writes, borders “remain significant because they provide social closure and symbolic separation between peoples and cultures” and “together with the institution of citizenship, designate both inclusion and exclusion and define the socio-political community.” In other words, borders can be invoked to serve a dual function of defining and sustaining identities. Focus on such constructs and discourses allow national political communities to justify even the most inhumane exclusionary policies, such as the indefinite, extraterritorial detention of children (AHRC, 2014). Indeed, the displaced, and particularly those with the tenacity to seek asylum in the developed north, become the unwanted ‘deviant other’ that threatens the national community’s identity and values, not just its borders and its ability to meticulously plan its own immigration program (Marfleet, 2006; Dunn et al, 2007).

2.4 Bounded Political Communities – Implications for Refugees
To recap, forced migrants seek certain rights, liberties and entitlements on the basis of human rights that only national governments and their local partners are in a position to render. Since the 1950s, human rights and cosmopolitan norms have been increasingly invoked in refugee and asylum debates and territorially delimited nations have been continuously challenged not only in their claims to control their territorial borders but also in their prerogative to define the boundaries of the national community. Indeed, so long as liberal democratic nation states such as Australia are legally and rhetorically committed to human rights norms, and are signatory to international covenants, the challenge of juggling particularistic, national interests (often led by the executive arm of the state) with universal rights principles incorporated into the domestic legislature (usually safeguarded by the judicial arm of state) is both inevitable and ongoing, with no end in sight.

Articulating the limits of a national democratic community is, on one level, a complex metaphysical task that requires democratic members to justify the exclusion of other, human non-members, such that such the justification for exclusion is lawful and democratically constituted. That is, such that the exclusion of a person, and its justification, are legal and represents the will of an increasingly pluralistic national community (a community itself made up of former refugees and migrants). In the case of displaced persons seeking refuge in Australia, and contingent to the articulation of legitimate democratic closure in liberal democratic political systems more broadly, is the special claim that forced migrants make on citizens’

“...concern. They require us to consider issues of membership, citizenship and democratic liberalism. They require us to ask what our responsibilities are to the stranger in distress, the stranger amongst us, on our doorstep, who is seeking a better life for himself or herself and for his or her children, and the stranger halfway around the world who is brought into our homes by satellite TV channels. They require us, in other words, to consider who we are – what is or should be our moral community and, ultimately, what it means to be human”
(Turton 2003, p. 8)
Turton points here to the responsibilities contingent to socio-political membership within liberal democratic polities, and the moral and ethical appeals to shared humanity that forced migrants lay down to sedentary, relatively wealthy citizens of states that nominally adhere to human rights norms. As Ossewaarde argues, “Ignorance no longer provides an alibi: to remain silent is to plead guilty” (Ossewaarde, 2007, p. 376). Indeed, in a culturally diverse and technologically advanced society like Australia, citizens are less and less able to feign ignorance about what happens to strangers and are increasingly confronted with real world manifestations of the liberal paradox. As the current intuitional arrangements and discourses become more and more constrained, so too does the challenge to articulate a path forward become more necessary.

Political philosophers tend to frame their discussion of issues pertaining to this liberal paradox in terms of a project of global justice. One aspect of this broad debate is a concern with illustrating an ethical and practical path forward from the current world order. This discussion plays out between Rawlsian thinkers, such as Thomas Nagel, and a variety of cosmopolitan thinkers, such as Seyla Behabib and Anthony Appiah. Rawlsian scholars are broadly directed by the “Law of Nations” thesis of John Rawls (1971), which view socio-political communities as isolated social entities, autonomous from one another. Although Rawls’s analysis is abstract, critics contend that using the isolated “society” as the central ontological unit of analysis obscures an examination of the various phenomena in the real world that transcend national boundaries. Human displacement, as a socio-political phenomenon, is a case in point. In light of this critique, scholars dealing with issues pertaining to forced migration tend to find greater theoretical analytic purchase in the work of cosmopolitan thinkers, which are many and varied in their approaches. Common to all cosmopolitan theories is the idea that humans beings – regardless of national, religious, cultural, or political affiliation – should be seen as members of the same community – humanity - and that this community should be cultivated (Strand, 2009).
The term “cosmopolitan” derives from Greek _kosmo politeˆs_, meaning citizen of the world. It dates at least to the Cynics of Greece in 4BCE and the Stoics’ later description of themselves as cosmopolitans—“human beings living in a world of human beings and only incidentally members of polities” (Barry 1999, p. 36). In the contemporary moment, cosmopolitanism foremost views humans as moral beings capable of communicative freedom and who have a fundamental right to have rights, as per Hannah Arendt. As Ossewaarde argues, “To keep one’s conscience clear, cosmopolitanism proposes to cultivate the goodwill of locals or nationals to become engaged with strangers, to cultivate a sense of global responsibility for the fate of strangers in distress, regardless of their group identity or social distinctions” (Ossewaarde, 2007, p. 376). In crude terms, human rights principles and their expression in international law and domestic legislatures are an institutional manifestation of cosmopolitan ideals.

Scholars interested in cosmopolitan theories tend to take impetus from what they perceive are unprecedented empirical conditions surrounding contemporary states, governments and national communities now forcibly enmeshed in international and regional networks. They recognize that individuals are no longer simply citizens of their respective states but are persons bearing universal human rights and potentially enjoying multiple citizenships and having a sense of belonging to a multitude of communities (Benhabib 2004, 2007, 2013; Archibugi & Held, 1995). Indeed, some scholars view cosmopolitanism as an empirical imperative; “with the globalization of national societies, cosmopolitanism has now become something of an urgent reality” (Arendt, 1968, p. 82) and “an actual social condition of many today” (Mazlish 2005, p. 106; Cited in Ossewaarde 2007, p. 384). Such an assertion is widely disputed.

The empirical realities of international migration and human mobility, increasing socio-political diversity of national communities and the proliferation of mechanisms of global justice, such as the integration of human rights principles into domestic legislatures, do mark a move along a cosmopolitan trajectory. However, it far from engenders a wholesale adoption
of the normative principles of cosmopolitanism into the socio-political frameworks and practices of nation states such as Australia. Even as we see an ever more globally integrated economic system, issues of substantive social and political integration repeatedly tend to lag behind (Kendall et al, 2009). Indeed, cosmopolitanism is often criticized for its affinity with neo-liberal globalization, unchecked capitalism, elitism and its tendency for utopian abstraction that ignores anthropological and sociological literatures and in so doing whitewashes, or assigns secondary importance to issues of socio-cultural complexity, privilege and inequality.

To overcome such weaknesses, some scholars have come to conceptualise the cosmopolitan project as an ongoing, social and political process, or, reminiscent of Karl Marx, a struggle. Moreover, that the reciprocal recognition of each other as beings who inherently bear the right to have rights inevitably involves political and social struggles, activism and learning processes both within and across classes, genders, nations, ethnic group and religious faiths (Benhabib 2013). These scholars tend to ground their more abstract, theoretical insights and assertions within an empirically demonstrable or explorable socio-political phenomena. Mitchell Cohen, for example, has conceptualised “rooted” cosmopolitanism” (Cohen 1992) and Kurasawa has dubbed his own treatment of cosmopolitanism as “cosmopolitanism from below” (Kurasawa 2004). Seyla Benhabib grounds her own take on cosmopolitanism in Habermasian notions of democracy (this is discussed below). “Universalism does not consist in a human essence or nature which we are all said to have or to possess,” she argues, “but rather in experiences of establishing commonality across diversity, conflict, divide and struggle. Universalism is an aspiration, a moral goal to strive for; it is not a fact, a description of the way the world is” (Benhabib, 2013, p. 70).

Informing democratically grounded approaches to cosmopolitanism is the recognition that while the state’s role may be changing and attenuating in the contemporary age, it is certainly not withering away. Indeed, the discussion thus far has illustrated that the normative persuasion and mobilization of even the most powerful non-state actors can only be in the ultimate interest of
altering the practices of states (Gest, 2010). Kymlicka has termed this, the ‘taming’ of liberal nationhood as opposed to any exaggerated notions of it transcendence (Kymlicka W; Cited in Benhabib 2007, p. 131).

Among the various cosmopolitan theories that have grown ever more popular in an age of tamed liberal nationhood, are those thinkers, like Benhabib, who seek to articulate mechanisms by which to ground the cosmopolitan project in existing democratic socio-political structures of nation states. That is, philosophers and scholars concerned with reconciling new socio-political phenomena and conditions with existing structures of governance and power. Such scholars point to the inclusive potential of normative democratically grounded cosmopolitanism. They tend, in the first instance, to conceptualise democracy itself as discursive and procedural, in the fashion of Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1972; 1985; 1987). For Benhabib, for example, the limits of democratic ‘closure’ are fluid, constantly contested and redefined through dialectic processes that lead to democratic learning and iteration through law. She argues, “although all democracies require borders, because every democracy must define very specifically who may vote and who may not, these boundaries are fixed by positive law and are therefore subject to the force of democratic iteration” (Benhabib, 2007, p. 33). Democratic iterations are to be understood as

“complex processes of public argument, deliberation and exchange through which universalist rights claims are contested and contextualized, invoked and revoked, posited and positioned throughout legal and political institutions as well as in the associations of civil society” (Benhabib, 2013, p. xx)

Other scholars, such as David Held, have also grounded the cosmopolitan project in this fundamental theoretical point about ideal, theoretical democracy (Held, 2010).

Thinkers such as Habermas, Benhabib and Held contend that any practical path forward in the current world order inevitably requires engagement with socio-political institutions that constitute democratic polities. Benhabib, for example, is concerned with the logic of democratic representation, rather than
any identity-based link between a government and its territory. She argues that state sovereignty has been frayed in the contemporary era and the institution of “citizenship has been disaggregated or unbundled into diverse elements. New modalities of membership have emerged, with the result of the political community, as defined by the nation-state system, are no longer adequate to regulate membership” (Benhabib 2004, p. 1). Such an approach conceptualizes the democratic political community foremost as demos, not ethnos, wherein peoplehood, or the nation, is regarded as a dynamic and not a static reality. She concedes that, ‘certainly, identification and solidarity are not unimportant, but they need to be leavened through democratic attachments and constitutional norms’ (Benhabib 2004, p. 221). By using the ‘liberal paradox’ as a broad starting point, this argument highlights a democratic dilemma for countries such as Australia, that are concerned with reconciling the vision that stands behind human rights principles “with the institutional and normative necessities of democracy, as a form of government based upon public autonomy, namely that those subject to their laws also be their authors” (Benhabib, 2004, p. 221).

Benhabib takes this “democratic dilemma” up in her examination of the boundaries of political community in the contemporary age by focusing on political membership. She defines political membership as “the principles and practices for incorporating aliens and strangers, immigrants and newcomers, refugees and asylum seekers, into existing polities” (Benhabib, 2004, p. 1). She argues that “demos can alter its own understanding of citizenship, which in turn will alter the ethnos, understood as a shared community of fate” (Benhabib 2007, p. 69). That is, qualitative understandings and experiences of political membership, such as citizenship, necessarily change over time and in line with the social realities and needs of the shared democratic community. However, Benhabib (2007, p. 47) concedes that the end of the unitary model of citizenship “does not mean that its hold on our political imagination or its normative force in guiding our institutions have grown obsolete.” It does mean, however, that political communities and their members must be ready to “imagine forms of political agency and subjectivity that anticipate new modalities of political membership.” In an era of cosmopolitan norms
(instituted as human rights), a range of political actors are emerging that challenge traditional distinctions between citizens and long-term residents, insiders and outsiders, and call for a readjustment not just of the qualitative nature of political membership in democratic polities, but the boundaries of the demos (Benhabib 2007). As such, the structural, institutional arrangements designed to govern these communities - via laws, policies and the bureaucracies through which they are executed, as well as the rhetoric that justifies and sustains them - must too change and remain dynamic if they are to keep apace with the needs of the public, and thereby maintain democratic legitimacy.

The strategy chosen by nation states like Australia to navigate this democratic dilemma has particular consequences for forced migrants seeking refuge in the country, both before and after they arrive, and despite their mode of arrival. As noted above, for the past two decades the strategies adopted to respond to forced migration have repeatedly displayed a propensity for domestic politicking, securitization and national cultural selectivity. The popular political imagination appears to remain beholden to territorial politics and the unitary model of citizenship rather than genuine, reflexive, democratic process and substantive adherence to human rights norms (Castles, 2001, Crock 2009; McDonald, 2011).

Within such dominant discourse, the refugee is often represented as a dehumanised other, who is subject to, yet largely disenfranchised by, the national political system (Marfleet 2006; Dunn et al 2007). And yet, despite such top-heavy, rhetorical melodrama, sociological scholarship is premised on and repeatedly demonstrates refugees’ ‘capacity for agency at all odds’ (Soguk 1999, p. 5, Cited in Turton 2003, p. 12). Refugees and asylum seekers exist as ordinary people, purposive actors whose very flight and arrival to countries like Australia is representative of contextualised and active decision-making and behaviour. Indeed, their protection by the Australian state and official membership in the community is a case in point for Benhabib’s argument; they gained entry and membership in the national society by leavening constitutional norms and democratic attachments, as is the nature of the
asylum process. However, once arrived and nominally integrated into the official socio-political system as political members, their resettlement experience and their substantive, democratic inclusion in their new polity over time, and across subsequent generations, is deeply affected by the normative and political discussions surrounding the politics of forced migration. It is a contentious politics that tends, for the most part, to cast forced migrants as socio-culturally incompatible with the national community, and furthermore a potential threat to social cohesion, economic prosperity and security (Kateb, 2006).

It is in light of such discussions, which beg redress of the increasingly obvious short circuit in the feedback loop between ruler and ruled/structure and agent, that there has been a conceptual shift in the field of political science in recent decades; what some dub a ‘representative turn’ (Näsström 2011; Saward 2010; Shapiro et al 2009), and others a ‘cultural turn’ (Kurasawa 2007). In short, there is a call for greater emphasis on human agency, a notion that has gained particular relevance in discussions about declining participation in democracy (Dahlgren, 2009; De Haas 2008; Robinson and Tormey 2009, Castles 2001). While most of these scholars concede that there has never been a perfect overlap between the circle of those who stand under the law’s authority and the full members of the demos, they argue that democratic political communities are to be foremost understood as reflexive. Populist liberal egalitarian discourses of political systems, such as prevails in Australia for example, are deemed insufficient to meet the challenges of globalization, as they render the social a passive recipient of political largesse qua ‘fairness’ instead of the social having a life and potentiality of its own (Robinson and Tormey 2009; Crock 2010).

In order to bolster the value of macro-level, abstract philosophical discussions, such as Seyla Benhabib’s democratically grounded cosmopolitan theory, a trend has arisen which sees political scientists attempting to establish a behavioral link to the micro-level. In other words, much of the recent literature dealing with liberal democratic theories and governance is concerned with making explicit “the behavioral assumptions underpinning the macro-level
correlations they assume or describe” (de Haas 2011, p. 16; Niemi & Klingler, 2012; Zingher & Thomas, 2012; Martin, 2012). It is with this in mind that this study seeks to build on an assumption of diffuse sanctions in democratic systems, whereby an account from a range of social actors is sought in order to both understand and innovate new political spaces and thereby recognise, explore and remain apace with dynamic social facts. It applies this approach to the context of exiles from the Iraq war who have sought refuge in Australia, for they, in crude terms, represent a compelling case study within this discussion. If Benhabib’s theory that ‘identification and solidarity are… to be leavened through democratic attachments and constitutional norms’ has any empirical bearing upon the case of Iraqi exiles settling and orchestrating their social lives in Australia, then they must a priori identify with and be engaged with democratic processes.

2.5 Iraq’s Mass Displacement since 2003

This section presents a review of literature about forced migration from Iraq since 2003. It briefly outlines the major events associated with Iraqi displacement as well as outlining the particular dynamics of migration from and within the country. It is worth restating that the UNHCR estimates that more than 4.1 million people are displaced inside Iraq or beyond the country’s borders (UNHCR, 2015). In other words, at least 4.1 million Iraqis are displaced from their home, which is equivalent to one sixth of Australia’s entire population, or the population of greater Sydney.

The mass displacement of more than 4 million Iraqis since 2003 is no surprise. Before the US-led occupation, humanitarian agencies, academics and the media warned that there would be a major displacement of Iraq’s population; a humanitarian crisis would occur as a direct effect of the war or as a result of an ethnic and/or sectarian conflict, and widespread human rights abuses would ensue (Sassoon 2010). The international aid regime prepared accordingly, setting up emergency camps to house the inevitable outflow of forced migrants that would come in the immediate wake of intervention. But nobody came. Aid organizations “had miscalculated the Iraqi peoples’ response to the
invasion; the empty emergency camps were dismantled and pre-positioned food and equipment were removed” (Chatty & Mansour, 2012, p. 98). It was not until three years later, when the fragile security situation eroded into ubiquitous conflict and insecurity that Iraqis were uprooted and began to flee their homes on a large scale. The Iraqi refugee crisis that ensued and continues unabated exhibits socio-political characteristics peculiar to the historical context in which it arose and continues to morph. Indeed, the nature of Iraqi displacement defies neat characterisation and precludes many of the displaced from fitting the neat categories used by the International system of refugee protection.

The people of Iraq are no strangers to upheaval; they bear witness to three major wars over the last four decades. Violence during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 Gulf War and the uprising in the south that followed, the several savage attacks on the Kurds in the north and the Shi’a in the south, and more than a decade of international aid, trade and economic sanctions drastically effected the country’s entire population (Fawcett & Tanner, 2002). As Sassoon points out, “the root causes of Iraq’s mess after 2003 cannot be seen in isolation from the events and developments in Iraq before this time, and during Saddam’s era” (Sassoon, 2010, p. 1). The Sunni Arabist Ba’th party under President Saddam Hussein fostered feelings of paranoia, xenophobia and distrust to create a hegemonic state and nurture a “culture of violence” in the country (Abbud 2002). During Saddam’s era, in the 1990s for example, Iraq witnessed large waves of migration and “brain drain” (when the most educated, skilled members of the national population emigrate en masse) from its territories as a result of authoritarian Ba’th policies and the deterioration of economic conditions. It is estimated that there were 1.2 million people affected by protracted displacement over the course of 40 years leading up to 2003 (MoMD, 2008).

It is the most recent conflicts in Iraq, however, which have led to the largest scale, protracted human displacement situation in the republic’s history. Marfleet argues, “the cumulative effect of pressures on the Iraqi population is the key to understanding recent patterns of movement. Living conditions have
declined steadily since 2003, while new crises of security have led more and more Iraqis to seek exit” (Marfleet, 2007, p. 408). The fragile fabric of Iraqi national society has been torn by violence and deepened a pervasive mistrust throughout the entire population, particularly between disparate religious and ethnic communities (Sassoon 2010). It is argued that Iraqis have fled “as a consequence of a conflict in which they have no stake but of which they were made victims” (International Crisis Group, 2008).

Prevalent among the risk factors that prompted the flight of millions of Iraqis after 2003 were ethnic and religious identity, minority status, personal wealth, and professional association such as employment by foreign forces (Chatty & Mansour, 2012, p. 99). Many others fled from Iraq’s central and southern provinces, and most notably from Baghdad and more recently from the country’s north, as a result of high levels of indiscriminate violence carried out by various actors in the name of sectarianism, tribal and/or ethnic affiliations.

After 2006, state and society in Iraq fractured further as power devolved to localities and militias. Communal identities hardened and inter-group hatreds flared, even as more weapons poured into the immediate region, particularly from global north states to Syrian dissidents fighting the brutal Assad regime. Sassoon says “The armed militias filled the vacuum in humanitarian assistance as the national government lacked the skills and resources to take care of their internally and externally displaced populations” (Sassoon, 2010, p. 4). With the rise of Islamic State (IS, otherwise known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS, or Da’esh), a militant Sunni fundamentalist jihadist group with territorial and state ambitions, ample weapons and funding, as well as media and technological know-how, there has been a further escalation of armed conflict across the country. This has led to new and secondary movements of internally displaced Iraqis in particular.

In order to illustrate the complexity of Iraqi displacement and migratory movements since 2003, it is worth looking at the phenomenon in terms of three main displacement patterns. First it looks at the situation for Internally Displaced Iraqis, the number of which has increased markedly with the rise of
IS, particularly in central and northern Iraq. It goes on to look at the movement of Iraqis to countries of first asylum, often to countries that border with Iraq, including Syria, Iran and Turkey. And finally it reviews the movement of displaced Iraqis to nation states of the global North that are signatory to the UNHCR convention and protocol, such as Australia, countries of Europe, Canada and the US.

**Internally Displaced Persons**

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which utilizes figures from the UN and IOM, there were some 2.7 million IDPs in Iraq in 2010, and an estimated 2.1 million in 2012, of whom nearly three quarters were living in a situation of protracted displacement (IDMC, 2012). The UNHCR conservatively estimated that in 2012 there were 1.1 million IDPs in Iraq (UNHCR 2012), while according to Iraq’s Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD), 235,610 people returned to their places of origin in 2012 and 1.1 million remained displaced (MOMD 2012). These official government figures, however, do not take into account the displacements that took place before 2006, the fact that not all IDPs are officially registered, and the questionable nature of some returns.

Such a large-scale displacement within Iraq has led to pressing humanitarian needs that systematically fail to be publicly acknowledged by the Iraqi government and the international community, let alone met with an adequate response. After 2012 and before the publicly acknowledged, violent rise of IS, the civil war in Syria forced millions of people to seek shelter in Iraq, including Iraqi refugees who were fleeing back across the border, along with millions of newly displaced Syrians. That is, with no end in sight to Syria’s civil war, the direction of forced migration was reversed for many Iraqi refugees who had hitherto sought asylum in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who sought refuge in Syria between 2003 and 2011 continued to return home, which brought the number of Iraqi IDPs to roughly 2.8 million in 2013 (Refugees International, 2013). Returning ‘home’ in this case simply meant returning to Iraq. Given the major social upheavals and physical destruction of
infrastructure that the country has witnessed since 2003, seldom can these Iraqi exiles return to a recognizable neighborhood of their childhood or previous life, if they are able to physically access it at all (Izady 2009).

Since 2013, IS has violently captured and now control territory populated by some ten million people across large swathes of central and northern Iraq and into Syria (Nebehay, 2015). As a result, a new wave of mass displacement has occurred. In 2014 alone, Iraq suffered the highest new internal displacement worldwide with at least 2.2 million displaced. Overall, there were an estimated three million IDPs displaced from January 2014 to May 2015 (IDMC 2015).

Given the chaotic conditions in Iraq, various bodies monitoring displacement from Iraq, such as the IOM, UNHCR and the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UAMI), have no access to displaced populations, such as people in IS-controlled territories, and no longer differentiate between newly displaced and the protractedly displaced. As such, internally displaced Iraqis are difficult to account for, and are extremely vulnerable given their limited access to shelter, food, and basic services. Iraq’s internally displaced live in makeshift arrangements under conditions of perpetual insecurity, continuing civil conflict, and economic uncertainty (Chatty 2012; IDMC 2015).

**Iraqi Exiles in the Region**

Of the estimated two million displaced Iraqis who were beyond the Iraq borders in 2012-13, the vast majority was living in regional asylum states, or first countries of asylum. Syria was the main host country for Iraqi refugees between 2003-2013, with an estimated one and a half million Iraqis residing there prior to the unrest in Syria that began in 2011 and significantly escalated in 2013. At 2015, the situation of those who were in Syria is largely unconfirmed, as violence persists and humanitarian agencies, such as the Red Crescent, have extremely limited or no access to these populations. It is presumed that most have fled back to Iraq and now live there as IDPs.
Jordan hosts the second largest number of Iraqi exiles, with an estimated population of more than half a million, of whom only 30,000 were registered with the UNHCR in 2014. Jordan is also host to Syrian and Palestinian refugee populations of even greater magnitude (UNHCR 2015). In relative, per capita terms, the size of the Iraqi refugee influx into this small Hashemite Kingdom since 2003 is equivalent to an influx of 1.9 million refugees into Australia. There are also significant populations of Iraqis in Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon and other countries of the region.

The capacity of Iraq’s neighboring Arab countries to host and absorb the displaced was overwhelmed in the decade after 2003. After an initial open border policy for Iraqis, Jordan began to restrict their entry in November 2006, while Syria also came to tighten border controls after 2007. None of these states are signatories to the UN Convention or Protocol, and accepted Iraqis into their territories in the spirit of Arab brotherhood, affording them only temporary protection as “guests”. These countries have shown hospitality in hosting such large populations of displaced, yet fervently draw the line on the issue of integration of Iraq’s exiles into their societies (Chatty & Mansour, 2010).

Research has shown that Iraqis living in Syria (formerly), Jordan and Lebanon suffer from economic and social marginalization, and are plagued by continuing uncertainty as a result of their precarious legal status in these states (Amnesty International, 2008). The informal status of Iraqis in these countries prohibits them from attaining official, gainful employment, pushing many into exploitative informal sectors and/or religious groups/militias, leading to a perceptible spike in prostitution and child labour (Sassoon 2010). Such social arrangements also contributed to the rising influence of extremist and radical ideology over the increasingly alienated, impoverished and relatively young demographic of displaced Iraqis who are trying to make sense of their unsettled social reality. Under such conditions, many Iraqis pursue other coping strategies, too, tapping into transnational migratory networks, to move on to third countries via irregular pathways (Dorai 2011), or undertaking circular migration back into Iraq for “specific reasons such as to check on their
relatives, sell their assets, collect their pensions, and assess the security situation, first-hand” (Chatty & Mansour 2010, 102). The constant threat of deportation amplifies the uncertain and stressful environment in which many individuals and families attempt to orchestrate their lives, forcing many to maintain a deliberately hidden and marginalized existence (Ellis 2009). The individual and collective wellbeing of many Iraqi exiles remain very much in limbo in countries of first asylum.

**Iraqi Exiles and the International Community**

States of the global north that are signatory to the Refugee Convention and Protocol contribute to Iraqi displacement through the formal system of international refugee protection. The mechanisms of protection available through this bureaucratic system were outlined above. The first element, ‘Preventative Measures,’ is redundant in the Iraqi context of mass, protracted displacement. The second element is ‘temporary protection in a country of first asylum.’ The provision of assistance and protection for Iraqis living in limbo and uncertainty in neighboring countries such as Syria and Jordan is hugely challenging and growing more untenable over time. The UNHCR, funded by international donors, operates in these countries of first asylum through agreements or memorandums of understanding with Arab host governments, whereby responsibilities for refugee assistance and protection are, in principle, shared. In effect, there is a de facto transfer of refugee policy management to the UNHCR which acts as a “surrogate state” in the Middle East, yet lacks the “capacity to fully substitute for a host government” (Kagan, 2011, p. 1; Crisp & Slaughter, 2008).

High donor interest from countries such as the US and Australia in the years after 2007 has given the UNHCR considerable resources to mobilize for refugee service provision through this imperfect institutional arrangement. It has also allowed donors from the global north to symbolically shoulder their share of the “burden” as per global refugee policy. Despite this, the situation remains ad hoc and challenging due to a range of factors; the urban and “invisible” nature of Iraqi displacement, regional host states’ lack of domestic
refugee law and opposition to local integration, and no clear, practical
delineation of who is ultimately responsibility for protection failures (Kagan
2011). Furthermore, since 2013 and in line with the territorial expansion of IS
and related conflict, protection agencies have had severely limited access to
displaced populations of concern (Nebehay 2015).

The third element of international refugee protection is ‘durable solutions.’ As
outlined above, the UNHCR framework offers three durable solutions. In light
of the discussion above, the first solution, voluntary return is not feasible for
displaced Iraqis at this point (AusAID, 2010; UNHCR, 2015). The 4 million
IDPs currently resident in Iraq are testimony to the difficulty of repatriation.
Furthermore, as Chaterland and Morris (2012, p. 8) note, the Iraqi parliament
passed a resolution in June 2012 “banning the forced return of tens of
thousands of failed asylum seekers.” The resolution threatened “to fine airlines
that take part in deportation programs. There appears to be no precedent for
the post-crisis legislature of a refugee-producing state to refuse to take back its
own nationals” (Chaterland & Morris, 2012, p. 8). The second durable solution
is “Local integration in the country of first asylum,” which has been touched
on above and is ruled out by neighboring host states. The third durable
solution is ‘resettlement in a third country.’ Indeed, this is the only durable
solution being pursued for Iraqis. In 2010, Iraqis were the largest group of
beneficiaries of UNHCR-facilitated third-country resettlement programs
(26,700 people) and in 2011 they were the second largest group (20,000
people) (UNHCR, 2012). By 2014, they were the fourth largest group (11,
778) with other displacements emerging and taking priority – namely, refugees
from Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar (UNHCR,
2015).

The US has accepted far more Iraqis than other resettlement countries, which
include Australia, Canada, the Nordic countries, New Zealand and since 2013,
Italy and South Korea. As of April 2013, 199,202 referrals to the U.S.
Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) had been approved and 84,902
Iraqi refugees had actually arrived in the US (USCIS 2013). In Australia, from
the beginning of 2006 to the end of 2013, the government granted offshore
visas to 15,881 Iraqis (Australia’s Iraqi refugee intake is discussed in detail in the next section). Although resettlement is projected as a humanitarian response, research shows that “it is in fact an intensely politicized process. Resettlement is a political tool used by states to meet political aims” (Long, 2011, p. 18). Iraqi resettlement is particularly hampered by “structural inefficiencies in potential host states, by ‘security’ protocols that prolong and often terminate resettlement proceedings, and by a global trend in the de-liberalization of refugee and asylum policies that intensified after 9/11” and was touched on above (Berman, 2010, p. 12). Furthermore, while resettlement programs represent a valuable and high profile demonstration of international burden sharing, the UNCHR successfully resettles less than ten percent of Iraqi applicants, who in turn represent the fraction of the refugee population registered with the organization. Current resettlement practices cannot hope to ‘unlock’ the protracted displacement of Iraqis.

The final element of the international protection system is asylum. Many Iraqi exiles, the majority of whom are protractedly displaced with little hope for a resolution of their situation, choose to undertake irregular migration and claim asylum in signatory countries upon arrival. While the US has been the main resettlement country since 2003, Western European states have received the largest number of in-country asylum applications from Iraqis, with Sweden topping the list. In 2007 the “number of Iraqi applicants for asylum in the industrialised countries was significantly more than from any other state, and more than the total of applications from both the second- and third-largest states of origin (China and Russian Federation) combined” (UNHCR 2008, 14; Cited in Chatty and Marfleet 2009, p. 4). In 2008 Iraqis remained the largest group of asylum seekers worldwide. They were the third largest by 2010-2011 and in 2011-2012 Iraqis were the seventh largest group of asylum seekers globally (UNHCR 2013). In 2012-13 Iraqis were the fourth largest group of asylum seekers (59,181 Iraqi asylum seekers), and the second largest group in
2013-14, with 106,040 Iraqis making asylum claims, predominantly to European countries.\(^5\)

To recap, there are an estimated 4.1 million Iraqis displaced inside Iraq and beyond the country’s borders, most commonly in Jordan, Iran and Turkey. Their displacement is protracted and complex, marred by ongoing insecurity and violence in Iraq and its immediate region. A small minority of Iraqis have managed to secure durable solutions to their displacement under the International refugee protection regime, but the vast majority remain uprooted and living in unsafe, ad hoc conditions. Furthermore, humanitarian agencies have little to no access to the majority of the displaced in Iraq and their basic sanitation, nutrition and other needs systematically fail to be met.

### 2.6 Australia’s approach to forced migration

This section looks at the history of policies, laws and rhetoric designed to address the issue of forced migration to Australia. It reviews the contemporary political discourse and the state’s attendant institutional arrangements to deal with forced migrant arrivals. This provides background for the following section, which discusses the impact that the politics of forced migration has on refugees living in the Australian community.

Australia has a paradoxical history of immigration. The popular slogan used by Labor Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell (1945-49) ‘Populate or Perish’, juxtaposed onto the ‘White Australia Policy’ (WAP) and its discursive bedfellow, the ‘Yellow Peril’, is a telling example of the contradictory politics of belonging that is built into public discourse on immigration. In a parliamentary debate in November 1946, Calwell argued of the economic and defence need for

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\(^5\) It is worth noting that in 2012-2013 alone there was a 32 per cent rise in annual asylum levels to Europe, from 368,400 to 484,600 claims. This increased to 712,300 claims to European countries in 2013-14, a rise of 47 per cent from the previous year. Conversely, the reported number of new asylum-seekers in Australia dropped by 24 per cent during 2014 (9,000 claims) compared to the previous year (11,700). Australia receives far fewer asylum seeker arrivals than most other countries of the global north (Iraqi asylum seekers arrivals to Australia after 2003 are discussed at greater length in the next section).
more immigration to the country. He went on to assure the polity, which was anxious about the racial makeup and “character” of potential arrivals, that that for every “foreign” migrant there would be ten from the United Kingdom. Around this time, too, Calwell became infamous for his statement, “two wongs don’t make a white,” a racist sentiment strongly backed by the Australian public and considered an apt approach to planning the country’s immigration program (Warhaft, 2004, p. 244). Once arrived, he further assured the electorate, all “foreign” migrants (such as Italians, Jews, and “Negroes”) would have to “assimilate” - discard their origin culture and language, and adopt the attitudes and behaviours commensurate with “Australian nationality” (Vrachnas, Bagaric, Dimopoulos, & Pathinayake, 2011). Assimilation policies were in place well before Calwell’s time, and affected not just foreign arrivals, but also deeply affected Australia’s aboriginal communities (Buti, 2003).

Immigration laws and policies, social attitudes and public policies have changed remarkably since the 1940s and 1950s. In saying that, contemporary governments champion the contributions that migrants and forced migrants have made to the country. Australia’s multicultural policies and its welfare-based refugee settlement programs, executed through Human Settlement Services (HSS), are relatively progressive and effective models by global standards for the political management of cultural diversity and are regularly touted by politicians (Bowen 2011). In addition to official multicultural policy, there exists an industrious civil society, with activist movements and civic organisations oriented towards notions of human rights and anti-racism, the respect and celebration of cultural and religious diversity, and inclusive refugee resettlement in the country. These include various migrant resource centres, advocacy movements and other non-governmental organisations working with migrant communities. Further to this, Australia consistently ranks among the world’s top three resettlement countries in the world (UNHCR, 2015).

At the same time, however, the rubric of white Australia persists. Most obviously in the prerogative of the state to deem who is and is not a desirable migrant, particularly in relation to humanitarian arrivals. In line with this, barriers to entry for forced migrants are becoming ever more restrictive, or in the
case asylum seekers arriving by boat since August 2012, proscriptive. Rhetoric and policy towards asylum seekers, which tends to dominate the entire forced migration debate, is increasingly militarised, opaque and punitive. Indeed, Australia’s asylum policies over the past two decades have been formulated on the back of contentious political claims and populist discourse, which tends to frame debate about forced migration around notions of national security threat and other domestic concerns, cultural, religious and economic.

Australia was a founding signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, of which Article 14 states, ‘Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution’ (United Nations, 1948). On January 22, 1954 the Liberal Menzies government voluntarily ratified the United Nations’ Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. As the sixth country to ratify the agreement, Australia’s signature rendered the Refugee Convention a binding international treaty, though there was little public knowledge of the move (Manne, 2013). In 1959, at the opening of World Refugee Year in Australia, Prime Minister Menzies declared,

“It is a good thing that Australia should have earned a reputation for a sensitive understanding of the problems of people in other lands; that we should not come to be regarded as people who are detached from the miseries of the world” (Menzies, 1959).

It is with such nationally framed generosity of spirit that political leaders in Australia first approached the issue of forced migration.

It was after the fall of the South Vietnamese Government in April 1975, which sparked the mass flight of Vietnamese refugees into nearby countries, and prompted an international response, that Australia pledged support and developed a coordinated response to resettling refugees. Over the next two decades Australia resettled more than 100,000 Vietnamese refugees, more than 2000 of them arriving in 55 boats over six years (1975-1981) to seek asylum (Phillips & Spinks, 2012). The seed of this refugee processing and settlement system remains in place until this day, though the nature of the program has changed over the past decades in terms of service provision, regional
composition and the numbers accepted. In terms of overall migration to Australia, the humanitarian program represented upwards of 10 per cent at the turn of the century, dropping to around 7-10 per cent after 2006 (See Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MIGRATION PROGRAM</th>
<th>HUMANITARIAN STREAM</th>
<th>% OF MIGRATION PROGRAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>93,080</td>
<td>12,303</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>108,070</td>
<td>12,522</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>114,360</td>
<td>13,698</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>120,060</td>
<td>16,697</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>142,930</td>
<td>18,073</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>148,200</td>
<td>13,521</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>158,630</td>
<td>13,464</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>171,318</td>
<td>14,351</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>168,623</td>
<td>13,944</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>168,685</td>
<td>13,797</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>184,998</td>
<td>13,756</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>190,000</td>
<td>20,019</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>190,000</td>
<td>13,791</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>190,000 (planned)</td>
<td>13,750 (planned)</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Australia’s humanitarian intake relative to its overall permanent migration program, 2000-2015 (Source: Karlsen, 2015)

There are two pathways currently available under Australia’s humanitarian migration program: onshore protection and offshore resettlement. The onshore component aims to provide options for people who wish to apply for protection or asylum after arrival in Australia. The offshore resettlement component, which generally represents the bulk of Australia’s annual intake, provides pathways for resettling refugees living outside of Australia. It comprises two categories of permanent visas: refugee visas and Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) visas. The majority of applicants who are considered under the refugee category are identified and referred by UNHCR.
to Australia’s immigration department for resettlement. Applications for entry under the SHP require support by an Australian citizen, permanent resident or eligible New Zealand citizen, or an organization based in Australia.

The Australian state sets an annual total intake for its entire humanitarian program. Given the unplanned nature of onshore asylum seeking, the number of refugees resettled via the offshore pathway reflects the number of visas available after the number of onshore visas granted in a particular year is deducted from the total intake. In 2012-13, the annual intake was increased from 13,750 to 20,000, in line with rising numbers of asylum seekers arriving to the country. However, since the state suspended processing applications for onshore “Irregular Maritime Arrivals” (IMA) in August 2012, the LNP government under Tony Abbott reduced the total intake back to 13,750 in 2013-2014 (Karlsen, 2015). This is despite the ever-rising number of displaced persons globally. See table 2.2 for overall figures on visas granted under the two pathways of Australia’s Humanitarian migration program since 2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>OFFSHORE SHP VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>OFFSHORE REFUGEE VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>ONSHORE PROTECTION VISA GRANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>4,258</td>
<td>4,160</td>
<td>3,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>7,280</td>
<td>4,376</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>7,668</td>
<td>4,134</td>
<td>1,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>6,585</td>
<td>5,511</td>
<td>4,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>6,836</td>
<td>6,022</td>
<td>5,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>5,275</td>
<td>6,003</td>
<td>2,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>5,026</td>
<td>6,004</td>
<td>2,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>4,586</td>
<td>6,499</td>
<td>3,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>3,244</td>
<td>6,003</td>
<td>4,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>2,981</td>
<td>5,998</td>
<td>4,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>6,004</td>
<td>7,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>12,012</td>
<td>7,504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>4515</td>
<td>6501</td>
<td>2775</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As stated above, Australia consistently ranks in the top three countries for refugee resettlement through the UNHCR system. Since 1975 it has accepted a total of 273,517 refugees for resettlement via the offshore pathway (Karlsen, 2015), which represents approximately one per cent of Australia’s entire population of 23.13 million. The number taken in on an annual basis varies greatly, with the greatest amount being the Indochinese refugees resettled by the Fraser government in the early eighties. In 1980-81 Australia accepted 20,795 and in 1981-82 accepted 20,195 refugees for resettlement. The lowest annual intake was under the Hawke government in 1989-90, when Australia received 1,238 refugees for resettlement (Karlsen 2015).

In more recent years, Australia consistently ranks behind the US in terms of resettlement numbers. In 2012, for example, a total of 69,252 refugees were resettled in 44 countries. The US resettled 53,053 or 77 per cent of the total, while Australia resettled 5,079 or 7 per cent, and Canada resettled 4,755 refugees (Karlsen 2015). It is worth noting that Australia, unlike most other countries in the world, is a geographically isolated island. This means that high resettlement numbers are the most practical measure the state can take in sharing the global burden of refugees. Its rank in the top three resettlement countries, then, taking into account that the number of asylum seekers arriving spontaneously at Australia’s borders is comparatively few, is reflective more of its geography than any particular state or public beneficence towards displaced persons.

In terms of onshore arrivals, the numbers have varied over time, yet are consistently low compared to other countries of the Global North. In 2009, for example, 49,000 claims were made in the US, 42,000 in France and 33,300 in Canada. In comparison, Australia and New Zealand combined received 6,500 claims (Karlsen, Philips, & Koleth, 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, the vast majority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014-15</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>2,750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.2 Number of Visas granted under Australia’s Humanitarian migration program, 2001-15 (Source: Karlsen, 2015)*
of asylum claims to the Australian state up until 2007 were from non-Irregular Maritime Arrivals (non-IMA) arrivals - people who arrived to the country by plane. Despite this, asylum seekers arriving by boat tend to be the central focus of debate about forced migration and the development of policy in the country.

Since 1976 fewer than 50,000 asylum seekers have reached Australia on boats (Manne 2013), which represents 0.2 per cent of the total population. More than half of these arrived after the election of the Rudd Labor government in 2007 (the particular dynamics that led to this are discussed below). After 2007, maritime arrivals increased significantly with 18,365 asylum seekers arriving by boat in 2012-13 alone - this is more than a third of Australia’s total asylum claims (see Table 2.3 for a breakdown of asylum claims to Australia according to IMA and non-IMA categories). Despite being high for Australia, this figure represents three per cent of the total number of asylum applications submitted around the world that year (UNHCR 2013). Overall, Australia’s contribution to the global refugee burden-sharing arrangements of the UNHCR is comparatively small.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Non-IMA (plane)</th>
<th>IMA (boat)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protection visa applications lodged</td>
<td>refugee status determination requests received</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO.</td>
<td>% OF TOTAL</td>
<td>NO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>7026</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>2222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>4959</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>3485</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>3062</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>3191</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>3723</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>3987</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>5072</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>678</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.3 Onshore humanitarian applications by IMA/Non-IMA category, 2001-14. (Source: Philips 2015)

Beyond the raw numbers of humanitarian arrivals to Australia, it is important to look at the history of politics, and the development of policies and legislation that have been designed over the years to address the phenomenon of forced migration. Despite Australian support for the UN Refugee Convention more than half a century ago, there are a number of contemporary blemishes on the Australian state’s commitment to human rights, particularly to the claims of individuals seeking asylum in the country. Such misdemeanours include the state’s punitive mandatory detention scheme (HREOC 2011; UN 2013), including the incarceration of children (AHRC, 2014), sexual and violent abuses against people in detention centres and officially under Australian state care (AHRC, 2014), a temporary protection regime which leaves the displaced in a protracted state of limbo (Leach & Mansouri, 2004), and various manoeuvres associated with offshore detention and processing, including contravention of the non-refoulement principle by implementing naval interdiction and return policies (Mountz & Hyndman, 2008; Crock, 2003) and more. Such ongoing misdemeanours are best understood by looking at the socio-political context in which they developed.

Robert Manne (2013) points to four key moments in the evolution of Australian forced migration policy, after its official establishment in 1975. His four-point thesis is a useful way of synthesising an otherwise convoluted social, political and legal story, without overlooking the key aspects. Such a historical lens problematizes simplistic explanations of Australia’s approach to forced migration as being an ongoing effect of Australia’s racist past, or placing blame for the current state of affairs on one or other political party or leader, though their actions indelibly contribute to the situation. It also helps to understand how asylum seekers arriving by boat have come to represent the
Lynchpin issue in any discussion about forced migration in Australia. As such, Manne’s four-point history is used as a loose guide for the following discussion, and is supplemented with an analysis of public policies and rhetoric relating to the settlement of new migrants in the country.

As touched on above, the Liberal Menzies government ratified the UN Refugee Convention in 1954. The decision came at a time when social attitudes towards racism were beginning to slowly change, and the work of dismantling the White Australia Policy began. Instituted primarily through the immigration restriction act, the White Australia Policy restricted ‘non-white’ immigration to Australia, and imposed a dictation test designed to exclude undesirable (non-European), illiterate migrants, as well as restricting the rights and freedoms of non-whites and indigenous populations living in the country. The immigration restriction act was one of the first acts of the newly formed Australian federal parliament in 1901 (Kendall, 2008), which highlights the fact that immigration, and control of immigration specifically, have long been a touchstone policy issue for consecutive Australian governments.

In the decades after WWII, as stated above, a paradigm shift began to occur, as social attitudes came to regard racial discrimination as increasingly problematic. This shift occurred in light of the atrocities of the holocaust and later in relation to the brutal apartheid policies in South Africa. Political leaders in Australia understood that racial discrimination was starting to be considered incommensurate with the needs of a globalising world, which called for economic, trade and political cooperation across and between countries and cultural groups. By the early 1970s it had become untenable internationally and in Australia to keep explicit racial clauses in government policies.

After Menzies’ Prime Ministership, consecutive governments remained committed to refugee protection and the liberalisation of immigration practices more broadly. The Whitlam government was particularly industrious, as it dismantled the final vestiges of WAP in 1973, introduced the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) in 1975, and regularly championed a multicultural
philosophy. Indeed, it was as early as 1967 that post-war immigrants in Australia began lobbying the government for their cultural, ethnic and linguistic rights to be supported by funding for service provision. Social, political and legal changes were in train, and in 1978, under the Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser, the state implemented its first Multicultural policy.

In this period, multicultural policy was premised on a broader social justice agenda designed to address the social and economic disadvantages experienced by recently arrived migrants. Multicultural policy was applied as a means of addressing cultural diversity in Australia - “a set of practical policies aimed variously at improving the absorption of migrants and harmoniously integrating a culturally diverse society around liberal democratic values” (Brahm Levey, 2007, p. 1). Policy makers adopted an access and equity approach as expounded in the Galbally Report of 1978, which acknowledged the significant settlement needs of migrants and highlighted the need to foster multiculturalism through ethnic communities and all levels of government. It called for a focus on the recognition of heritage culture, equal opportunity and adequate services for migrants, a represented a marked rhetorical and policy shift away from the strict assimilationist policies of the old guard under the likes of Calwell (Galbally 1978).

Support services for migrants were established, including language and social services, workplace and welfare assistance, and access to media in the first languages of migrants via the new Special Broadcasting Services (SBS). Many such services remain in place today. Along with these changes came superficial understandings of culture, which “led to celebrations of exotic food and folkloric traditions in schools, local government services, state-funded cultural production, and many other spheres” (Poynting and Mason, 2008, p. 235). In this context, and in light of systemic, historically entrenched racist attitudes prevalent among the majority of the population, resentment began to grow among white Australians of British (or Western European) decent who became concerned with “cultural extinction” (Hage, 2003, p. 61) or “cultural
invisibility” (Hewitt, 2005, p. 126). A growing popular backlash against multiculturalism started to emerge throughout the mid to late 1980s.

As stated above, the Fraser government was prompt in responding to the Indochinese refugee crisis in the late seventies and early 1980s and accepted Australia’s responsibility for refugees fleeing Vietnam, not least in relation to its combatant role in the Vietnamese war. Cabinet papers from the year 1979 do reveal, however, that the arrival of Vietnamese asylum seekers by boat had been perceived as potentially problematic by the Fraser government. Indeed, it was during this time that terms such as “queue jumper” and “unauthorized arrivals” were first coined and used by members of the Cabinet and immigration department officials. These terms depicted forced migrants arriving by boat as opportunistic, using the “back door” not the “front,” and less deserving of protection, despite the Refugee Convention and Protocol suggesting otherwise (Smit, 2011). Those that facilitated the passage of Vietnamese asylum seekers, meantime, were quickly depicted as criminals deserving of punishment. The Immigration (Unauthorized Arrivals) Bill 1980, introduced under Fraser was the first piece of legislation intended to criminalize the “trafficker’s enterprise” (Smit, 2011, p. 78) and deter further boat arrivals. Despite popular understandings of this period of history as the “halcyon years” of Australia’s refugee policy (Manne 2010), thanks to generous intake numbers, it was under Fraser that Australia instituted its first suite of deterrence policies. This marks the loose beginning of perceiving asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat as a criminal issue.

By the end of the 1980s, the Hawke Labour government’s liberality toward asylum seekers was tested and found to be waning. With the arrival at the end of 1989 of a boatload of Indochinese asylum seekers, Hawke moved to enact the *Migration Legislation Amendment Act 1989*, which introduced changes to the system of processing boat arrivals and allowed officers to arrest and detain anyone suspected of being an ‘illegal entrant’. Although detention was still discretionary and not mandatory, the changes made in 1989 effectively introduced a policy of ‘administrative detention’ for all people entering
Australia without a valid visa, or any others present in the country unlawfully while their immigration status was resolved.

According to Robert Manne, the first major change in the Australian state’s approach to forced migration came later in Hawke’s tenure and was carried on by the Keating government. It developed in response to the arrival of 735 mostly Cambodian refugees who had continued to arrive to Australia’s north-western shores after November, 1989, and up until January 1994. Much of the generous spirit shown to the Vietnamese “boat people” who had arrived prior to 1981 was gone, and the growing overlap between criminal justice and immigration policy, what some scholars have dubbed ‘crimmigration’ (Stumpf, 2007), became more pronounced. Instead of providing the onshore arrivals protection after a short stay in administrative detention, the state gave them prolonged detention (Manne 2013). Between November 1989 and January 1994, eighteen boats arrived carrying 735 people, one third remaining in detention until the end of this period (some of whom were in custody for over four years) (Phillips & Spinks, 2013).

Manne argues that this period marked a significant shift in Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers. He contends, “The government publicly derided the Cambodians’ refugee claims. Prime Minister Hawke labelled them “queue jumpers”; a Keating government immigration minister “forum shoppers”” (Manne 2013). Furthermore, “throughout this period access to lawyers was deliberately made difficult. Decisions on their refugee claims were long delayed” (Manne, 2013). In 1992, a decision was made to turn down the Cambodians’ pleas for asylum, a decision to which the asylum seekers’ lawyers at once appealed to the Federal court. The legal upshot of subsequent exchanges between the executive arm and the judicial arm of the state was that “amendments to the Migration Act removed the 272-day limit [on mandatory detention] and narrowed the grounds for the courts’ involvement in asylum seeker cases” (Manne 2013). So marked the beginning of indefinite mandatory detention for asylum seekers arriving to Australia without visas, which enjoyed bipartisan political support. Parliamentary records reveal from this period reveal that long-term detention was deliberately implemented to deter
future boat arrivals (Manne 2013. Notably, the whole episode with the Cambodian boat arrivals largely escaped public attention and scrutiny. Manne argues that this signalled to the political class that they could deal with asylum seekers harshly and receive little to no public repudiation or concern.

The next major shift in forced migration policy – at least, for onshore arrivals, which continued to dominate the state’s (if not the public’s) concern about the issue - came under the conservative Howard government in 2001. It is worth noting that it was under Howard’s leadership during the 1990s that a loss of explicit bipartisan support for multicultural policy occurred, and Australian public policy rhetoric began to shift. Political “retreat from multiculturalism” (Joppke, 2004; Uberoi & Modood, 2013; Banting & Kymlicka, 2013) at this time was informed by distrust in aspects of multicultural policies by social critics and political analysts who argued that it is divisive (Brahm Levey, 2008) and works against the harmonious integration of migrants (Modood, 2007). Mansouri notes that the primary, popular critique leveled at multiculturalism at this time was “that migrants have been able to access the rights associated with Australian citizenship and more broadly the Australian way of life without having to assume the social and civic responsibilities necessary to a cohesive society” (Mansouri, 2013, p. 4).

As the conservative Howard government came to abandon its rhetorical use of “multiculturalism” in the late 1990s, civic integrationist notions such as citizenship, social cohesion and integration were touted as viable alternatives for government focus. This manifested as the “New Integrationism” (Poynting & Mason, 2008) under Howard, which focussed on “an assumed core culture that saw it as binding the nation together – western civilization, English language and Anglo-Saxon cultural roots” (Schech & Rainbird, 2013; Tate 2009). Poynting and Mason argue that there was a “shift from multiculturalism as a state assisted and demanded by immigrant communities to ‘new integrationism’ as a state imposed and demanded of immigrant communities” (Poynting & Mason, 2008, p. 232). In this spirit, a socially conservative civic integrationist agenda was pursued. This culminated years later in 2006 with the introduction of a citizenship test - an internet-based multiple-choice quiz of
thirty questions testing migrants’ knowledge of Australian history, culture, values and government in order to obtain citizenship. For a number of commentators, this was a throwback to the dictation tests of the WAP, representing what some describe as an attempt to tie a national character to the prerogatives of government and “dictate the cultural choices of Australians in civil society in the name of ‘our values’” (Brahm Levey, 2007, 10). It was becoming more clear throughout the late nineties and early 2000s in Australia that despite previous political leadership and policy developments, race and racism, or at the least a certain nationalistic, culturally-defined parochialism did not cease to exist on a prescriptive level in all of Australia’s policies and social institutions, nor at the normative level of the national ethos (Pardy & Lee, 2011, p. 298).

It was during Howard’s tenure, too, that the issue of forced migration became more than just a “sleeper issue” in the Australian public sphere, but arose to take centre stage. This situation crystallised from late 1999 onwards, as a number of boats began to arrive carrying mostly Iraqi, Afghani and Iranian asylum seekers. Between 1999 and August 2001 more than 12,000 asylum seekers arrived to Australian waters, either to Christmas Island or Ashmore reef, by way of a newly established smuggling route from Iran to Indonesia by way of Malaysia. Howard was faced with a challenge. While the indefinite mandatory detention of the 700 odd Cambodians by the state was cruel, the detention of 12,000 Iraqis, Afghanis, Iranians and also many stateless Palestinians represented a new set of contingencies. Indeed, this state of affairs renewed tensions between the civic and legal guardians of human rights principles, which called for full respect of refugee law and the immediate processing of the arrivals’ asylum claims, and a conservative executive adamant to defend the sovereign state prerogative to “decide who comes to this country and the circumstances under which they come” (Howard 2001).

Howard chose to detain the arrivals in various detention centres across Australia - Villawood, Maribyrnong, Port Hedland, Curtin, Woomera, Baxter. The centres filled quickly and were soon overcrowded. The detainees were treated punitively – despite the ostensible “administrative” purposes of
mandatory immigration detention (Nethery 2011) – and desperation and depression began to bubble over. Manne (2013) notes, “[detention centres] became the sites of riots and break-outs, of occasional suicide attempts and hunger strikes, and of almost routine instances of severe depression or self-harm.” In the fashion of the Hawke and Keating governments, Howard’s immigration minister, Philip Ruddock, deftly characterised the detainees as “not merely queue jumpers seeking hotel-style treatment” but as “cunning manipulators of people’s natural sympathy, seeking to morally blackmail their way out of detention” (Manne 2013). As the detained asylum seekers became more restive and desperate in their protests during 2000-2001, “the less sympathetic public opinion appeared to become” (Manne, 2013). Indeed, there was popular consensus that such unrest was case in point for the incompatibility of these new arrivals with an “Australian way of life” and respect for the rule of law. This is despite the existence of significant mental health issues and legitimate legal grievances among the detainees, and the fact that well over 90 per cent of these new arrivals were found to be UN Convention refugees (Betts, 2009).

It was not until August of 2001, however, when the Tampa incident occurred, that the Australian public became far more engaged with the issue of forced migration policy, and asylum policy in particular. Howard’s refusal to allow the Tampa, a Norwegian fishing vessel carrying 438 Afghani asylum seekers, to enter Australian waters was met with polarised responses, the majority of which backed Howard’s nationalistic stance. Fatefully, just three weeks after the Tampa incident, the September 11 attacks on the US occurred, which set Western nations such as Australia on a course of securitisation, militarisation and heightened nationalistic and racialized rhetoric around the issue of immigration more broadly (Gauthier et al 2011). This chain of events solidified Howard’s resolve, as well as populist support for his stance on forced migration.

In this post-September 11 atmosphere, national security, border protection and the ‘war on terror’ were linked and touted as urgent national priorities, integral to any effort to assuage the Islamic terrorist threat that had proven it could
strike at the heart of America, the bastion of western civilization and liberal democracy. The asylum seekers that had been picked up by the Tampa were taken to a makeshift detention centre on the small, impoverished Pacific island state of Nauru. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) was “mobilised for a quasi-military operation to prevent any further boats of asylum seekers reaching Australian territory” (Manne 2013). For good measure, Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef were “excised” from Australia’s migration zone, and thereby excluded form the country’s Migration Act. After the Tampa incident, 13 boats left Indonesia for Australia: one (SIEVX) sank, drowning 353 people (146 of whom were children); four were pushed back to Indonesia by RAN; the rest were intercepted, and the asylum seekers on board were sent to detention on Nauru or a new detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Howard’s new policy suite was called the Pacific Solution, and it enjoyed bipartisan political support and the majority support of the Australian public.

The Pacific Solution stuck, despite inviting condemnation from the UN, causing chagrin among human rights defenders in Australia, particularly organisations working in refugee settlement, and being duly tested in the Australian courts. Illustrative of this is the High Court’s 4:3 Al-Kateb decision in 2004, which confirmed the executive’s prerogative to indefinitely detain onshore maritime arrivals. The Al-Kateb decision came to the disappointment of human rights activists, while several legal experts, including the three dissenting judges, critiqued the legality of the policy and prompted calls for a bill or rights in Australia (Prince, 2004).

Since this time, too, the bipartisanship that had characterised forced migration and asylum seeker politics since the arrival of the Vietnamese in 1976 began to slowly erode. Labour’s gumption to do what it takes to defend Australia’s sovereignty was regularly called into question by the incumbent Liberal government. Manne (2013) argues, “For the Coalition, the plight of asylum seekers came to represent not so much a tragedy or even a problem as a wonderful vote-garnering opportunity.” Labour tended to argue that Howard
was opportunistic and tapping into the latent xenophobia in the Australian populace (Crabb, 2012). The issue became politicised.

The establishment of extraterritorial immigration detention facilities on Nauru and Manus Island entrenched the shift “from legal frameworks of protection to more politicized and securitized practices of exclusion… (Using) geography to suspend access to asylum” (Hyndman & Mountz, 2008, p. 269). The deployment of such an innovative technology of governance, the ‘externalisation of asylum’ (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008), was in line with (though not identical to) actions taken by the US at Guantanamo Bay a decade earlier (Dastyari & Effeney, 2013). After the Pacific Solution was in place, almost no asylum seekers arrived to Australian shores by boat. Manne argues, “Simple common sense suggested that the government’s post-\textit{Tampa} asylum seeker policies… ‘worked’ as a deterrent” (Manne 2013). This policy remained in place until 2008, when the newly elected Labor PM, Kevin Rudd, dismantled it to a significant extent, signalling a complete loss of bipartisanship on the issue. Rudd not only dismantled the Pacific Solution but also attempted to humanise forced migration rhetoric and asylum seeker policy in the country. He reaffirmed the federal government’s commitment to multiculturalism, and appealed refugee and human rights advocates.

In terms of its asylum policy, the Rudd government disbanded many of Howard’s apparently effective deterrence measures – not least the threat of naval interception and offshore processing on Nauru. By the beginning of 2008 Nauru was empty. The first boat of the new wave of asylum seekers arrived on 29 September 2008. By the end of 2009, some 678 boat arrivals applied for asylum. According to parliamentary library figures, this rose to 4597 in 2009-10, then to 5166 in 2010-11, up to 7373 in 2011-12 and reached a peak of 18 365 in 2012-13 (Philips, 2015). Along the way, many were dying. Between 2000-2007, under John Howard, some 363 asylum seekers died en route to Australia, while 350 went missing at sea and their status is unknown, though they are presumed dead. The death toll of asylum seekers at sea between 2008 and 2013 was 877, though a figure of more than 1000 dead stuck in the public mind. Tellingly, “no official records are kept by any
government agency as to how many people trying to reach our shores to seek asylum are dying en route” (Davies & Reily, 2013), and both sides of party politics, and their attendant media mouthpieces, tended to beef up the number of deaths witnessed under the opposition’s lead. Either way, the Australian public was outraged at the images of people drowning off Christmas Island, yet paralysed. Many lamented the dismantling of the Pacific Solution, which they perceived as having opened the proverbial floodgates to people smugglers peddling “human misery” and causing the deaths at sea. Still others lamented the harsh and the dehumanising rhetoric about asylum seeker arrivals and warned that extraterritorial detention was not a viable and humane solution.

By 2009, the issue of asylum seekers had again become the central political issue in Australia, exhibiting a propensity for partisanship and politicking. As a WikiLeaks State Department cable revealed, in November 2009 a key Liberal Party strategist told the American ambassador that the more boats arrived, the happier his party would be (Manne 2013). Shortly afterwards, Tony Abbott, a staunchly conservative politician with an unabashedly combative style, won the leadership of the Liberal Party. He immediately made it clear that at the next election he would promise to “stop the boats” by reinstating all the Howard government’s asylum seeker policies, including temporary protection visas, naval escort of boats back to Indonesia and the re-opening of Nauru. Rudd’s perceived inability to protect Australia’s borders, prevent death at sea, as well as a range of internal issues in the Labour party, contributed to his final demise; he was removed from the party leadership in June, 2010.

So entered a pragmatic political operator in Labor’s new leader, Julia Gillard. Pursuing a tweaked political logic for Labor – a tougher policy aimed at stopping the deaths at sea, and subverting the people smugglers’ business model – Gillard attempted a number of new manoeuvres, including the establishment of an offshore processing centre on East Timor, and once negotiations for that failed, a refugee swap with Malaysia. The “Malaysia Solution” was promptly thrown out by the high court (High Court of Australia, 2011). Accepting defeat, and with ever more onshore maritime arrivals and
vocal political opposition from the LNP, which enjoyed majority public support at the time, Gillard succumbed to her most immediate domestic political considerations and in August 2012 moved to reinstate Howard’s Pacific Solution, reopening the offshore processing camps on Nauru and Manus Island.

Forced migrants entering Australian territory by boat were now given “no advantage” in terms of processing. In fact, they were deliberately given the lowest priority, having their claims for asylum suspended, thereby sending a signal to people considering making the perilous journey that they would gain nothing from the risk. Despite this, and as may be expected under the circumstances, the new decision did not act as an effective deterrence mechanism straight away. Most likely because many thousands of protractedly displaced were stranded in Indonesia, and had committed to the asylum journey to Australia no matter the odds (Hoffman 2012). Among them were thousands of Iraqis and Afghans who were stuck in Indonesia with little hope for resettlement - between 2001 and 2010, Australia accepted only 56 refugees from Indonesia per year.

In the immediate wake of Gillard’s announcement, thousands more asylum seekers arrived to Australian waters. Of these, roughly one in 18 were sent to Nauru or Manus. Several hundred Sri Lankan asylum seekers were repatriated. “The remainder of these asylum seekers are either in detention centres on Christmas Island or the Australian mainland” (Manne, 2013) or due to overcrowding of detention centres were released into the community on bridging visas, with a diminutive government stipend and no study or work rights. Gillard announced that no IMAs who arrived after August 13, 2012, would have their asylum claims processed by Australia. They could either repatriate to their origin country, or wait in detention on Nauru or Manus, before being resettled in a third country. This is despite their apparently legal claims for asylum under international law.

In September 2013, conservative LNP leader Tony Abbott came to power on the back of disarray in the Australian Labor Party (Rudd deposed Gillard from
the party leadership in a counter-coup in 2013), as well as his three word slogan; “stop the boats.” Within days of taking office, the Abbott government renamed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, suggesting a rhetorical shift back to the rubric of Howard’s Prime ministership; from viewing arrivals to Australia as potential citizens, to viewing arrivals as unwanted intruders that must be repelled at the border as a matter of national priority. Abbott and his immigration minister Scott Morrison immediately made key changes, which mirrored the urgent rhetoric and militaristic approach characteristic of the Howard years.

Since 2013, Australia has deployed its navy to turn back boats with migrants, including asylum seekers, before they could get close to its shores. This defence force operation is known as “Operation Sovereign Borders,” and its objectives are portrayed as dire issues of national security. As such, all “operational matters,” which include the arrival of unauthorized boats to Australia, are deliberately withheld from the public, leaving Australian citizens unaware of actions being taken in their name. This is a significant deliberalization and securitization effort. Furthermore, Abbott has remained unaffected by calls, particularly from the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to address the issue of indefinite detention and the incarceration of children. The government labelled an AHRC national inquiry into children in immigration detention, and its subsequent “Forgotten Children” report, as a partisan political effort to undermine the Liberal Government. This is despite the report highlighting major human rights abuses against children under Australian state care, including incidences of assault and sexual assault under Labor’s watch, as well as having its findings corroborated in a report released in August 2015 by an Australian Senate committee (Commonwealth of Australia 2015).

Another significant securitization and deliberalization measure that has been introduced under the Abbott LNP government is the Border Force Act, which took effect July 1, 2015 and makes it a crime punishable by a two-year prison sentence for employees at detention camps to publicly discuss the conditions
found there (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). More than 40 detention centre staff, including medical personnel and social workers, wrote a public letter to senior government officials in July 2015 saying they would rather risk arrest than stay quiet. “If we witness child abuse in Australia we are legally obliged to report it to child protection authorities,” they wrote. “If we witness child abuse in detention centres, we can go to prison for attempting to advocate for them effectively” (Sanggaran et al, 2015). The tenor of legislation such as the Border Force Act suggests that Australia’s border protection policies resonate well within the borders, socially and politically, and may be seen to significantly curtail the rights not just of asylum seekers, but Australian citizens, too. The democratic legitimacy and legality of such a move is moot.

It is something of a twist of fate that urgent foreign policy and security concerns emanating from the Middle East and intimately related to Islam – the jihadist group, IS - came to the fore of public attention at the same time Abbott became Prime Minister. Such a contingency is similar to September 11, which boosted John Howard’s political ratings amongst the electorate, as the polity became aroused and looked to their political representatives to stem the perceived rising tide of Islamist threat, as per the “war of terror” narrative. The rise of IS favoured Tony Abbott’s hard line, nationalistic ideological and policy approach, and sparked renewed national security fears and counter-terrorist measures. Such a political atmosphere bodes well for the executive’s ability to institute restrictive immigration and other legal measures, as well as the public’s ability to palate such incursions upon not just human rights principles, but their personal rights and liberties as citizens.

Although counter-terrorism and national security measures dominate current political discussion, as per the post-September 11 environment, there are a variety of distinctions. In the political mix this time, for example, is the issue of what was quickly dubbed “home-grown terrorism” – the radicalisation of a very small minority of Australian Muslims who were and are travelling overseas to join jihadi forces, or, worse, planning attacks on Australian soil. Rhetoric about urgent national security threats, terrorism and counter terrorism
were once again plausibly linked to issues of migration, Islam, Muslims, Muslim migrants and Muslim boat people in the public imagination. Indeed, such political issues have become the axiom upon which opaque policy was and continues to be developed largely behind closed doors.

Interestingly, as Abbott moved to put in place counter-terrorist measures, including a number of legally questionable federal police operations against Australian Muslims suspected of terrorism or of having terrorist intentions, he simultaneously dropped his election promise to repeal section 18C of the racial discrimination act. Section 18C makes it unlawful “to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people” on the basis of “race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the other person or of some or all of the people in the group” (RDA, 1975). Abbott had previously, continuously argued that Section 18C was an attack on freedom of speech, which is a fundamental liberal freedom. This assertion and his decision to repeal Section 18C, however, was widely unpopular amongst the Australian public, particularly migrant communities. Shrewdly, Abbott found in the new context of insecurity and counter-terrorism measures, an opportunity for capitulation. He backed away from his election promise to repeal section 18C, framing the decision as a counter-terrorism strategy. As Waleed Aly noted at the time,

“To draw a specific connection between 18C and counter-terrorism requires a long bow. But the mere attempt to do so has intriguing philosophical consequences. By presenting divisive politics as a security concern, the government is implicitly accepting the social dimensions of terrorism. It suggests that terrorism gathers around feelings of alienation and social exclusion…This, as it happens, accords with the best research we have on the psychology of radicalisation and effective counter-terrorism policing. It accords far less well, however, with the way that governments tend to talk about terrorism” (Aly 2014).

With such an admission implicit in the move to keep Section 18C, Aly further questions Abbott’s previous decisions to abandon the state’s Countering Violent Extremism program in June 2014. In particular, its grants for
community programs aimed at “Building Community Resilience.” The Liberal government has not reinstated any such measures. Rather, the counter-terrorism strategy pays lip service to “engaging” the Muslim community, but expounds no substantive plan moving forward (CTS, 2015). Furthermore, new citizenship laws before parliament propose to strip dual nationals of their Australian citizenship, should the relevant minister, not the Australia courts, have due cause for concern over said individual. The bill is not yet passed and its draft form has been publicly condemned as unconstitutional and a path to law enforcement based in no small part on racial and religious profiling (Chalmers, 2015). Nonetheless, Abbot appears steadfast, and enjoys majority public support on the issue of forced migration, defence and foreign policy.

To recap, Australia is at the vanguard of the trend in the global north, whereby wealthy states respond to the growing phenomenon of south to north migration with the “imposition of increasingly restrictive immigration laws and regulations… intensified border controls, carriers’ sanctions, deterrent policies and return migration policies” (de Haas 2007, 824). A loss of bipartisanship that occurred since 2001 is lamentable as the politics of forced migration in Australia displays a propensity for politicking, rather than genuine democratic and legal process and presentation and appreciation of facts, such as the driving factors of displacement and irregular migration (Dunn 2007; de Haas, 2011). Since the Tampa incident, the question of asylum seekers arriving by boat, and Australia’s obligations to the global population of human displaced, including the country’s intake quotas, have been fiercely contested and politically explosive. Indeed, as Manne suggests, in 2001 the issue helped John Howard win an election. In 2010 it helped loosen Kevin Rudd’s grip on the Australian prime ministership. In 2013 Tony Abbott’s “Stop the boats” policy proposals contributed to the defeat of the Gillard government. Border protection and sovereign prerogatives trump humanitarian refugee protection in the privileged Australian political context.

2.7 Contentious Political Discourse - Socio-political Implications for Forced Migrants Settling in Australia
In recent years Australia has witnessed tightening immigration rules alongside a growing body of formal anti-discrimination legislation at both state and federal levels. Regulation of migration, and especially symbolic attempts to display control over forced migration, has grown up in dialogue with a discourse of securitization and deliberation. Such a discourse has tended to posit and naturalise ideas in the political realm that select people belong in Australia, a status of membership most commonly legitimised in terms of citizenship. The dialogical counter fact of this discourse is that select people do not belong. Indeed, Muslim immigrants to Australia, most particularly IMA arrivals, are increasingly constructed and perceived as “national outsiders” and “enemies to the nation” (Abu el-Haj, 2007, p. 30; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005).

Since 2001, contentious debate about asylum seekers in Australia has “polarised large sections of the Australian community and paralysed politicians of most persuasions from engaging in a constructive policy dialogue” (Gauthier et al. 2011, 5). Furthermore, Australia’s actual intake of forced migrants, when viewed relative to the alarmist controversy surrounding the politics of forced migration, as well as considering the country’s global status as the vanguard of anomalous and expensive approaches to border restriction and detention may be seen as even more diminutive. This domestic situation in Australia highlights that attempts to create adequate global response mechanisms for forced migration tend to fall victim to the expediencies of national politics, which predominantly manifests in a rubric of “crimmigration” (Stumpf, 2007) and opaque national security policies.

The populist discourse surrounding asylum seekers and refugees in 2015 should be seen, to an extent, as an iteration of what Fear has dubbed “dog-whistle politics” characteristic of the Howard era (Fear 2007). As noted above, the Howard government came to frame the debate surrounding asylum seekers and refugees with stock phrases such as “We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances under which they come” (Howard 2001). It is to be conceded, however, that the politics of belonging promulgated by Howard was less an innovation unique to his leadership, and more a conservative political effort to tap into a strain of identity politics and planned
immigration programs that characterized most of Australia’s history, and was exemplified by the WAP. Hage has dubbed this ongoing trend in the Australian psyche ‘paranoid nationalism’ (Hage, 2003). In pursuing such an approach, a culture of politics re-emerged in Australia that saw appeals to xenophobia and, in this historical moment, post-September eleven insecurity, sanctioned as legitimate grounds upon which immigration and a large part of Australia’s foreign policy – such as the war in Iraq - were contextualized and justified.

Integral to the overall discussion of national cultural selectivity in the politics of responding to asylum seekers is empirically demonstrated undercurrents of xenophobia that prevail in the Australian community. Most pertinent to the last decade has been manifestations of “Islamaphobia” that have circulated throughout society. Indeed, the 2001 terrorist attacks, the Bali bombings in 2005 and now the violent and heavily publicised rise of IS in Iraq and Syria, are the latest in a string flashpoints that bring Muslims into the limelight of global geopolitics, and reify the position of Muslims as the other in relation to secular, Western liberal democracies (Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman, 2005; Dunn et al 2007).

In tandem with increasing xenophobia across Australia (Scanlon Foundation 2015), the past decade has witnessed a resurgence of strident, culturally framed nationalism within Australia. This nationalist sentiment has found its way into the popular lexicon with statements like “Fuck Off We’re Full”, “Speak English or Piss off!!”, “We Grew Here You Flew Here,” “Australia: Love it or leave it”, ‘Ban the Burqa’ and “Stop Immigration”. More recently, it has culminated in public protests by a group called “Reclaim Australia,” a mostly Christian-based anti-immigration and anti-Islam group (Irfan, 2015), as well as “White Pride,” a neo-Nazi civic group. These groups have met their own resistance with anti-racism protests, “Islamaphobia Watch Australia,” and other public measures aimed at showing solidarity and support for Australia’s Muslim community in particular.
The extent of Islamaphobia, or anti-Muslim sentiment, has been well recorded in Australia (Dunn et al 2007; Akbarzadeh & Roose, 2011; Rane, Nathie, & Isakhan, 2011). This sentiment has been shown to be reproduced through a process of racialization that utilizes political tools such as stereotypes of Islam, perceptions of threat and inferiority, as well as fantasies that the other (in this case Muslims) do not belong or are absent” (Dunn et al, 2007, p. 564). Fekete and Sivanandan describe this ongoing phenomenon as “xeno-racism” (Fekete & Sivanandan, 2009, p. 19). This term describes a form of racism “toward otherness, toward the different outsider who is not seen to belong or could be a potential threat” (Dawes et al, 2010). Morphing from its conceptually exhausted antecedents, “old” or “colour-based racism”, xeno-racism in contemporary Australia may be seen as “a complex pattern of dislike based on a range of qualifications around difference” (Mansouri et al 2009, p. 12).

Research into Islamaphobia tends to solidify the link between threat perception and constructions of otherness, and highlights a clear racialization process in relation to Muslims. Such research also tends to highlight that “negative media treatment is strongly linked to antipathic government dispositions” (Dunn et al 2007). More specific to this study, is the finding that “Islamic asylum seekers have been constructed as less (than) human, incompatible and threatening, and considered deserving of inhumane treatment. Government and media discourses regarding asylum seekers have been a key means of racialization.” (Dunn et al, 2007, p. 582). Such negativity sponsors a more widespread Islamaphobia and (mis)informs xenophobic attitudes in the public domain and ever more restrictive asylum seeker policies. Ultimately, it has been shown that “the racialization of Islam corrupts belonging and citizenship for Muslims in Australia”, a purportedly tolerant and multicultural nation (Dunn et al 2007, p. 564).

There has been a clear racialization of political discourse surrounding asylum seekers and refugees in Australia over the last decade – not necessarily on the basis of different racial or ethnic origins but on the basis of different culture, traditions and religion, as well as legal status. Like any form of racialization and “other” boundary construction, this expresses a politics of belonging and
should be seen in the Australian case as a discourse of indigeneity (particularly ironic given the brutal history of colonization in Australia). It is used by purportedly democratic majorities to justify exclusionary measures to limit migration, prevent citizenship rights, call for repatriation and in the most extreme extrapolation of this logic, ethnic cleansing. Such a discourse formulates national political communities in their most racialized form and their least democratic form; it imagines the nation as *ethnos*, not *demos*. Such a politics does not reflect a realistic anxiety of a hegemonic ethnic majority, as Australia is not going to be swamped by immigrants and their cultures or religions (de Haas 2008). Furthermore, it imperils the potential for the liberal democratic political system to remain reflexive, and for the structures of state to reflect the needs of the society to which it is theoretically and legally supposed to be subject.

Nationalistic sentiments are exacerbated further by the ongoing state of war and conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as media attention to the spread of images from IS, such as public beheadings. These images are readily available on the Internet and are morally repugnant to the vast majority of Australians, Christians and Muslims alike. Indeed, Muslim leaders in Australia publicly denounce IS and other extremist, jihadist movements. The Australian National Imams Council released a statement after Australian teenager Abdullah Elmir left Australia to join IS: “We condemn in the strongest possible terms any threat against Australians … It is utterly deplorable for violent extremists to use Islam as a cover for their crimes and atrocities” (AAP, 2014). At the same time, Muslim leaders in Australia point out the potential appeal of such extremist movements among alienated and disaffected Muslim youth particularly. Such arguments tend to be sociological, rather than made for political, systemic ends. They point out that debates playing out in the public sphere reflect and shape the relationships and tensions that exist in society at large. In this way, political rhetoric about transnational geo-politics, in concert with harsh asylum seeker policies, and new laws and policies that give state bodies unprecedented powers over citizens’ liberties and privacy in Australia, have coalesced to significantly contribute to a hostile political and social climate for Muslims in the country. This is particularly the case for
young Muslims who are trying to understand their place in a country to which they belong to officially, but in which they feel misrepresented, misunderstood, and from which they feel substantively and socio-psychologically disconnected (Hassan, 2010).

This point about alienation and social disconnection among Australian Muslims goes back to the point made by Waleed Aly about the psychology of radicalisation; “terrorism gathers around feelings of alienation and social exclusion; that [counter-terrorism] intelligence flows best from communities that feel valued and included rather than surveilled, suspected and interrogated” (Aly, 2015). Wilner and Dubuono corroborate this assertion, saying, “the most commonly cited precursor of radicalization and homegrown terrorism is the lack of socio-political integration particular Western Muslim communities have with their broader society, and, relatedly, their experiences of discrimination, victimization, and xenophobia” (Wilner & Dubuoloz, 2010, p. 38). As David Wright-Neville and Debra Smith suggest about the process of radicalization of alienated individuals who are recruited by extremist causes: “alienation is replaced by identification with the group, powerlessness is replaced by potency derived from being involved in group operations, while humiliation is mitigated by participation in actions” (Wright-Neville & Smith, 2009, p. 95). Some scholars go further, contending the greatest threat to Western democracies is not terrorism from the outside, but the sustained marginalization of citizens and residents from within their political system (King & Taylor, 2011; Gest, 2010).

The sociality of forced migrants, and particularly Muslim refugees and asylum seekers in societies like Australia is deeply affected by such normative and political discussions, in an instrumental and discursive sense. Within an often top-heavy, political melodrama the refugee is often represented as a dehumanised other; yet, sociological scholarship is premised on and repeatedly demonstrates refugees’ “capacity for agency at all odds” (Soguk 1999, p. 5, Cited in Turton 2003, p. 12). Refugees and asylum seekers exist as ordinary people, purposive actors whose very flight and arrival to Australia is representative of contextualised and active decision-making and behaviour.
Having arrived in Australia, refugees, as purposive actors, may not integrate without regard for the sociality of locals (Kateb, 2006).

The key finding of a recent government commissioned report on the settlement outcomes of newly arrived refugees to Australia was that “government perspectives differ from Humanitarian entrants’ perspectives on settlement” (DIAC, 2011, p. 1). DIABP (previously DIAC), like other agencies, defines successful outcomes in terms of systemic outcomes - social participation, economic wellbeing, level of independence, and personal wellbeing. Contrary to this, newly arrived refugees define settlement in terms of life outcomes, such as personal happiness and community connectedness (DIAC, 2011). Four key items that were found to best predict the level of comfort felt by humanitarian entrants were: “How happy a person feels about him/herself; Confidence about making choices about living in Australia; Being treated well by the local community since coming to Australia; Ease of finding a place to live in Australia” (DIAC 2011, p. 1) The report also found that refugees are significantly less happy than family and skilled migrants to Australia, and less likely to report they felt they were treated well by their local community. The most common reasons cited by refugees for such unhappiness were: discriminatory statements or rude treatment; that they were not involved with the local community; or, the local community was not aware of them (DIAC, 2011).

Such empirical findings suggest that “positive refugee settlement” may only be understood and services developed in light of the qualitative experiences of refugees themselves. The key finding of DIAC’s report is representative of a gulf that has open up between the way the government in Australia conceptualizes not just the phenomenon of forced migration, but the settlement needs of forced migrants and the way forced migrants’ themselves conceptualize their situation. Indeed, every discourse requires a minimum level of internal coherence; “otherwise, it loses its ability to make the world meaningful and therefore knowable” (Turton, 2003). Refugee settlement may be seen as an area of socio-political life in which the potential for coherent dialogue between state and subject (structure and agent) is imperiled, and the
establishment of shared meanings is imperative if democratic ideals are to be upheld.

Overall, it may be seen that under current political arrangements in Australia, the human rights of people are more often respected if these people have formal state citizenships. In light of the macrostructural and discursive changes associated with globalization, the articulation of a politics of belonging that has conventionally legitimated the institution of citizenship (nationalism) has grown more constrained in space and time by current cultural arrangements. That is, various political arrangements legitimated through constructions and discourses of belonging have been significantly affected by the rise of a global consciousness that has in turn acted to sensitize value conflicts. The perceptions and actions of forced migrants in particular socio-political locales, may be seen to embody the most important anthropocentric challenge to political systems in the contemporary age (especially those of the Global North who are the key stakeholders in a self-legitimating global political order) to articulate ethical arrangements that seek to reconcile notions of value and human agency in a culturally plural world.

2.9 Iraqi Refugees in Australia

This section briefly outlines the key immigration patterns and demographic features of the Iraqi population in Australia. First it looks at the Iraqi population in general, before looking at the Iraqi refugee population more specifically. It is worth noting that this profile of the Iraq-born population was based upon statistics available in 2012-13, when the research instruments were being designed and the fieldwork was being conducted.

The Iraq-born population in Australia includes Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Jews, Turks, and Turkmens. Religions followed include Islam, Christianity – predominantly Chaldean and Assyrian – and Judaism amongst others. The Iraqi population in Australia has been rising at a steady rate since the Gulf War of 1991-2. At the time of the 1991 census there were
5,186 Iraq-born in Australia. By the 1996 census this population had risen to 14,005. By the 2001 census, this population had again dramatically grown to 24,832, representing a 77.3% increase, a much higher growth rate than the Australian population as a whole (see Figures 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 below). The 2006 census recorded 32,520 Iraq-born people in Australia, which then increased by 48.1 per cent to 48,170 Iraq-born in 2011. That is, between 1991 and 2001 the Iraq-born population increased almost five-fold, and between 2001 and 2011, this population more than doubled. Among the total Iraq-born in Australia at the 2011 Census, 25.5 per cent arrived between 2001 and 2006 and 26.9 per cent arrived between 2007 and 2011 (DIAC, 2013a).

![Iraq-Born Population Growth in Australia](image)

*Figure 2.1. Iraq-Born Population Growth in Australia, 1976-2011 (Source: ABS Census, 1976-2011)*
Figure 2.2. Population Growth in Australia, 1976-2011 (Source: ABS Census, 1976-2011)

Figure 2.3. Iraq-Born As a Percentage of Australian Population, 1976-2011 (Source: ABS Census, 1976-2011)

In terms of Iraqi arrivals via the humanitarian program since 2003, DIABP has not made available clear statistics specific to Iraq-born humanitarian arrivals for the years 2003-06. However, it may tenuously be assumed, in light of global Iraqi refugee, asylum seeker and resettlement numbers, and Iraq-born immigrant numbers in Australia more broadly, that the growing number of
humanitarian arrivals continued to rise at a steady rate, and then gained slightly more momentum from 2006 onwards. Overall, a total of 18,066 Iraqi refugee visas were granted between 2006 and 2013 (see table 4.1 for a breakdown of Iraqi arrivals via the humanitarian pathway since 2006). That is, the vast majority of Iraqi arrivals to Australia were refugees; between 2006 and 2011, 74 per cent of Iraqi arrivals came via the humanitarian pathway, and it may be assumed that a bulk of the remaining arrivals came via the family migration pathway as the result of applications made by Iraqi refugees already in the community as permanent residents or citizens.

In terms of the breakdown within the humanitarian stream, significantly more offshore humanitarian visas than onshore humanitarian visas have been granted to Iraqis since 2003. From the beginning of 2006 to the end of 2013, DIABP granted offshore visas to 15,881 Iraqis. In that same period, 2,185 onshore visas were granted - 1076 non-IMA onshore visas were granted, and 1109 IMA visas were granted (it is to be noted that DIABP’s data for onshore arrivals and visas granted for the years 2006-08 are “incomplete”). That is, almost eight times more displaced Iraqis have arrived to Australia as refugees for resettlement, than those arriving by boat or plane to claim protection upon arrival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>OFFSHORE VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>ONSHORE VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>TOTAL HUMANITARIAN VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>OFFSHORE AS % OF TOTAL</th>
<th>ONSHORE AS % OF TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>1443</td>
<td>154*</td>
<td>1597</td>
<td>90.36%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>2202</td>
<td>204*</td>
<td>2406</td>
<td>91.52%</td>
<td>8.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3038</td>
<td>94.34%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>83.90%</td>
<td>16.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>2147</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>2515</td>
<td>85.37%</td>
<td>14.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>1476</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>4064</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>4535</td>
<td>89.61%</td>
<td>10.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15881</td>
<td>2185</td>
<td>18066</td>
<td>87.91%</td>
<td>12.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistics INCOMPLETE – no data available for IMA arrivals over these two years

Table 4.1. Iraqi Humanitarian Arrivals to Australia 2006-13

In terms of Australia’s contribution to Iraqi resettlement, it has given particular attention to the Iraqi crisis. Of people lodging offshore protection visa
applications for Australia, Iraqis have occupied one of the top two places by country of birth for the past five years. In line with this, Iraqis have also remained in the top two countries of origin for people granted offshore protection visas in the five years between 2007-12 (DIAC, 2013). In 2012, 22 per cent of offshore visas were granted to Iraqis (See Table 2.x). However, on average, 82 per cent of Iraqis’ applications were refused in the same period. In 2007-2008, in the wake of the darkest and most violent period in Iraq’s modern history, a time when Australian troops were still engaged in the country, the grant rate was 10 per cent. The Australian Government did make a concerted effort in 2008-2009, granting a one-off allocation of 500 refugee places for the Iraqis who worked as interpreters and translators for the Australian Defence Forces during their deployment in Iraq. These are positive contributions made by the government, yet hardly cause a ripple amongst the millions who are displaced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number Offshore Visa Applications Lodged</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Applications Lodged</th>
<th>Number Granted</th>
<th>Grant Rate - Percentage of Applications</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Visas Granted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>21 698</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>2193</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>12 527</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>7558</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>1685</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>8433</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>1443</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>7682</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>1472</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4: Iraqi Offshore Visa Applications and Visas granted. Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2012).

Iraqis have consistently been in the top five countries of origin for onshore entrants into Australia over the past five years, most arriving as Irregular Maritime Arrivals. However, the numbers are relatively small, with status determination commencing for 566 people in 2010-11 and 368 people in 2011-12. The protection visa grant rate was 95 per cent in 2010-2011 and 96.1 per
cent in 2011-2012 (DIAC 2013). Those Iraqis who arrived to Australia as Irregular Maritime Arrivals, have spent upwards of three months in mandatory detention, some remaining in detention indefinitely. Iraqis who were issued with temporary protection visas reported an ongoing protraction of their displacement (Leach and Mansouri 2004). Since August 2012 a cohort of more than one thousand Iraqis have been released into the community on bridging visas, given basic welfare provision, no working rights and no indication of when their applications will be processed. Many others are doubtless in detention on Nauru and Manus Island, but statistics about these populations are not available.

As mentioned above, having arrived in Australia, Iraqis cannot integrate without regard for the sociality of locals (Kateb, 2006). A 2011 DIAC report shows that newly arrived Iraqi refugees in Australia have relatively poor settlement outcomes compared to other humanitarian groups. Iraqi humanitarian entrants resident in Australia and on a path to citizenship were found to have the highest levels of unemployment and report feelings of social isolation and a loss of agency. Indeed, Iraqis, along with Iranians and Afghans, were found to have the poorest mental health. Iraqis were also reported as having the poorest physical health and were more likely to indicate that they are ‘not happy’. While humanitarian entrants from Iraq are more likely (compared with all other countries of birth) to have university qualifications before arriving in Australia, Iraqis are the least likely to be employed. They tend, instead, to be part of households that are most likely to receive Centrelink payments (DIAC 2011, p. 28). These findings are supported by other research into Iraqi refugees resident in Australia, which indicate adverse psychological well-being and high levels of anxiety and depression (Hoffman 2012; Slewa-Younan et al, 2012).

A report published by Wise and Ali (2008) from the Centre for Social Inclusion about grassroots strategies to improve relations between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians highlighted that issues existed particularly among people of Iraqi background that manifest in their lack of ‘integration’ with others people in Australia, especially people of Anglo-Celtic background.
Such findings specific to Iraq-born individuals, combined with research into Islamaphobia and alienation in Australia, and the negative findings on the settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants more broadly (DIAC, 2011) indicate the need for more research into newly arrived Iraqi refugees, who are on a path to Australian citizenship, to better understand their outlook on the experience of settlement in Australia. Such research may explore whether their socio-political attitudes and behaviors suggest that they are engaged with the socio-political, democratic community in Australia, or whether they are disaffected or alienated in their current context. In light of the more general findings of the settlement outcomes for refugees, it may be seen that research into this group must be qualitative in nature and afford individuals total agency, so as to elicit a meaningful understanding of their experiences and perceptions of the politico-social fabric in Australia, and their place within the national community.

### 2.11 Conclusion and Research Questions

The issue of forced migration is far from esoteric and theoretical, it has very real, grassroots causes and implications that are tightly woven into the increasingly hyper connected globe upon which humans must attempt to orchestrate their social lives. Issues that crop up in any attempt to manage forced migration tend to expose the ineffectiveness of current global institutional arrangements. This highlights the precariousness of social and political institutions in general, and a need for constant reformation. Reformation, in liberal democracies such as Australia, may only occur on the back of public debate and genuine attempts to engage with perspectives from across the political spectrum of democratic political community.

Given the impasse that has been reached between party politics in Australia and the highest courts of the land on particular legal and ethical aspects of forced migration, it is clear that a shift in the choice/equity balance between citizens and forced migrants is essential for the future. None of the conditions known to play a role in the politicization of international migration - unequal
distribution of symbolic and material resources, market failures, labor market segmentation, and the expansion of social networks, global transportation and communication—is likely to end soon (de Haas, 2007). Nor is the concomitant racialization of forced migrants in nationally framed political discourse (Dunn et al 2007). Indeed, the asylum seeker as the ‘deviant other’ is well documented – Marfleet (2006) argues that the state needs to be called into account for responses to asylum and refugee issues.

Some scholars argue that the greatest threat within Western democracies is not terrorism, as has been argued by nation states of the global north particularly after September 11 and the rise of IS and “homegrown terrorism”, but the sustained marginalization of citizens from their liberal democratic political system. In this way, violent extremism is understood as a manifestation of the same outlook that informs individuals who choose to withdraw from the public sphere, rather than attack it. In other words, both the alienated and the destructive defect from the political system and hinder its capacity to facilitate change. The former reacts by living outside of it, while the latter chooses to disrupt it. Neither of these political behaviors reproduces the democratic political system or contributes to the process of responsive claims making which is championed as the guiding principle and foundational strength of manifestations of Western political systems (Benhabib 2004).

With this in mind, this research proposes to explore the tensions between the rights claims of asylum seekers and refugees and the prerogatives of national democratic political systems (and the communities they purport to represent) as they play out in the lives of Iraqi refugees settling into and navigating the socio-political system in Australia. It explores the extent to which newly arrived refugees are substantively included into the socio-political fabric in Australia during their first years of settlement, an important time in their acculturation and a critical, formative period as their understandings about their role within their new society, and their attendant socio-political behaviors and habits are beginning to take shape.
There is little detailed qualitative research that has focuses specifically on the settlement experiences of humanitarian entrants from Iraq, despite their having displayed relatively poor “settlement outcomes” (DIAC, 2011). Furthermore, there is limited qualitative data regarding settlement processes and outcomes of Iraqi refugees who arrived since the Iraq War of 2003. The needs of a multicultural society such as Australia may only be gauged through intersubjective recognition, dialogue and understanding (Lobo et al 2011; Lobo and Mansouri 2011). More empirical research is required into refugees’ qualitative experience of socio-political membership in Australia. In so doing, their capacity to engage democratically, and participate in political, economic, social and cultural life in Australia; their ability to act substantively as members in their new democratic community such that their interests are represented, as per democratically grounded theories of cosmopolitanism.

After completing a multi-disciplinary Literature Review covering both empirical and theoretical aspects of the research topic, the following research questions were proposed, and will be addressed throughout the remainder of this thesis:

1. What are the socio-political behaviours and attitudes of individuals in this sample group of Iraqis refugees?

2. Are individuals within the sample group of Iraqi refugees engaged with the socio-political system in Australia, or are they alienated from or disaffected by the very system that is meant to be their primary means of inclusion?

3. In light of the results of the first two research questions, to what extent does the Australian political system, as perceived by the sample group, foster conditions that progress a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism?
Chapter Three

Theoretical Approach

This study seeks to elucidate data about the socio-political attitudes and behaviors of a sample group of Iraqi refugees who have been granted protection in Australia since the Iraq War began in 2003. The data is then analysed in order to explore whether one of the macro-level assumptions of democratically grounded cosmopolitan theory – that members of the demos are engaged with, and therefore potentially represented in democratic institutions and processes - are founded in their context. To do so, a critical theoretical approach is employed in order to bridge the normative issues raised by the study’s research questions and its empirical findings.

This chapter outlines the theoretical approach that underpins this study. It begins with a brief explanation of the broad aims of critical theory as a mode of social scientific enquiry, particularly the work of Jürgen Habermas. It goes on to briefly review and then outline the theoretical approach taken to conceptualising central notions in the research questions, so that they may be operationalized in the research design and meaningfully reflected upon in the final discussion. Firstly, taking cues from Habermas’s theory of
communicative action, it outlines a broad theoretical understanding of the liberal democratic political system in Australia. Building upon this, it goes on to explain the particular understanding of democratically grounded cosmopolitanism - as theorised by scholars like Habermas and Seyla Benhabib, and much of which was touched on in the Literature Review chapter - which it seeks to explore. Finally, it outlines the approach taken to conceptualising humans’ socio-political attitudes and behaviours, drawing from the theories of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, whose worksforeground the notion of individual agency in social scientific enquiry. It also draws upon the work of sociologists concerned with alienation in modern societies, and the work of political scientists such as Robert Putnam, who have formulated empirical measures for civic participation/non-participation that are, to an extent, apposite to this study.

3.1 Critical Theory

Despite the value of macro-level theories developed by sociologists, political scientists and philosophers, their abstract nature tends to preclude or obscure a behavioral link to the micro level. That is, they do not make explicit the behavioral assumptions underpinning the macro-level correlations they assume or describe, and therefore lack explanatory and critical power (de Haas, 2011). Cosmopolitanism is a case in point for this critique, often called out for being too abstract and out of touch with, or having only anecdotal grounding in empirical studies and therefore lacking any practical aspect. This study seeks to bridge this gap between the normative and empirical by employing a critical theoretical approach, which generally attempts to fulfil two requirements: “to maintain the normativity of philosophical conceptions”, and at the same time “examine the contexts in which they have developed and may best be promoted practically” (Bohman, 2005). That is, a critical theoretical approach is employed in this study in order to use the project’s empirical findings - data about the socio-political attitudes and behaviours of Iraqi refugees settling in Australia – to explore the normative issues raised by the research questions – whether the theorised mechanisms of democratically-grounded
cosmopolitanism, which presume engagement with democratic processes and discourse, are founded for this sample group.

Specifically, this study takes a cue from the work of Jürgen Habermas, a second-generation scholar of the Frankfurt School (the home of critical theory). Habermas is concerned with facilitating cooperation between philosophy and the social sciences through the rational reconstruction of practical knowledge, which is to inform a normative conception of “real democracy” (Habermas 1985, 1987; Bohman 2005). In other words, to develop an empirically informed conception of democracy that may be harnessed as an alternative to political practices that engender anti-democratic trends.6

Such an approach is primarily concerned with democratic processes and institutions - the sum of civic and political processes, bodies and forums for dialogue and discourse in which members of the demos can represent their interests and cooperate with one another - as the locus where ideals of freedom and equality are to be realised. For Habermas, democratic mechanisms are ideally to operate inclusively and exhibit deliberative capacity. Failure to facilitate such inclusive deliberation, according to Habermas, potentially gives rise to anti-democratic trends, in which the interests of all those affected by law and policy are not taken into account. Rather, policy and law are formulated in a more top-down process, according to the rationale of political elites and power holders. As such, for Habermas, the way in which members of the demos relate to and reason with one another in democratic forums – which may be seen as the micro-level, empirical aspect of normative democracy - is particularly relevant for study and critique in socio-political

6 Indeed, much of the first-generation Frankfurt School/critical theoretical research was borne of concern with antidemocratic trends, including increasingly tighter connections between states and the market in advanced capitalist societies, the emergence of the fascist state and the authoritarian personality. The sociologist and philosopher Max Horkheimer, for example, came to view antidemocratic trends as gradually undermining the realization of an expressive whole, with the consequence that the autonomous liberal individual is a “hopeless fiction,” (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 211) that the subjective conditions for exercising freedom and achieving solidarity were being eroded by an increasingly totalizing social reification (Bohman, 2015).
contexts that exhibit anti-democratic tendencies. Such an approach may be harnessed as a means of exploring the limits of democracy as a sustainable system of political governance.

Indeed, Habermas's basic philosophical endeavour from his work, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972) to *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1985), to *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (1996) and beyond, has been to develop a more unassuming, empirical account of philosophical claims to universality and rationality (and universal rationality). These notions are central to his understanding of democratic political systems, yet are often criticised as sociologically uninformed or overly simplistic (Bourdieu, 1992; Popeau, 2001). As such, Habermas’s theoretical approach (or philosophical endeavour) is apposite to this research, which seeks to elucidate an empirical, first person account of the social and political lives of Iraqi refugees in Australia. It analyses these accounts in order to reflect upon whether the assumptions of democratically grounded cosmopolitanism– a political philosophy with universality at its core, yet is regularly criticized as ungrounded, privileging unfounded rationalism over substantive empiricism - are founded in their context.

### 3.2 Discourse and the Liberal Democratic Political System in Australia

In conceptualising the liberal democratic political system in contemporary Australia, this thesis follows Habermas in accepting that universal human rights and popular sovereignty are currently two indispensable foundations of the democratic constitutional state (Habermas 1998; Benhabib 2004). Such a starting point recognises that there is a “fatal tension” (Cole 2000, p. 2) inherent in Australia’s political system; tension between the expansive and inclusionary principles of moral and political universalism (as anchored in human rights principles) and the particularistic and exclusionary principles of popular sovereignty and democratic closure (as anchored in national/citizenship rights principles). For the case study at hand, and as was highlighted in the Literature Review, this tension is perhaps most clearly
manifest in the disjuncture between the successive findings of the judicial arm of the Australian state, which uphold the human rights claims of forced migrants, and the preferred nationalistic policies and politics of the executive arm, particularly regarding onshore arrivals, which tend to circumvent international legal obligations to subject, non-citizens seeking humanitarian protection.

This research is based on the view that the manifestations and trajectories of this foundational “tension” – that is, whether the constitutional state is oriented more toward universal than particularistic approaches to policy and law, or vice versa, in various areas of governance – need not be understood as “fatal,” or destructive of one another. Instead, universal and particular approaches are to be understood in the contemporary moment as mutually constitutive, part and parcel of ever-present dialectic processes. Such dialectic processes are understood in terms of Habermasian discourse ethics, which situates the moral point of view within the communication framework of a community of selves and calls for individuals to participate in discourse where all are aware of others’ perspectives and interpretations (Habermas 1990).

For Habermas, democracy is procedural and discursive, grounded in an intersubjective structure of communication that ideally is to exhibit reflective and reciprocal communication, or discourse, in which members of the public deliberate, test claims to validity and thereby facilitate practical cooperation with one another. Discourse emerges in contentious political situations in which new solutions must be sought in order to ensure and maintain social cooperation and ongoing democratic reproduction (Pensky, 2009). Such contentious situations are usually socio-political manifestations of anti-democratic trends or emerging deficits in democratic legitimacy, where individuals or groups feel disenfranchised or unrepresented by the political system and decisions to which they are subject. In these problematic situations, democratic institutions are, ideally, to operate discursively, such that they have the proper reflexive structure and mechanisms to accommodate and represent a plurality of viewpoints. This political discourse and dialogue, then, can provide a consensual rationality that should inform and thereby
legitimise policy formulation and enforcement. That is, democratic institutions and processes are, theoretically, to provide a forum for citizens to deliberate as free and equal persons, for whom the legitimacy of the decision is related to the achievement of a “rational consensus.” A “consensus is rational to the extent that it is based on a norm that could under ideal conditions be justified to all those who are affected by a decision” (Bohman, 2005; Habermas, 1996; Gutman & Thompson, 2004).

Habermas notes that this is a dynamic ideal, and that the realization of democratic norms must account for and be a function of ever-changing, varied social facts, including pluralism (Habermas, 1996, p. 474). Democratic discourses are to be recognised as mixed and complex, including various asymmetries of knowledge, information, interests and power (and their attendant socio-cultural stratifications - such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and more). Democratic deliberation is thus not a special case of moral judgment with all of its idealizing assumptions and black and white logic – what Weber referred to as the struggle between “gods and demons” (Turner, 2002, p. 92) - but a complex discursive network with various viewpoints and modes of argumentation, bargaining, bartering and compromise (Habermas, 1996, p. 286). What regulates the use of varied viewpoints and communicative styles, argues Habermas, is the public use of practical reason, which is ideally to be “self-referential and recursive in examining the conditions of its own employment” (Bohman, 2005).

Given the complex social circumstances of pluralistic modern societies such as Australia, democratic deliberation requires the “medium of law,” such that the results of deliberation are expressed through law (Shelly, 2007, p. 68). The more specific principle of democracy states “only those laws may claim legitimacy that can meet with the agreement of all citizens in a discursive lawmaking procedure that is itself legally constituted” (Habermas, 1996, p. 110). This is, in effect, a reiteration of one of the founding principles of democracy, that all those who stand under the law also be its authors. Indeed, the word democracy comes from the ancient Greek meaning “rule by the people” - *demos* meaning “the people” and *kratia* meaning “power or rule.”
Habermas argues that such a principle aims primarily to “establish a discursive procedure of legitimate law making” (Bohman, 2005), and is a necessary standard of agreement for a democratic polity. He posits that democratic legitimacy is achieved in an uncorrupted public sphere, where active citizens of the demos participate in discourse, and cooperate with one another to influence political decisions and contribute to legitimate law making.

This principle of democratic legitimacy is idealistic and demanding, in that it requires the agreement of all citizens. Habermas admits that in the case of cultural values, for example, we need not expect such agreement, and he introduces compromise as a possible discursive outcome of democratic procedures. That is, he warns that it would weaken the democratic principle if cooperation were to be substituted for consensus and the outcome of the procedure. Bohman notes, “a law then would be legitimate only if it could be agreed to in a fair and open deliberative process in which all citizens may freely continue to participate whatever the outcome” (Bohman, 1996, p. 89). In this way, what is crucial is not the agreement as such, but how citizens reason together within a common public sphere. The democratic principle in this form expresses an ideal of citizenship and highlights the importance of the qualitative experience of socio-political membership for individuals within a polity - rather than a standard of liberal legitimacy. In other words, such a democratic principle emphasizes the importance of the qualitative experience of citizenship, such that members of the national polity feel included and involved in public discourse and reasoning, and perceive themselves as capable and willing to cooperate with fellow members of the demos in an ongoing fashion.

In Mubarak’s case, he talked about racism and Islamaphobic interactions encountered by his daughter at school, saying, ‘this thing, [Islamaphobia], I can feel it… I felt discrimination against Muslims. Now my younger daughter refuses to wear any hijab. She’s saying ‘the kids will hate me’… And I think a lot about that’ (Author interview with Mubarak). One racist encounter faced by his daughter at school imperilled the respondent’s perceived ability to remain true to his cultural and religious identity. Though resilient in the face of
what he interpreted as a clear case of anti-Muslim sentiment, and adapting his behaviours so as to protect his young daughter from an apparent social stigma, this incident caused him great stress and engendered resentment of the mainstream society, and ultimately a sense of alienation from it.

In light of this inclusive and dynamic conception of liberal democratic political systems, which is contingent on the ideal, active and substantive role of members within such systems, it is worth noting here that this thesis rejects more populist, liberal egalitarian discourses of political systems. Such egalitarian discourses tend to render the social - the lives, rights, choices and interests of members of the demos - a passive recipient of political largesse qua ‘fairness,’ instead of the social having a life and potentiality of its own, as it has repeatedly been demonstrated to do in empirical, sociological studies (Robinson & Tormey, 2009). Instead, it is premised on the logic that “Statist sanctions are the least accessible, the least ‘democratic’ so to speak, of all the forms of sanctioning activity. They create the possibility of arbitrary power, despotism and tyranny; the danger of so-called outlaw states is built into these kind of sanctions… Concentrated formal sanctions are clearly the least compatible with diversity, and the least likely to entail listening to others; their very concentration disempowers the other” (Robinson & Tormey 2009, p. 1401).

That is, this study approaches legitimate democracy as a bottom-up political process in which active members of a demos are to cooperate with one another to represent their interests, not a top-down formulation of the “political class” that eschews and/or corrupts effective public deliberation and potentially gives rise to anti-democratic or authoritarian tendencies.

In summary, this research employs a theoretical understanding of the liberal democratic political system in Australia in which the participation, cooperation and sanctioning activity of diverse socially situated agents, members of the demos, is a necessary element of any legitimate democratic process. It advocates an assumption of diffuse sanctions in democratic systems, whereby an account from a range of social actors must be sought, especially in contexts
of political contention or anti-democratic, non-transparent policy and law-making, in order to both discuss and understand socio-political discontents. It contends that such discussion facilitates the potential for cooperation and the innovation of new political spaces and arrangements, and thereby allows democratic polities to remain apace with dynamic, diverse social facts and interests. Like Habermas, it contends that no normative conception of democracy or law can be developed independently of an adequate model of contemporary society. Without this empirical and descriptive component, democratic norms become merely empty ideals and not the reconstruction of the rationality inherent in actual attitudes and practices of members of the demos (Bohman, 2005).

3.3 Democratically Grounded Cosmopolitanism

This thesis is based on a conception of the liberal democratic political system that is contingent on the effective participation of political members. It argues that such a system offers potential for being both inclusive and expansive (or, conversely, in line with the foundational tension discussed above, potential to be exclusive and restrictive). Indeed, an extrapolation of its fundamental logic along an inclusive trajectory, into various fields of study, sees Habermas placed under the broad category of “cosmopolitan” thinkers. In particular, his work on democracy is drawn upon to develop theories of democratically grounded cosmopolitanism, which views the democratic nation state as something that can be harnessed in the process of “cosmopolitanisation” (Benhabib, 2004, 2007; Held, 1995). Although covered in the Literature Review, it is worth reiterating here that cosmopolitanism expresses the idea that all humans beings – regardless of national, religious, cultural, or political affiliation – should be seen as members of the same community, and that this community should be cultivated. In crude terms, human rights principles and their expression in international law and domestic legislatures are an institutional manifestation of cosmopolitan ideals.

Scholars interested in cosmopolitan theories tend to take impetus from unprecedented empirical conditions surrounding contemporary states,
governments and national communities now forcibly enmeshed in international and regional networks. They recognize that individuals are no longer seen as simply citizens of their respective states but as persons, bearing universal human rights and enjoying multiple citizenships and having a sense of belonging to a multitude of communities (Benhabib, 2007; Held, 1995). Indeed, some scholars view cosmopolitanism as an empirical imperative; “with the globalization of national societies, cosmopolitanism has now become something of an urgent reality” (Arendt, 1968, p. 82) and “an actual social condition of many today” (Mazlish, 2005, p. 106; Cited in Ossewaarde 2007, p. 384). Whether it is imperative or not, in the face of such globalized conditions, the inclusive potential of normative, democratically grounded cosmopolitanism renders it a highly attractive notion for philosophers and scholars concerned with reconciling new socio-political phenomena and conditions with existing structures of governance and power.7

While the empirical realities of international migration and human mobility, increasing socio-political diversity and the proliferation of mechanisms of global justice, such as the integration of human rights principles into domestic legislatures, mark a move along a cosmopolitan trajectory, it far from engenders a wholesale adoption of the normative principles of cosmopolitanism into the socio-political frameworks of nation states such as Australia. For, even as we see an ever more globally integrated economic system, issues of substantive social and political integration repeatedly tend to lag behind (Kendall et. al. 2009). In other words, there is an ongoing ‘lack of fit between the material interconnectedness brought about by global capitalism and the degree of formation of global solidarities’ (Cheah, 2006, p. 491). Indeed, cosmopolitanism is often criticized for its affinity with neo-liberal globalization, unchecked capitalism, elitism and its tendency for utopian

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7 There are a number of critiques of this claim for a cosmopolitan “imperative.” Such critiques tend to take a more realpolitik approach to global socio-political arrangements, rather than an ethical approach, and view current conditions as grounds for a retreating internationalism (and its counterpart, a resurging cultural nationalism), which may manifest in various ways such as the erection of tougher border protection mechanisms and an overall protectionist approach to the globalized social world and international political engagements. Notably, protectionist arguments tend to crop up more commonly around issues of immigration - that is they are critical of the movement of human beings across national borders - rather than the global flow of goods and capital or environmental deterioration.
abstraction that ignores anthropological and sociological literatures and in so doing whitewashes complexity, privilege and inequality. In light of this disjuncture, the connection between normative cosmopolitanism and its empirically demonstrable counterpart deserves exploration.

From a sociological perspective, the macrostructural and discursive changes associated with globalization, such as the propagation of universal rights principles and governance mechanisms, and their attendant cultural plurality in countries like Australia, constrains and reconfigures the articulation of a politics of belonging that have conventionally legitimated the institution of citizenship (typified by nationalist discourse) (Yuval Davis, 2011a; 2011b). In the context of this study, international human rights (as has been noted, in crude terms, may be seen as a top-down manifestation of cosmopolitan ideals) are increasingly invoked in refugee and asylum debates and territorially delimited nations such as Australia are challenged not only in their claims to control their borders but also in their prerogative to define the boundaries of the national community. In other words, forced migrants seek certain entitlements based on international legal precepts that only national governments and their local partners are in a position to render. This leads to a situation that challenges and transforms entrenched political narratives of the nation state system, as members of the demos must deliberate and cooperate to define, exactly, who can and who cannot claim rights to the entitlements of membership within the liberal democratic political system.

As was touched on in the Literature Review chapter, such changes are not only making the previous characterizations of national communities obsolete, but also provide a framework for rethinking the nation state, both in terms of its internal legitimacy (that is, the extent to which it represents its various citizens as bearers of civic or cultural/racial/religious attributes or interests) and its capacity to cosmopolitanize in the context of global affairs (the extent to which a national community opens its proverbial doors to individuals seeking protections under international legal precepts). By way of an example that is relevant to this study, the popular characterization of “White Australia” and its attendant suite of culturally and racially exclusive immigration policies that
had prevailed since 1901, became obsolete in the context of labor shortages and the need for mass, non-European international migrations post-World War Two. It was further significantly constrained by the popular, counter-cultural, civil rights movements of the sixties and seventies. These economic and socio-political circumstances eventually ushered in a new rhetoric of “multicultural Australia” in the early 1980s, which represents a significant reconfiguration of the articulation of a politics of belonging in the country and is testament to the potential dynamism of liberal democratic political systems.

Critical thinkers, such as Habermas and others, articulate this phenomenon not as the “death” but the erosion of the nation state’s traditional prerogatives (Archibugi & Held, 1995; Castles, 2001, 2003; Held, 1995; Benhabib, 2004, 2007). This may include phenomena such as lost autonomy in cases where the state can no longer effectively protect its citizens from processes beyond its borders, emerging deficits in democratic legitimation in cases where there is a clash between state policy and international agreements, and restrictions on the capacity for intervention in cases where the state cannot intervene in global markets (Bohman, 2015). Such conditions, which see the state not only integrated into, but also increasingly dependent on the external environment, in turn change the established institutional pathways of state-citizen relationships and the nature, not just of state sovereignty but of political membership, too. The previously strong and proscriptive relationships between citizens and the state, although still significant, are now increasingly impacted by regulatory mechanisms outside the aegis of the state.

Research surrounding the concepts of cosmopolitan democracy (Held, 1995; Archibugi & Held, 1995) and constitutional patriotism and the public sphere (Habermas, 2001; Calhoun, 2002), which may be seen as variations of democratically grounded theories of cosmopolitanism, can assist in navigating these new socio-political conditions and dilemmas, and contribute to the innovation of existing structural arrangements to meet unprecedented social needs. Such scholarship utilizes social scientific conceptions of democracy, the state, the public sphere, and law to ground cosmopolitan ideals within the context of existing social structures. Democratically grounded cosmopolitan
theories tend to be predicated neither on the relegation of the state to a secondary actor in societal affairs - the state remains the only widely accepted “coercive negotiator [that] presides over a community” (Brennan 2001, p. 82 in Kendall et. al. 2009) - nor on the complete reinvention of democratic political processes and institutional frameworks. Such an approach is anti-utopian and sociologically and politically realistic or, more accurately, empirically explorable, because it engages with key suppositions that are contingent to a sociologically grounded cosmopolitan project.

Indeed, there is a range of democratic cosmopolitan thinkers, scholars who present relatively optimistic accounts of the role of the liberal democratic political system in the context of the cosmopolitan project (Benhabib 2007; Buzan and Held 1998; Archibugi & Held, 1995). Whether such scholars think of the nation state as something that needs to be developed and eventually superseded, or as something that provides direct grounding for cosmopolitan sentiments, sociologists tend to view it as enabling and constraining at the same time. That is not to depict the nation state as ‘good’ or ‘necessary.’ Instead, such an approach opts to account for the state given that it has been, and continues to be, the dominant institutional form and organizational principle of social and political life at least since the seventeenth century (Kendal et.al. 2009). Two democratic cosmopolitan theorists, Buzan and Held (1998, p. 394), contend that “…the contemporary world is one in which we need to re-invent the idea of democracy — not surrender it. The project of cosmopolitan democracy — involving the deepening of democracy within nation-states and extending it across political borders — is neither optimistic nor pessimistic with respect to these developments. It is a position of advocacy.” Seyla Benhabib, among others, engages with this democratically grounded perspective, which sees the democratic nation state as something that can be, as noted above, harnessed by active members of the polity in the process of cosmopolitanization (Benhabib 2007, 2007; Held 1995; Habermas 2001b).

Within this field of scholars, Habermas takes a somewhat measured view of the role of the modern democratic state under conditions of globalization,
emphasizing its capacity to create constitutionally binding communities (Habermas 2001). In line with his theory of communicative action, he argues that the nation state and democracy have a capacity to stabilize each other and have “jointly produced the striking innovation of a civic solidarity that provides the cement of national societies” (Habermas, 2001, p. 16). He credits the constitutional state with the legal capacity to tame “political power on the basis of the recognition of the sovereignty of the collective subjects of international law” (Habermas, 2006, p. 24). That is, Habermas’s model for a democratically grounded cosmopolitan trajectory relies on established mechanisms of interaction between the state and its citizenry and the ability of the state to promulgate a sense of participatory political culture, secured by laws and workable systems of representative democratic government (Kendal et. al 2009). This reliance on a legally framed capacity for deliberative politics and the assumption of the primacy of universally rational attitudes and actions of social actors makes Habermas one of the staunchest defenders of the centrality of rationalist discourse among contemporary social commentators (Bohman, 2015).

A number of scholars critique Habermas’ reliance on rationalist discourse, which they say is a central yet abstracted assumption that downplays issues of cultural plurality and socially constructed power differentials. For scholars such as Calhoun and Fine, Habermas provides only a weak, sociologically unsubstantiated account of participation that ignores key issues such as belonging and solidarity (Calhoun, 2007; Fine, 2003). Habermas counter argues that a strong account of solidarity and belonging is unnecessary, and emphasises the role of citizenship (institutionalized, national political membership) as a fundamental legal document that is about solidarity and belonging, and therefore addresses the issue (Habermas, 2006, p. 100). Habermas’s vision is of a constitutionally bound citizenry: “the strength of the democratic constitutional state lies precisely in its ability to close the holes of social integration through the political participation of its citizens” (Habermas, 2001, p. 76).
Craig Calhoun’s critique of Habermas’s approach goes to the heart of the latter’s emphasis on discursively legitimated constitutional arrangements and a resulting constitutional patriotism. In Calhoun’s view, Habermas relies too heavily on the assumption that the public’s sense of belonging and solidarity will result from the strength of an adherence to a legal framework. He argues that such a suggestion is insufficient because it places too much emphasis on a bare inclusion into the legal-political framework afforded by the constitution: “Citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law” (Calhoun, 2002, p. 153).Basically, it is Calhoun’s charge that Habermas, and thinkers like him, such as Seyla Benhabib, display a lack of attention to the complexities of culture, such as entrenched socio-economic variance and power differentials across a range of popularised cultural, religious and class stratifications. Instead they tend to gloss over the pertinence of inter-group or inter-cultural distinctions, inequity and contestations and provide only a weak account of solidarity. Neither explores this issue of solidarity closely enough to satiate the culturally-oriented critics. Instead, thinkers like Habermas insist that it is the role of modern law, in concert with the availability of “actionable individual rights” (Flynn, 2003, p. 431) to ensure social integration in complex societies. And yet, sociological scholarship often runs counter to such assertions, and certainly the tenets of critical race theory are in large part antithetical to such claims. The need for a “thick” account of social solidarity is, according to Calhoun and others, especially relevant for a nation-state preoccupied with internal legitimacy crises rather than its place in a broader global community, desirous of maintaining outcome-oriented communicative processes (Kuraswa, 2004; 2009). The theme of solidarity and concern with the question of the strength of social ties have constantly entered and re-entered social and political science vocabularies under different names, recently as social capital (Putnam 2000).

To recap, the underlining ambition of Habermas’s project of “constitutional cosmopolitanism” is to harmonize cosmopolitan institutions while simultaneously re-affirming national identity (Fine 2003, p. 462; Calhoun 2007; Kendall et al 2009). Political philosopher Seyla Benhabib furthers this theoretical approach, if in a slightly different way (Benhabib, 2004, 2007).
Indeed, Benhabib has gone further in extrapolating Habermas’s theoretical orientation (both scholars draw heavily upon the work of Immanuel Kant and notions of universal justice deriving from the categorical imperative) - refining the normative issues at play, responding to the “cultural critics” and even, in some cases, grounding her arguments in anecdotal case studies (Benhabib 2007 and 2010)\(^8\). Her theorisation, which was touched on in the Literature Review and is outlined below, is logically sound at an abstract level, and her approach is particularly relevant to the study of forced migrants. Before discussing her precise approach, which this study seeks to explore, it is worth revisiting the issue of forced migration in the contemporary moment, especially as it is playing out in Australia.

As was noted above, forced migrants seek certain entitlements based on international legal precepts that only national governments and their local partners are in a position to render. This leads to a situation that challenges and transforms entrenched political narratives of the nation state system. That is, contingent to the articulation of legitimate democratic closure – defining who is and who is not welcome in the national community - in the contemporary age, is the special claim that forced migrants make on citizens’

“…Concern. They require us to consider issues of membership, citizenship and democratic liberalism. They require us to ask what our responsibilities are to the stranger in distress, the stranger amongst us, on our doorstep, who is seeking a better life for himself or herself and for his or her children, and the stranger halfway around the world who is brought into our homes by satellite TV channels. They require us, in other words, to consider who we are – what is or should be our moral community and, ultimately, what it means to be human” (Turton 2003, p. 8).

As such, the stateless and/or the asylum seeker or refugee may be seen as one of the most important anthropocentric challenges to the liberal democratic

\(^8\) Benhabib has been industrious in responding to the weaknesses of the rationalist approach (maybe a footnote about her book with Kymlicka and Jeremy Walden) and progressing Habermas’ claims (if not purposefully) (which despite his ontological orientation, often lack an empirical element)
political system to articulate legitimate democratic closure in an era of increasingly popular and legislated human rights norms. For in a culturally diverse and technologically advanced society like Australia, people are less and less able to feign ignorance about what happens to strangers. As Ossewaarde (2007, p. 376) argues, “Ignorance no longer provides an alibi: to remain silent is to plead guilty.” He goes on, “cosmopolitanism proposes to cultivate the goodwill of locals or nationals to become engaged with strangers, to cultivate a sense of global responsibility for the fate of strangers in distress, regardless of their group identity or social distinctions” (Ossewaarde, 2007, p. 376).

Further to this discussion, and as was touched on in the Literature Review, it is well-documented that particularistic approaches to the issue of forced migration (such as policies based on restrictionism, deterrence, security and detention) fail to recognize forced migration as a complex and historically entrenched social phenomenon (Crock & Ghezelbash, 2010; Hein de Haas, 2011). Therefore, they tend to fail to approach and deal with the phenomenon as a whole and in a sustainable manner, in effect allowing it to become more intractable while, in some cases, violating the legitimate human rights claims of individual forced migrants. Testimony to this is the number of forced migrants globally, in particular from war-torn countries such as Iraq, which continue to increase each year, more and more living in unprecedented social conditions of protracted displacement, such as exhibited in the distinctly urban nature of the Iraqi displacement in the Middle East region. Such phenomena are occurring even as Australian and other “elected leaders and bureaucrats increasingly [turn] to symbolic policy instruments to create an appearance of control” over the phenomenon (Massey et al., 1998, p. 288). While perhaps politically expedient for the short term, Hein de Haas argues, “‘harsh political discourse on immigration which systematically obscures the real demand for migrant labor can be a catalyst for the very xenophobia and apocalyptic representations of a massive influx of migrants to which they claim to be a politico-electoral response’” (de Haas 2007, p. 826). That is, harsh rhetoric from political elites in counties like Australia toward forced migrants should be seen as both a self-serving and self-perpetuating discourse. It is a rhetoric
that fails to appreciate the entrenched social process of migration, feigning its impermanence and thereby dehumanizing forced migrants themselves; a vicious cycle that stagnates legitimate democratic reproduction and denies political membership to many individuals legitimately seeking protection under international law.

This thesis argues that the phenomenon of forced migrants seeking protection in Australia is one such context where the current political arrangements exhibit what Seyla Benhabib refers to as a “democratic dilemma”. That is a situation where those subject to the law are not represented in the democratic processes that constitute policy and law making (a manifestation of an anti-democratic trend). The approach adopted in this thesis concurs with Benhabib’s argument that the underlying political issues in debates surrounding forced migration are concerned with defining the boundaries of belonging and determining the extent to which constructions of “us” and “them” continue to be naturalized. Benhabib views such controversies as reenacting in practice the theoretical “dilemma” of discursive scope: Universalist norms are mediated with the self-understanding of local communities.

Benhabib takes this “democratic dilemma” up in her examination of the boundaries of political community in the contemporary age by focusing on political membership (Benhabib 2004). Benhabib defines political membership as “the principles and practices for incorporating aliens and strangers, immigrants and newcomers, refugees and asylum seekers, into existing polities” (Benhabib 2004, p. 1). She argues that “we have entered an era when state sovereignty has been frayed and the institution of national citizenship has been disaggregated or unbundled into diverse elements. New modalities of membership have emerged, with the result of the political community, as defined by the nation-state system, are no longer adequate to regulate membership” (Benhabib 2004, p. 1). Concerned with the logic of democratic representation, rather than any social identity-based link between a government and its territory, Benhabib argues for a moral universalism and a cosmopolitan federalism. She has supplemented this call with the idea that,
“certainly, identification and solidarity are not unimportant, but they need to be leavened through democratic attachments and constitutional norms” (Benhabib 2004, p. 221). While this research does not extrapolate so far as to call for “cosmopolitan federalism”, it draws heavily upon Benhabib’s concern with various and emerging modalities of political membership, as it is concerned with reconciling the vision that stands behind human rights principles “with the institutional and normative necessities of democracy, as a form of government based upon public autonomy, namely that those subject to their laws also be their authors” (Benhabib 2004, p. 221).

This research acknowledges that there has never been a perfect overlap between the circle of those who stand under the law’s authority and the full members of the demos, yet, as per Habermas, advocates an understanding of democratic political communities and socio-political agents as reflexive (this is outlined further in the next section). As such, this thesis is grounded in a theoretical approach to democratic political systems that conceptualizes the political community foremost as demos, not ethnos, wherein peoplehood is regarded as a dynamic and not a static reality. It engages with Benhabib’s argument that “demos can alter its own understanding of citizenship, which in turn will alter the ethnos, understood as a shared community of fate” (Benhabib 2007, p. 69) (bearing in mind that such a claim remains highly speculative). That is, qualitative understandings and experiences of political membership, such as citizenship, necessarily change over time and in line with the social realities and needs of the shared democratic community. For the end of the unitary model of citizenship does not mean that its hold on our political imagination or its normative force in guiding our institutions have grown obsolete. It does mean, however that we must be ready to imagine forms of political agency and subjectivity that anticipate new modalities of political membership. In the era of cosmopolitan norms (instituted as human rights), new forms of political agency have emerged that challenge the distinctions between citizens and long-term residents, insiders and outsiders (Benhabib 2007), and the structural arrangements designed to govern these communities must too change if they are to maintain democratic legitimacy.
As stated above, this thesis contends that, broadly, the perceptions and actions of forced migrants in particular socio-political locales may be seen to embody one of the most important anthropocentric challenge to political systems in the contemporary age (especially those of the Global North, such as Australia, who are the key stakeholders in a self-legitimating global political order) to articulate ethical arrangements that seek to reconcile notions of value and human agency in a culturally plural world. The destiny of intensified global interconnectivity is far from manifest. The extension of political space and the redistribution of political power, seen through a lens of cosmopolitanism, are not only constraints “but also an open field of opportunities for innovative, distributive, and multi-perspectival forms of publicity and democracy” (Bohman in Turner et al, 2007, p. 732). Any attempt to realise a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism must consider social facts as problematic situations from the point of view of variously situated agents.

This democratically grounded brand of cosmopolitanism argues for individual and collective activism, or at the least, for members of a polity to engage with discursive processes in order to facilitate democratic iterations that lead to learning, innovation and the juridification of the outcomes of such normative contestations. Rather than seeing the outcomes of political universalism as undermining democratic sovereignty, we can view it as promising new political configurations and new forms of agency, inspired by the interdependence – never frictionless but ever promising – of the local, the national and the global (Benhabib 2007, p. 74). If Benhabib’s theory that “identification and solidarity are… to be leavened through democratic attachments and constitutional norms” has any empirical bearing upon the case of forced migrants in Australia, then agents from throughout the political community, such as forced migrants themselves, must a priori be involved in democratic processes. That is, agents must identify with and be engaged with the democratic political system for this dialectic process to even exist. So, in order to empirically explore the extent to which Benhabib’s brand of democratically grounded cosmopolitanism is relevant to the politics of forced migration in Australia, it is necessary to ascertain the extent to which forced migrants, who have been shown to stand at the political margins in the
country, view themselves as entitled political members and are participating in the political system, and to account for their choices.

3.4 Socio-Political Attitudes and Behaviours – Identification & Alienation, Engagement and Disengagement

As has been noted, the macro-level discussions of political philosophers such as Habermas and Benhabib, have greater explanatory and critical power if they are grounded in empirical research. Following Habermas, this study is based on the idea that no normative conception of democracy or law can be developed independently of a descriptively adequate model of contemporary society. Without an empirical and descriptive component, democratic norms become empty ideals and not the reconstruction of the rationality inherent in actual attitudes and practices of members of the demos.

This study, then, is an empirical exploration of the lives of Iraqi refugees who have been granted protection and some form of socio-political membership in Australia (if not immediately becoming citizens they do so eventually, as not only do the vast majority of humanitarian arrivals tend to become citizens, this category have the lowest rates of emigration from Australia of all migrant groups (Hugo 2011a)). The aim is to gauge whether they identify and engage with the democratic political system, no matter the content of their activism - that is, even if they are cynical of the democratic process and act to agitate the status quo within legal bounds – and thereby contribute to democratic reproduction. Alternatively, it looks at whether they do not identify with the democratic political system in Australia, but feel disaffected or alienated by the very system that is supposed to be their primary means of inclusion, and thereby remain passive, choose not to engage, or even defect from the system and act to disrupt it.

To achieve its aim, the study seeks to elucidate first-hand accounts from Iraqi individuals who have been granted humanitarian protection in or after 2003 and are residents in the Australian community. The accounts relate to their socio-political attitudes and practices, and as such will allow for an exploration
of the salient attitudes and experiences that inform their socio-political behavioural choices. In other words, the study seeks to gauge a qualitative understanding of the participants’ experiences of socio-political membership in the country, and gauge their subjective orientation to the socio-political system. Such an empirical focus leads to a nuanced picture of whether people in the sample, who are the subject of contentious discourse and vigorous debate and are subject to contentious policy and law, identify with and are engaged with the democratic political system in Australia, and therefore have “democratic attachments” which see them being involved in discursive, democratic processes. Alternatively, it looks at whether they do not identify with the polity in Australia but are instead alienated from or are disaffected by it, and are therefore not involved in democratic processes. In simplistic terms, their engagement with democratic processes lends credence to (not proof of) one of the key tenets of Benhabib’s cosmopolitan theory; that “identification and solidarity are… to be leavened through democratic attachments and constitutional norms.” While their alienation or disaffection from democratic forums and processes suggests that Benhabib’s assumption about identification and solidarity does not hold in their particular case (and, as a corollary, perhaps the logic of her claim should be reversed for this particular sample group).

The task of conceptualising micro-level, individual socio-political attitudes and behaviours so as to draw inferences about identification and engagement or disaffection and apathy, alienation and disengagement (or the nuanced in-betweens) and render their study meaningful is, in itself, complex. To do so, this section begins with a brief review of approaches formulated by political scientists, such as Robert Putnam, who tend to be concerned with civic participation. It goes on to review approaches formulated by sociologists concerned with alienation in modern, complex societies. It then moves on to argue that both these formulations in their current usage tend to be incomplete, and that merging these approaches may allow for a more substantive and nuanced understanding of individuals’ relationships with the socio-political system in Australia. To do this, it outlines an approach to conceptualising how individuals’ attitudes and behaviours are embedded within broader socio-
political structures or frameworks. It highlights the importance of individual agency and an individual’s sense of self-identity relative to such structures as determining identification with and belonging to a socio-political system. It then outlines the study’s specific approach to identification/engagement, disaffection/apathy and alienation/disengagement, which are viewed as subjective orientations toward the socio-political system in Australia - orientations that are at once constructive of and contingent to the attitudinal and behavioural patterns present in the sample - such that they may be meaningfully reflected upon and linked back to the normative issues raised by the research question: to what extent does the *Australian political system* foster conditions that progress a *democratically grounded* cosmopolitanism for the sample group?

Many considerations of political attitudes and behaviours by political scientists are primarily concerned with understanding and predicting individuals’ civic activity. In order to achieve such a feat, a range of scholarship has dichotomized behavioural outcome variation by utilising observational criteria for active participation and passive non-participation (Woshinsky, 2008; Gest, 2011). Other variants divide notions such as “empowered” (Robinson & Tormey, 2009), “mobilised” (Davies, 1970) or “engaged” (Dahlgren, 2009) individuals from “apathetic” (De Luca, 1995), “disillusioned” (MacCallum, 2010) or “disadvantaged” (Foster, 2007) counterparts. In such formulations of active participation and non-participation, all forms of activity and passivity tend to be treated as homologous. Putnam’s study of associational membership, for example, considers the causes of specific activities that qualify as activism in the scope of democratic claims making (Putnam 1993). Such a formulation as Putnam’s, which has received and continues to receive much attention, may be seen as incomplete, insofar as it is more concerned with the quantitative degree rather than the qualitative nature of civic engagement or disengagement. In other

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9 It is worth noting that this research posits that socio-political behaviours tend to issue out of attitudes, but comprehensive discussion of this distinction is outside the scope of this study.
words, it largely ignores the qualitative nature of political membership as experienced and played out by agents themselves.

Putnam’s major contribution from his study on why some people participate more than others in liberal democratic political systems has been the finding that resource possession is the most determinant variable affecting people’s behaviour. He buttresses this central determinant with sociologically informed, more qualitative determinants such as “trust”, “local connectedness” and “reciprocity” to formulate his notion of social capital. While a step in the right direction perhaps, this research posits that such a formulation is incomplete and presents only a mechanistic notion of individual agency, failing to account for subjective interpretations of sociality. Other scholarship conducted in much the same way to Putnam has explained political engagement or disengagement in a similar fashion, arguing that behaviours are determined by socio-economic status, education, civic skills, social networks and access to communication technology, such as internet usage, among others (Woshinsky 2008). While important, these factors are not wholly determining of an individual’s choice of socio-political activity. More subjective notions, such as perceptions of the polity, or expectations of social life, for example, are potentially more powerful informants of socio-political attitudes and behaviours than social background variables (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Appiah, 2005).

If political scientific accounts of participation/non-participation are circumspect, sociological accounts of alienation (or related ideas of marginality and estrangement) have been hindered by an ambiguity that prohibits the concept’s application as a meaningful term of empirical reference (Dahms, 2011; Kalekin-Fisher & Langman, 2006; Israel, 1971; Pascoe, 1990). The concept’s use in the humanities and social science literature in recent history tends to be informed by Karl Marx’s historical materialist analysis of “social alienation”, a social phenomenon central to his critique of capitalism. Marx argued that “capitalism was not only exploitative when buying labor power and extracting ‘surplus value,’ but its very structure promoted alienation.” (Langman, 2006, p. 179). Marx’s legacy informed the critical
theory of the Frankfurt school, which “reframed the understanding of alienation from the factory labour experienced by industrial workers to an inherent structural condition of bourgeois society” (Langman, 2006, p. 180). The work of critical theorists developed further the category of alienation as central to the modern condition – to illuminate precisely those contradictory and paradoxical features of culture, politics, and society which non-critical traditions implicitly presume (Dahms 2006, 2011).

In the post-world war two years, there was a surge in interest around the concept of alienation. Scholars like Etzioni (1968) saw alienation as resulting from nonresponsive social systems that do not cater to basic human needs. Another crop of scholars tried to formulate empirical measures of alienation. The most notable among these attempts is the work of Melvin Seeman, who sought to shore up historical interest in alienation - his work is imbued with ideas of Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim - with the “modern empirical effort” (Seeman, 1959, p. 783). His efforts then informed later attempts to clarify the concept and develop a theory of alienation, such as in the work of David Schwartz who tries to define the concept of political alienation (Schwarz, 1973). Melvin Seeman’s “On the Meaning of Alienation,” though, has been generally accepted as the classic clarification of the concept. Seeman’s review of the literature revealed six analytically separable usages of the word: normlessness, meaninglessness, powerlessness, social isolation, cultural estrangement and self-estrangement. Some writers have argued that alienation is an umbrella concept covering these six issues, which constitute a generally integrated network of negative attitudes toward society that tend to occur together (Geyer, 2011).

Much about society and politics has changed since Seeman’s work was published - computerization, television, internet-based media and the network effect, and the domination of current forms of neoliberal globalization – and there now exist radically different forms of alienation, reaction and emancipation. In more recent decades it has been particularly the works of Felix Geyer, Lauren Langman and Devorah Kalekin-Fishman that address the
issue of alienation in the contemporary western world. Geyer (2011, p. 389) notes,

“In much of the Western world, the average person is increasingly confronted, on a daily basis, with an often bewildering and overly complex environment, which promotes attitudes of political apathy, often politically dangerous oversimplification of complex political issues, and equally dysfunctional withdrawal from wider social involvements.”

It is in line with such observations that alienation has come to be used in empirical literature almost exclusively in a social-psychological sense, which views it as a subjective individual state or process; individuals, rather than societies (as per Marxian and earlier understandings) are now seen as alienated. Yet, the object from which the individual is alienated remains confused and so does the operational meaning of the term. That is, alienation, though still largely used as an umbrella concept, denotes a relationship between a subject and some – real or imaginary – aspect of his environment, such as different social structures, processes and institutions.

Alienation, for the purposes of this study then may be seen as “an attitude of separation or estrangement between oneself and some salient aspect of the social environment” (Schwarz, p.7) and stands in contrast to an attitude of identification. This research follows the view of David Schwarz that alienated attitudes are “likely to be adopted when individuals perceive a fundamental conflict between their basic politicized values and those exhibited in the polity, under the conditions that they perceive both themselves and the political system to be inefficacious to reduce this conflict” (Schwarz, 1973, p. 14). For example, if the individual withdraws self-identification (and possible attention) from part of the polity and finds that this is successful in reducing such threat, he is likely to remain in that orientation – in this study, such a participatory choice may be viewed as informed by an attitude of disaffection or apathy. If, however, the threat continues, perhaps because his basic values are still not realised in the polity, we may expect the individual to adopt attitudes and behaviours oriented toward influencing the political institutions from without– again, for this study, such a process may be described as
alienation with a disruptive behavioural element. It must be noted here that, in accordance with contemporary social psychological research into radicalisation, some alienated people can feel their subjective state of disconnection and inefficacy so intensely and chronically that they may choose to engage in behaviours aimed at disrupting socio-political stability and the status quo, leading to subversion, revolution or radical change (Duffy, 2009). Research into radicalisation, however, does suggest that by and large, alienated actors tend to defect from engagement with discourse and the socio-political system and hinder its capacity for democratic reproduction, and, as noted above, thereby reify their unrepresented, marginalised and alienated position within the polity (Baker-Beall et al, 2014).

In light of these discussions about political scientific understandings of engagement and sociological conceptions of alienation, it is posited that any approach to exploring how refugees encounter and navigate their experiences within the liberal democratic political system in Australia must be based on the understanding that individuals are never empty vessels. Every human makes social and political choices according to instilled paradigms of morality, felt sentiment, and principal understandings about the structure of society - origin, host and anywhere in between. In other words, it is based on the notion that political attitudes and behaviors, like all attitudes and behaviors, are connected and contextualized by surrounding factors and environments. The way individuals reflectively observe and constitute their personal realities is in part sui generis. In light of this argument, there is no such thing as abstract vulnerability, only conditioning. Human agency must be seen as is pivotal.

To garner a substantive perspective on Iraqi refugees’ attitudes and behaviours within the political system in Australia, then, a conceptual framework anchored in the notion of political agency is employed. In order to substantiate frequently simplified participation decisions, this study proposes to approach political behaviour as a choice of a particular type of political activity among a range of potential acts, and that these behaviours tend to issue out of attitudes (Leighley 1995, p. 198). As such the conventional tendency in scholarship to dichotomize political behaviour may be problematized and a more nuanced
understanding of engagement and alienation may be formulated. The vantage point proposed here is oriented toward making sense of the realities, attitudes and behaviours of individuals from the sample group, and the meanings they ascribe to such behaviours, thereby accounting for nuance inherent to subjectivity.

Such a conception of political agency is in line with the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, who seek to navigate the middle ground between structural determinism and voluntaristic subjectivism (Bourdieu 1977; 1990, Giddens 1984; 1993). Political behaviours, derived from notions of agency, are to be understood as both structuring and structured (see Figure 3.1). An individual’s choice to engage or withdraw cannot be reduced to adherence to a norm or rule, as cognitivists would have it, nor to the mechanistic execution of a pre-existing structural code (Bourdieu, 1977 & 1990; Taylor 1995). Sociological discussions now link individual selfhood, motives, and consciousness to shared self-referential narratives that together constitute ‘self-identity’ (Giddens 1991). In order to understand the relationship of identification/alienation and engagement/disengagement with identity, it is to be noted that self-identities are more than personal narrative scripts for social or political action, they are channels through which individuals attempt to find emotional gratifications in everyday routines (Giddens, 1991; Bourdieu, 1977). Alienation and engagement have social-psychological consequences, or experiential aspects. Thus, to explore the characteristics of alienated or engaged identity, we need to take into consideration the expectations, interpretations and perceptions of the embodied subjects under exploration (Langman, 2006).

As stated, integral to a comprehensive examination of what informs some individuals’ decisions to engage democratically and others to withdraw from modern civic life is an emphasis on the roles of individual perceptions, interpretations and expectations. Alongside this, is the reality that political agency is shaped by the structural context of agents. As Anthony Giddens has argued in his theory of structural relations, agents are knowledgeable and as such reflexively constitute their respective realities, but ultimately they are
always bounded by structural conditions and unintended consequences (Giddens, 1984; 1993). Notions of agency and subjectivity based on the idea that individuals reproduce their surrounding social conditions, as structures are never wholly determining, underpin this research (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Simple Diagram of Theoretical Approach of this Study

To sum up, this research is based on the idea that individuals who have a positive, subjective experience of political membership and identify with the socio-political system in Australia are likely to be engaged with democratic processes and discourse, or at least content with the status quo. That is, those who relate to and identify with (not to be confused with agreeing with) the social and cultural values, discourses, policies and laws that make up this system, as it is understood by said individual. While individuals who feel disaffected by the socio-political system in Australia - that is, who feel dissatisfied with or unrepresented by the social and cultural values, discourses, policies and laws that make up this system as it is understood by said individual – are likely to be apathetic and largely disengaged from democratic processes. And finally, an individual with a particularly negative, subjective experience of political membership and who feels alienated from the socio-political system in Australia – that is, not only feels unrepresented, but perhaps
misrepresented or exploited – is likely to disengage, and in extreme cases radicalise to disrupt the socio-political system. Neither of these two latter subjective orientations toward the socio-political system and their behavioural outcomes contributes to legitimate democratic reproduction, the innovation of new political spaces and cosmopolitanisation, as per the tenets of democratically grounded theories of cosmopolitanism. Instead, they tend to foster social and political disintegration, inhibit meaningful discourse and act to foster and, at times, legitimise anti-democratic trends.

3.5 Summary

The Habermasian critical theoretical approach used in this research employs empirical social scientific inquiry to explore new potentials for evolving democracy, such that its institutions and processes remain apace with the needs and interests of the demos. Taking a cue from a procedural and discursive conception of democracy, this study seeks to explore the extent to which Iraqi refugees, subject to contentious national policy, law and rhetoric, engage with democratic processes in Australia and are therefore represented in the political discourse and rationalisation of the resultant policies and laws to which they are subject. This study is premised on an understanding that the limits of democratic ‘closure’ are fluid, constantly contested and redefined through dialectic processes. It follows Seyla Benhabib in arguing that, “although all democracies require borders, because every democracy must define very specifically who may vote and who may not, these boundaries are fixed by positive law and are therefore subject to the force of democratic iteration” (Benhabib, 2007, p. 33). As such, this thesis is informed by the notion that in the contemporary era, the style of democratic political system such as exists in Australia is witnessing not the necessary decline or “erosion” of citizenship, but the “reconfiguration of citizenship” through democratic iterations (Benhabib, 2007, p. 69). As such, the sample group under study must theoretically be involved in discursive processes if their interests are to be represented and the laws and policies to which they are subject are to be democratically legitimate in a Habermasian sense.
This study builds on the body of literature concerned with democratic participation in Australia (Denemark & Niemi, 2012). Given that newly arrived refugees are popularly constructed as non-integrated guests of the welfare nation-state host, a social group that inevitably exists on the margins if not outside the unitary model of citizenship, they are often overlooked in the discussion of democratic participation. Such an omission of a highly politicised group, who are subject to domestic law and contentious policy, as well as the daily scrutiny of the popular media, potentially operates to further entrench and sustain their marginalization. Given that “it has been demonstrated that difficulties and challenges faced by refugees are particularly salient in the first years of settlement” (Hugo 2011), and that an important aspect of political attitudes and behavior is the timing and process by which individuals develop identifications, feelings and participatory habits (Denemark and Niemi 2012), the accounts given by the respondents in this study shed light on the salient understandings and attitudes of these new residents at this particularly formative juncture in their lives.

This thesis posits that identification and alienation are of basic importance to the functioning of political systems as a whole and to a broad range of public institutions and processes. It is vital to legitimate democratic reproduction to account for variously situated social agents’ identification with, or estrangement from, political systems and to take note of the behavioural consequences that flow from different levels of socio-political identification (Schwarz 1973). Individuals orient themselves to the political system because of their personal relationship to it. If a person feels she can influence society and politics, then she is more likely to engage with the political system, to feel that participation and government policy are beneficial and to give her diffuse support and identification to the polity; engagement. Alienation, then, is employed to refer to the estrangement or disconnection that occurs in the relation between an individual and that to which he or she is relating. It accepts that such a break in relations occurs in a variety of forms, such as the “estrangements between an individual and his or her social community, natural environment, own self, or even God,” and in this case will focus on the
participants’ relations within particular realms of democratic activity/socio-political interaction. Namely, the respondents’ interactions with Australian state and settlement services and service providers, their relations with non-Iraqi citizens, their personal involvement in political activity, and their overall socio-political interactions in civil society as political members. This will be expounded further in the following methodology chapter.
Chapter Four

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides details of the research methodology, its purpose and how it was designed and implemented. It is worth restating the study’s research questions, as they are the foundation upon which the research design was formulated:

1. What are the socio-political attitudes and behaviours of individuals in this sample group of Iraqis refugees?

2. Are individuals within the sample group engaged with the political system in Australia, or are they alienated from and disaffected by the very system that is meant to be their primary means of inclusion?

3. In light of the results of the first two research questions, to what extent does the Australian political system, as perceived by the sample group, foster conditions that progress a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism?

The basic research design formulated to execute a research project that explores these questions is shown in Figure 4.1. The theoretical framework (Step One in Figure 4.1) was elucidated in the previous chapter and will not be reiterated here. It is worth noting, however, that one of the key functions of the theoretical framework is to inform the choice of research methods and the design of the research instruments. That is, the nature and content of the research instruments were designed with the theoretical framework in mind - the general philosophical ideas behind the enquiry - such that the data elicited by these instruments is relevant to, and may be related back to the central theoretical concerns of the study (this is discussed in greater detail in section 4.2 of this chapter).
The aim of the fieldwork component of this project is to elicit data that can be used to gauge the socio-political attitudes and practices of the sample group of Iraqi refugees (research question one). Beyond this, it seeks to analyse the respondents’ various expectations, interpretations and perspectives about their lives in the Australian socio-political context, so as to explore the meanings and significance behind their attitudes and behaviours, and their subjective orientations to the socio-political system. Based on the trends and patterns of answers among the sample as a whole, it discusses the extent to which individuals in the sample group employ their practical knowledge and normative attitudes to engage with the democratic political system in Australia (research question two). It then draws inferences about the extent to which the socio-political system in Australia may be seen foster conditions that progress a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism in their case (research question three). In order to achieve this, the study adopted a mixed methods approach.

This chapter firstly gives a brief overview of mixed methods research. It goes on to outline the development of the two research instruments used - quantitative surveys and semi-structured, qualitative interviews - and how the
concepts in the research questions are operationalized in these instruments, such that they elicit meaningful data. The overall structure of the research instruments is outlined so as to inform the following analysis chapter. It goes on to outline the sampling criteria and strategies employed to recruit participants for the study, as well as noting the ethical considerations and safeguards put in place by the researcher. It then outlines the data collection methods, followed by the data analysis methods used in the study. It finally discusses the limitations of the research design and methodology before summarising the methodology chapter as a whole.

4.2 Research Methods: Mixed Methods

As stated, this study employed a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods research allows for the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and/or analysis to achieve a range of outcomes (Creswell 2003; Harwell, 2011). Specifically this research sequentially used quantitative surveys, and then semi-structured, qualitative interviews to elicit data. The results from the surveys were analysed first, then used not to inform the entire design of the interviews, but to refine the content of the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the qualitative data (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham 1989).

Two methods of data collection were employed in order to maximise the explanatory and interpretive potential of the final analysis. As Rocco et al, argue, studies that use mixed methods in order to fulfil such an aim are “explicitly seeking a synergistic benefit from integrating both the post-positivist and constructivist paradigms. The underlying assumption is that research is stronger when it mixes research paradigms, because a fuller understanding of human phenomena is gained” (Rocco et al 2003, p. 21). It is in light of such assertions that mixed methods research has gained traction in recent years (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).
In the case of this study, the two methods used complemented one another, and their use in concert overcame the weaknesses of a single design. The surveys elicited data pertaining to a larger sample size, and gave an indication of the demographics of the sample group, as well as initial data on their socio-political attitudes and behaviours. The data was then analysed, and the salient findings noted and purposefully pursued in the interviews, such that unexpected, unclear or very clear findings about the respondents’ attitudes and behaviours were revisited so as to substantiate the meanings that the participants themselves ascribe to these findings. In other words, the quantitative results assisted in explaining, interpreting and substantiating or at least lending further meaning to the findings from the qualitative interviews. This is what Greene et al (1989) classify as “developmental” utilisation of mixed methods. Creswell categorises such an approach as a “two-phase approach” (Creswell, 1994). Throughout much of this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study are described separately and in that order. At the end of this chapter, a brief description is given of how the dataset is treated as a whole towards the end of the analysis.

**4.3 Research Instruments: Quantitative Surveys and Qualitative Interviews**

The research instruments were designed to elicit data that could be analysed so as to reflect upon the research questions of this study. This section will firstly explain the design of the quantitative surveys, and the rationale and significance of its questions. It goes on to explain the design of the semi-structured qualitative interviews.

**4.3.1 Socio-Political Practices and Attitudes Surveys**

Firstly, a *Socio-Political Practices and Attitudes Survey* was designed by the researcher to elicit data that gives a broad picture of the socio-political behaviours and attitudes of the sample group. The survey was made up of 55 questions, which were either formulated by the researcher or borrowed from extant empirical studies. The questions were then translated into Arabic.
Specifically, the survey was designed to elicit data that addresses the first research question: *What are the socio-political behaviours and attitudes of individuals in this sample group of Iraqi refugees?* The data was analysed to explore the quantitative degree and nature of socio-political engagement among the sample.

In designing the survey, the researcher included questions/empirical indicators commonly used in refugee settlement research, social capital research, as well as questions that elicit data about the level of interaction between respondents (micro) and Australia’s democratic socio-political structures (macro). It is worth noting that in all cases for this study, empirical indicators were conceptualised subjectively, in that they are based on the individual reflexive insights of the participants rather than any measurable indices. Specifically, and in order to draw useful comparisons in the analysis, the survey used questions from the Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals (SONA) survey and report, which was commissioned and released by DIAC in 2010, as well as the Australian Humanitarian Settler Survey (AHSS), also commissioned by the Government (Hugo 2011a; 2011b). The broad purpose of the SONA and AHSS studies were to obtain a better understanding of how newly arrived humanitarian entrants are faring and what variables contribute to them settling successfully, and as such a number of questions raised in the surveys were relevant to this study.

In terms of the survey’s structure, the questions were set out to elicit data on six broad themes or areas of socio-political interaction. To neatly reflect this, the survey was divided into six sections (see figure 4.2 for an overview of the survey structure). It is worth outlining each of these sections and explaining the area of social-political interaction or theme that it addresses, as well as the questions, either borrowed or formulated by the researcher, that were specifically included to explore them.
The first section presents questions (1-15) that were designed to elicit demographic data about the sample, in order to establish an overall picture of the social backgrounds of respondents. This first section was modelled loosely on the demographic questions asked in the SONA survey, though such questions are commonly used in all manner of social scientific, empirical research. The researcher formulated and included the more specific questions relating to visa status and time spent in immigration detention, as they are relevant to participants in this study and their experiences of political membership.

The second set of questions (16-22) were designed to elicit data about respondents’ formal political status in Australia and their perspectives on this status. The questions in this section of the survey were included so as to ascertain the proportion of the sample that are already Australian citizens, as
well as their initial views on the process of becoming a citizen.

The third set of questions (23-26) were designed to elicit data about respondents’ interactions with Australian state services and service providers since their arrival in the country. The questions in this section were modelled on a line of questioning in the SONA survey (2010). They sought to gauge the proportion of the sample that has accessed government and/or government-funded services in Australia, and which services they were accessing at the time they completed the survey. It went on to ask the participants to assess the ease with which they have accessed services, and to rate the overall quality of government services.

The fourth set of questions (27-40) were designed to elicit data about individual socio-cultural behaviours and perspectives on social life in Australia. This section employed empirical indicators commonly used in social capital research, such as questions that elicit data about respondents’ frequency of interaction with various types of informal and formal networks, so as to gauge connectedness. It also included questions probing rates of volunteering and attitudes towards volunteering, as well as membership in formal associations/groups, which are viewed as behavioural outcomes of norms of trust and reciprocity. It included questions taken from the SONA study relating to the participants’ confidence in navigating Australian society, and questions from the AHSS about their happiness levels and whether they feel welcomed by the national community in Australia. Such empirical markers are often used in sociological studies to assess the individual’s sense of comfort in and belonging to community. This section also included questions that probed the importance that respondents place on maintaining their particular form of Iraqi culture and heritage, a line of questioning found in the Social Cohesion Survey (Mapping Social Cohesion 2014). Such questions probe issues of intercultural understanding, and the respondents’ values and attitudes towards their own cultural and social life, and how these play out in their new context.
The fifth set of questions (41-51) were designed to elicit data about individual political behaviours and perspectives on political life in Australia and transnationally. This section employed empirical indicators used in social capital research, such as membership in formal political associations and/or desire to for membership or involvement in such groups, either inside or outside Australia. The researcher designed questions about the respondents’ degree of interest in following politics, both in Australia and internationally, that elicit data comparable to the findings of the Australian Election Study (McAllister and Cameron 2014). Further questions were asked about the respondents actual behaviours in terms of how often they access information relating to politics.

The sixth set of questions (52-55) was designed to elicit data about individual perspectives on human rights in Australia, vis-à-vis forced migration and forced migrants generally, as well as in light of their particular case and experiences since arrival. The researcher formulated these questions to gauge a preliminary idea of the respondents’ understanding and opinions about human rights principles.

4.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The qualitative data analysed in this study came from semi-structured interviews. While also addressing the first research question, the interview questions were designed primarily to elicit data about the meanings that individuals ascribe to their socio-political behaviours and attitudes, in order to answer the second research question: Are individuals within the sample group of Iraqi refugees engaged with the political system in Australia, or are they alienated from and disaffected by the very system that is meant to be their primary means of inclusion? Given the sequential nature of the research design, a general structure was devised for the interview and certain questions were formulated and translated into Arabic, bearing in mind that the content might change, should the findings from the quantitative survey demand it.
Semi-structured interviews were chosen as an appropriate research instrument to elicit data on the understanding that

“through qualitative research we can explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work, and the significance of the meanings they generate… this means it has an unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts” (Mason 2002, p. 1).

This type of qualitative approach is useful as it permits a fuller expression of refugee experiences in their own terms, minimizing the potential of treating respondents as data-generating objects, and facilitating the active involvement of refugees in the construction of data about their experiences and lives.

The interview was structured around three sections. The first part of the interview included questions formulated to elicit demographic information about the interview sample. The second section included questions about the respondents’ personal narratives, their backgrounds and stories up until arrival in Australia. The third and final section included questions about the participants’ expectations, interpretations, and perceptions of their experiences and socio-political attitudes and behaviours in the Australian context. The interview aimed to get a snapshot of the meanings the respondents ascribe to their socio-political attitudes and behaviours, such that a substantive understanding of their experiences of political membership in Australia and their subjective orientations toward the Australian liberal democratic socio-political system may be inferred (at least, as it stood at the time of the interview). See Figure 4.3 for the basic interview structure, and a more in depth explanation of the themes and issues explored in the interviews.
4.4 Sampling Criteria and Recruitment

All the participants in this study were born overseas, self-identified as ‘Iraqi’ and were granted refugee protection in Australia after 2003. The study aimed to survey 100 individuals and interview 30 individuals. That is, the study did not seek to recruit a representative sample. Instead, it employed a “purposive sampling” strategy, which focused on conceptually relevant cases, rather than representativeness, as a means of drawing wider conclusions.
Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, which is used to select respondents based on the particular purpose of the study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This method enables researchers to develop broader understandings of, in the case of this study, the Iraqi refugee migratory and settlement experiences through surveys and in-depth interviews with a small number of select individuals - a more intimate knowledge of a smaller cross section of reality - rather than through ambitious data collection and generalization (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Korac, 2003; Mansouri et al, 2006).

Before recruiting participants, a clear picture of the Iraq-born population in Australia was formed. This was covered comprehensively in the Literature Review chapter, and only those points relevant to sampling and recruitment are repeated here. It is worth noting that this profile of the Iraq-born population was based upon statistics available in 2012-13, when the research instruments were being designed and the fieldwork was being conducted.

The Iraqi population in Australia has been rising at a steady rate since the Gulf War of 1991-2. At the time of the 1991 census there were 5,186 Iraq-born in Australia. The 2006 census recorded 32,520 Iraq-born people in Australia, which then increased by 48.1 per cent to 48,170 Iraq-born in 2011 (DIAC 2013a). In 2011, the distribution of the Iraq-born population by state and territory showed New South Wales had the largest population with 29,341 people (61 per cent of Australia’s Iraq-born population), followed by Victoria with 12,795 Iraq-born people (27 per cent of Australia’s Iraq-born population). It is also worth noting that according to 2011 census figures there were 24,851 males (51.6 per cent) and 23,317 females (48.4 per cent) in the broader Iraq-born community in Australia. That is, 106.6 males for every 100 females (DIAC 2013a) (whereas the Australian population as a whole has a slight female majority).

In terms of Iraqi arrivals via the humanitarian program since 2003, DIABP has not made available clear statistics specific to Iraq-born humanitarian arrivals for the years 2003-06. However, it may tenuously be assumed, in light of global Iraqi refugee, asylum seeker and resettlement numbers, and Iraqi-born
immigrant numbers in Australia more generally, that the growing number of humanitarian arrivals continued to rise at a steady rate, and then gained slightly more momentum from 2006 onwards. Overall, a total of 18,066 Iraqi refugee visas were granted between 2006 and 2013 (see table 4.1 for a breakdown of Iraqi arrivals via the humanitarian pathway since 2006). That is, the vast majority of Iraqi arrivals to Australia were refugees; between 2006 and 2011, 74 per cent of Iraqi arrivals came via the humanitarian pathway, and it may be assumed that a bulk of the remaining arrivals came via the family migration pathway as the result of applications made by Iraqi refugees already in the community as permanent residents or citizens.

In terms of the breakdown within the humanitarian stream, significantly more offshore humanitarian visas than onshore humanitarian visas have been granted to Iraqis since 2003. From the beginning of 2006 to the end of 2013, DIABP granted offshore visas to 15,881 Iraqis. In that same period, 2,185 onshore visas were granted - 1076 non-IMA onshore visas were granted, and 1109 IMA visas were granted (it is to be noted that DIABP’s data for onshore arrivals and visas granted for the years 2006-08 are “incomplete”). That is, almost eight times more displaced Iraqis have arrived to Australia as refugees for resettlement, than those arriving by boat or plane to claim protection upon arrival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>OFFSHORE VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>ONSHORE VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>TOTAL HUMANITARIAN VISA GRANTS</th>
<th>OFFSHORE AS % OF TOTAL</th>
<th>ONSHORE AS % OF TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>1443</td>
<td>154*</td>
<td>1597</td>
<td>90.36%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>2202</td>
<td>204*</td>
<td>2406</td>
<td>91.52%</td>
<td>8.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>3038</td>
<td>94.34%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>83.90%</td>
<td>16.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>2147</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>2515</td>
<td>85.37%</td>
<td>14.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
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<td>493</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>4064</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>4535</td>
<td>89.61%</td>
<td>10.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15881</td>
<td>2185</td>
<td>18066</td>
<td>87.91%</td>
<td>12.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistics INCOMPLETE – no data available for IMA arrivals over these two years

Table 4.1. Iraqi Humanitarian Arrivals to Australia 2006-13
The Iraq-born population in Victoria (12,795 individuals at 2011 census, or 0.23 per cent of the state’s entire population), like in Australia more broadly, is culturally diverse, with settlers from many ethnic and cultural backgrounds including Arabs, Kurds, Chaldeans and Assyrians and Turkmens. Although Islam is the dominant religion in Iraq, only 28 per cent of the Iraq-born people living in Victoria are Muslim, and 60 per cent are Christian. Roughly in line with this religious profile, nearly half of the Iraqi community speaks Arabic at home, the rest speaking Assyrian, Kurdish and other languages. In terms of age structure, according to statistics from the 2011 census, over half of Iraq-born Victorians are under 35 years old, and only 19 per cent are aged over fifty. This represents a young age structure in comparison to Victoria’s (and Australia’s) ageing population.

Looking at statistics from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, ABS data, local government reports, as well as conversing with colleagues working in the settlement services sector, it was ascertained that newly arrived Iraqi refugees tend to live in three main areas or hubs in Victoria. Melbourne’s Hume-Broadmeadows local government area in the city’s North/North-West has an Iraq-born population of 3,650 (6 per cent of the total population in this area) (ABS 2012b), who tend to live in suburbs such as Roxburgh Park, Broadmeadows, Campbellfield and Coolaroo. Almost 1000 Iraq-born people lived in suburbs of Greater Dandenong in Melbourne’s east, an area with among the highest overseas-born population numbers in the state. Others lived in the Greater Shepparton region in Northern Victoria, most particularly in the towns of Shepparton and Cobram.

These local areas all have disadvantaged socio-economic profiles compared to other areas of Victoria. At the 2011 census, 55.3 per cent of the population of Hume-Broadmeadows spoke a language other than English at home, and the local government was ranked as the most disadvantaged local area in Melbourne. In 2014, Hume-Broadmeadows had an unemployment rate of 26.4 per cent, the highest in the city and approximately five times higher than the
Victoria and Australia wide average of 5.2 per cent. Greater Dandenong was ranked the third most disadvantaged local area in Melbourne at the 2011 census. Greater Shepparton also has high unemployment rates - in December 2012 unemployment was 8.6 per cent, not as high as Hume-Broadmeadows, but significantly higher than the unemployment rates for Victoria and Australia, which were 5.8 and 5.5 per cent respectively at that time. Between 2006-11 more than 500 humanitarian migrants settled in the Greater Shepparton area, accounting for 32 per cent of its total migrant intake, compared with only 7 per cent for Australia overall. A report by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on the Greater Shepparton local government area (DEEWR, 2013) noted that the unemployment rate for people with no or poor English language proficiency in Greater Shepparton is four times that for people who speak English only (20.7 per cent compared with 5.2 per cent). Overall, it is clear that newly arrived Iraqi refugees tend to be resettled in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Victoria, and compounding this, tend to have the highest unemployment rates in those areas.

As stated above, all the respondents in this study were born overseas, self-identified as ‘Iraqi’ and were granted refugee protection in Australia after 2003. Despite the fact that more offshore humanitarian visas than onshore humanitarian visas have been granted to Iraqis since 2003, a roughly even distribution between individuals that arrived as refugees (via the offshore pathway) and those that arrived as asylum seekers (via the onshore pathway) was sought for this study so as to potentially compare, if deemed necessary as the analysis progressed, the various experiences and outcomes related to these distinct migratory pathways, which are viewed and/or portrayed as markedly different – one dubbed “the right way” the other erroneously dubbed “illegal” - by successive Australian governments and in the Australian mainstream media and popular debates (as was covered in the literature review).

Religious and ethnic identities were not taken into strict account when recruiting the sample. In this regard, given that the Iraqi Christian population residing in Australia is larger than the Muslim population, a majority of
Christians in the sample may be expected. However, the immigration pathway taken by Iraqis is clearly delineated along ethno-religious lines. Of those Iraqis who arrived to Australia via the offshore pathway, the vast majority were Christian Iraqis (both Assyrian and Chaldean), not Muslim (both Shia and Sunni). While the vast majority of onshore arrivals were Muslims, most particularly Shia Muslims. This is in contrast to Iraq itself, which as stated above is a majority Muslim nation. The upshot of this phenomenon, in light of this study’s concern with recruiting an even ratio of onshore and offshore arrivals, is that a relatively even distribution of Muslims and Christians might be expected.

A snowball technique was used to recruit participants. That is, participants were generally contacted and recruited through professional contacts of the researcher, particularly through caseworkers from non-governmental organizations in the settlement sector, who worked in organizations either in Melbourne (specifically in the Dandenong and Broadmeadows areas), or in the regional towns of Shepparton and Cobram. With the exception of two of the settlement workers engaged by the researcher, they were Iraq-born, Arabic-speakers who volunteered their time to act as third parties on behalf of the researcher. They approached Iraqi individuals who met the study’s criteria, explained the project’s aims with the help of a plain language statement provided to them by the researcher (discussed in the section below) and asked if they would like to participate, and/or if they would spread the word around their communities to ask if others may like to participate. It is worth noting that the settlement workers engaged by the researcher tended to deal mostly with IMA arrivals, as they are more heavily reliant upon settlement services and their needs tend to be greater and more complex than non-IMA and other arrivals in the initial months and years of settlement. Furthermore, the Iraqi community members engaged perceived IMA arrivals’ narratives as particularly relevant to the study being undertaken.

The recruitment process took some time, and the researcher remained in regular contact with the settlement workers, so as to keep abreast of developments and record the details of those individuals who were interested
in participating in the research. Then, the researcher organised to meet the interested individuals in the presence of a familiar caseworker or interpreter, usually at the offices of the settlement service providers, and further explained the aims of the project. Upon gaining their consent to be involved in the quantitative part of the study, the researcher administered the surveys to participants in the presence of the case worker/interpreter. The participants then chose if they would like to meet at a later date, unconfirmed at that stage, in order to be involved in the qualitative component.

The quantitative data collection component of the fieldwork lasted almost one year. Once it was complete, the analysis was performed (this is outlined below), and the initial findings were looked at so as to inform and refine the interview content. The interviews were then conducted in much the same manner as the surveys were administered. That is, the settlement workers and the researcher got in touch with those individuals who had earlier indicated that they would participate in the interviews, and arranged a time and appropriate place for the interviews to take place. The qualitative component took another six months to complete.

4.5 Ethical Considerations and Approval

Prior to recruiting participants and collecting data for this study, an ethics application (National Ethics Application Form) was submitted to the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DU-HREC). The ethics application outlined the purpose of the study, and illustrated how it communicated its purpose to organisational contacts to be engaged to help recruit participants, as well as to participants themselves. This was done in line with the requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee that each participant be given a plain language statement, which outlines in English and modern standard Arabic, the aims of the study and the requirements for participation. Each participant, then, after reading and agreeing to the terms upon which the research was undertaken, signed a consent form. At all times it was made clear to participants that they could withdraw their participation at any time.
Given that newly arrived refugees have been shown to suffer from mental health issues, often relating to trauma and/or issues related to flight and/or immigration detention, research studies requiring their involvement are seen as high risk by DU-HREC. It was noted that for the participants, reflecting upon their own stories and circumstances might have caused them anxiety or distress. As such, provisions were put in place so as to ensure no harm to the participants, particularly emotional or mental distress. Firstly, the researcher was introduced to participants by familiar third parties, such as settlement workers, translators/interpreters or friends, and therefore the participants felt relatively comfortable with candid conversation. Secondly, participation was fully voluntary, and prior to administering surveys or conducting interviews, a verbal conversation was had, reiterating the study’s aims and intentions (after the plain language statement was given). And finally, an immediately accessible qualified caseworker and/or mental health professional was identified prior to the interviews in the event that any mental disturbance among the participants arose. These services were not used, even though they were available in each case.

Furthermore, full confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to each of the participants. All interviews were digitally recorded and were then translated and transcribed using pseudonyms. The pseudonyms were allocated to the individuals by the researcher and these identities were maintained in a secure location. All participants were also ensured that all audio files and surveys were saved without any details or references that may identify the individual participants. This anonymity extends into the dissemination of the research findings in publications. It was made clear to the participants that they would not be compromised in any way – legal, political or social – for their participation in this study, and that they were free to withdraw at any stage without recrimination or incident. The project was granted ethical approval by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID 2012-024).
4.6 Data Collection

Data was collected in two phases over a total period of two years, from the beginning of 2012 and ending in late 2013. The first, quantitative phase involved a pilot study of five participants to ensure the efficacy of the survey. After minor adjustments to the survey, it was then administered to all participants in the quantitative sample group. In the second, qualitative phase, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 individuals that made up the qualitative sample. In both phases, a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredited interpreter was present.

**Phase One: Quantitative**

_Socio-political Practices and Attitudes Surveys_ were administered to 79 Iraqi humanitarian arrivals. The original target of 100 surveys was not met due to difficulties in recruiting willing participants and time limitations. In accordance with ethical guidelines, the surveys were administered on an individual basis by the researcher in the presence of an interpreter and/or caseworker. The surveys were administered in a range of institutional and public locations, including Deakin University Library (Burwood campus), Dandenong Public Library, the Land of Refuge Arabic Church in Broadmeadows, the office of Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre in Broadmeadows, the office of Victorian Arabic Social Services in Broadmeadows, the office of Uniting Care in Shepparton, the home of a NAATI-accredited interpreter and settlement caseworker in Cobram, and in four cases, and at the request of the participants themselves, at the homes of the participants.

As explained above, the participants were, in the first instance, given an explanation of the purpose of the research, along with the plain language statement by the third party employed in recruiting them. After giving their verbal consent, a meeting was arranged with the researcher present. The
researcher briefed the participants once more, so that the participants knew unequivocally what they were being asked to participate in. Certain points were highlighted by the researcher, such as the fully voluntary nature of their participation and the lack of direct benefits or remuneration that the project and the researcher could give participants. Each participant was then given the option to only fill in the *Socio-Political Attitudes and Practices Survey*, or to complete the survey and then also be involved in a qualitative interview at a later date. It must be noted that a vast majority of respondents did not wish to be interviewed, and the researcher had to go to lengths to meet the 30-person target for the interview sample (discussed further in the following section). Once each participant had decided to be involved, and in the presence of the researcher signed the consent form, he/she was given a copy of the survey to fill in.

Initially, a pilot study was performed with five participants, so as to verify the relevance and comprehensibility of the survey itself, and gauge the level of help needed by the respondents in answering the survey questions. It was deemed that the content of the surveys was largely fine but three formatting issues and one translation issue were flagged and resolved. Furthermore, three of the pilot respondents asked for clarification of the meaning of some of the survey questions. In light of this, the wording of these questions was tightened, with the help of a translator, so as to maximise comprehensibility. It was also understood from the pilot study that the administration of surveys required the presence of a third party and/or the researcher in order to ensure the whole survey was completed and incomplete surveys were not the norm. Overall, these first five respondents found the survey very long and one commented that most “Iraqis” would lose interest. The researcher chose not to cut the length of the survey, but found that remaining present while the survey was being filled out was a way of mitigating the length issue and ensuring the majority of surveys were completed. Often, the researcher and the interpreter provided explanations of the questions and explained how to fill in the survey. However, neither the researcher, nor the third party gave any direction, nor intimated expectations about the content of their answers. That is, participants answered the survey at their own discretion and without coaching.
**Phase Two: Qualitative**

After the quantitative surveys were administered and analysed, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews with 30 Iraqi refugees residing in Victoria. The interviews were conducted in Arabic with the help of an interpreter and were digitally recorded. All the interviews were then translated into English and transcribed by one NAATI-accredited translator (note that the same translator was used for all the interview transcripts, so as to maintain consistency across translations, ensuring a single linguistic style and lexicon). The same collection procedure was used for the qualitative data collection as for the quantitative, in that the interviews were conducted on an individual basis in the same, safe locations outlined in the section above.

Given that the interview respondents had all previously been involved in the quantitative element of the study, the researcher did not re-state the study’s purpose. Prior to the interviews, however, the researcher highlighted salient points about the process. The participants were assured anonymity and reminded of the fully voluntary nature of their participation. The researcher also encouraged the respondents to be candid and honest in their answers, and invited them not to feel shy or embarrassed about any element of their responses (of course such assurances were taken on board subjectively by the participants and certainly does not ensure the provision of frank, unguarded responses – discussed further below). Furthermore, the researcher asked if the respondents had any questions prior to the commencement of the interview, and fielded those before starting the process officially.

As may be expected, each participant engaged with the interview questions slightly differently. Some respondents spoke at length on all or a number of issues, while some spoke at length about certain topics broached by the interview questions – such as the circumstances that led to their flight, their migratory experience, and their experiences of mandatory detention – and were more succinct, or in some cases unsure of their opinions about other topics – such as their views on human rights, or questions about Australian
refugee policy. A number of respondents were very brief in their answers and appeared weary of the aims of the researcher (this is discussed further below in relation to weaknesses of the research design). To an extent, the researcher was guided by the respondents’ answers, as per the semi-structured design of the interviews, allowing the respondents to express those opinions they felt most intensely, and in cases where the questions were poorly understood, working with the interpreter to rephrase the questions such that the respondents could relate to the content.

4.7 Data Analysis

Overall, the dataset was analysed using a three-stage approach. The first stage involved analysis of the quantitative data, and the second stage was analysis of the qualitative data. These analyses are presented separately in the following data analysis chapter (chapter five). The analysis then progresses to the third stage, a conceptual analysis, which is presented in the subsequent discussion chapter (chapter six). The third stage, then, is where the dataset will be looked at as a whole. This final discussion presents the most pertinent empirical findings of this study in light of the research questions and theoretical approach of the study and informs the conclusion (chapter seven).

4.7.1 Quantitative

Seventy-three of the 79 surveys were deemed viable for use in the analysis. Incomplete and incomprehensible surveys were omitted.\(^\text{10}\) The quantitative analysis was broken down into two distinct phases. The first stage was a descriptive analysis, which produced the raw survey findings for the sample. That is, data collected in the surveys was entered into a database and then analysed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel software. Given that the survey was

\(^{10}\) It must be noted that this is a relatively small cohort for the purposes of quantitative analytic work and the quantitative results in this study are not generalizable. As mentioned above, this was a purposive, not a representative sample. The small sample size was deemed acceptable in light of existing, larger scale (and therefore, generalizable) quantitative studies into the newly arrived humanitarian immigrant cohort, the timeframe for this project’s completion, recruitment difficulties, and the project’s stronger emphasis on the data adduced in the qualitative interviews.
designed to elicit data that can complement/augment the qualitative data, and was not looking at a representative sample nor aimed at generating statistical comparisons and correlations, basic statistical analysis was deemed sufficient. Basic frequencies and cross-tabulations, which provide a basic picture of the interrelations between two variables and to explore interactions between them, were performed and a table of overall quantitative findings was generated (see Appendix Four), as well as graphs, tables and/or figures, which represent the findings for each question.

This initial descriptive analysis was then followed by a comparative analysis, which contextualised the raw data in terms of existing statistics and empirical findings. Specifically, comparisons were made with empirical findings and statistics from those studies that were drawn upon in the design of the survey. That is, the data was contextualised in terms of the relevant data from the final report from the 2011 SONA study, “Settlement Outcomes of New Arrivals” (DIAC 2011), along with Graeme Hugo’s final summary and comprehensive report from his DIAC-commissioned study, “Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants” (Hugo 2011a; Hugo 2011b), which also draws upon the AHSS, also used in Hugo. It also uses ABS census data from both 2006 and 2011, as well as DIAC’s annual and other reports relating to recent humanitarian arrivals. To a lesser extent it drew upon findings from the Australian Election Study and the Social Cohesion Survey (Mapping Social Cohesion 2014). Although carried out in two distinct phases, the analysis is presented as a whole. Specifically, the analysis is presented in subsections; each subsection corresponds with the six themes and topics that the survey was designed to address (this design was comprehensively outlined above).

4.7.2 Qualitative

The interviews were digitally recorded, then translated and transcribed. The interview transcripts were then subjected to systematic thematic content analysis using NVivo software. Thematic content analysis is defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data
through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1278). Or, more simply, Patton states it is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p.453). This method of analysis was deemed appropriate for the interpretive and critical paradigm used in designing this study. The goal of the analysis was to identify important themes and categories within the qualitative dataset – the body of interview transcripts – so as to provide a description of the social and political reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out for the respondents. That is, the analysis aimed to provide “thick descriptions” of the particular socio-political experiences, attitudes and behaviours that were present in the sample as a whole. The analysis went beyond counting words or extracting objective content from the interview transcripts, but examined meanings, themes and patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Set CODES</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Push Factors</strong></td>
<td>Main reasons for leaving origin country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pull Factors</strong></td>
<td>Reasons for choosing to come to Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-arrival expectations</strong></td>
<td>Expectations of Australia/have they been met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AS Journey</strong></td>
<td>Narrative of Asylum (on-shore protection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refugee Journey</strong></td>
<td>Narrative of refugee (off-shore protection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Camp Life</strong></td>
<td>Perceptions/Interpretations of life in Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Settlement Experience</strong></td>
<td>Perceptions/Interpretations of Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Services</strong></td>
<td>Perceptions of Government services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social support</strong></td>
<td>Perceptions of support from society/community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transnational Network</strong></td>
<td>Contact with people overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Social life</strong></td>
<td>Social activities/habits/networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social milieu</strong></td>
<td>Perception of social milieu in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cross-cultural networks</strong></td>
<td>Cross-cultural Social activity/Contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3.2 Pre-set Codes used to initially organise the data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Status and perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>Perception/interpretation of current emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political milieu</td>
<td>Perception of political milieu in Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Political life</td>
<td>Political activities/habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics Asylum</td>
<td>Perceptions/Interpretation of Politics Asylum etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society Asylum</td>
<td>Perceptions of understanding from society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>Perception/Interpretation of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>Perception/Interpretation of Democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview transcripts were collated, and then subjected to three rounds of coding and interpretation. The coding scheme was formulated in both a pre-set and open manner. Initially, pre-set codes, or a-priori codes, that derive from the research questions, theoretical framework, and more directly from the design of the qualitative interviews (structure and content) are used (these are set out in Table 4.2). These pre-set codes were used so as to organise the data in the first instance.

After the interview transcripts were broken down according to these pre-set codes, an open coding process was initiated. This took place in multiple stages, over a year. Overall, the researcher closely read and annotated with “emergent codes” each interview transcript. During this process, the texts were unitized into concepts (not physical linguistic units, such as recurrent singular words or phrases), which were highlighted and labelled. Initially, a pilot thematic analysis was performed on data collected in five interviews so as to verify the applicability of the pre-set codes, formulate a set of emergent codes, as well as gauge an early and superficial understanding of themes apparent in the dataset. Based on this initial analysis, the researcher identified those pre-set codes that were either irrelevant or could be brought under another code, and then began the first full round of analysis. Three rounds of coding were then conducted on the qualitative dataset as a whole. NVivo software was used to support the coding process. As mentioned above, coding consistency in this study was
addressed by conducting three rounds of systematic coding conducted over a period of one year.

![Figure 4.7 Qualitative analytic activities arranged in a general order of sequence](image)

The deeper qualitative analysis - the dominant themes in the data - was presented in four subsections, or categories. Each category represents a period in the life story of the respondents, from their personal history through to their current circumstances. The categories are labelled, “Personal stories up until arrival in Australia,” “Settlement in Australia,” “Current social life” and “Current political life.” The most significant themes (and a contextualised presentation of the most poignant interview responses that demonstrate and validate these themes arrived upon by the researcher) are presented under each of these categories (see figure 4.7). That is, the dominant patterns and themes
that became evident in the data after three rounds of coding and analysis. These themes highlight the prominent ideas, perceptions, interpretations, expectations, behaviours, relationships and meanings that were raised by respondents, thereby giving an overall understanding of each of the broad categories being addressed, as well as linking them to one another in some cases. The data was also analysed and presented, to an extent, in light of the quantitative finding of this study. That is, it highlighted and interpreted the meaning of consistencies and inconsistencies between the quantitative and qualitative dataset.

| Personal stories up until arrival in Australia | • Salient trends and patterns among the sample regarding their personal backgrounds |
| Settlement in Australia | • Salient trends and patterns among the sample regarding their first year of settlement |
| Current Social Life | • Salient trends and patterns among the sample regarding their current social lives |
| Current Political Life | • Salient trends and patterns among the sample regarding their current political lives |

**Figure 4.8: Four Main Categories used to present the qualitative analysis**

4.7.3 Converging the quantitative and qualitative: Discussing the complete dataset

Given the size of the sample and the length of the surveys and interviews, the complete dataset elicited for this study was extensive and wide ranging in terms of content. With this in mind, and in order to discuss the findings meaningfully both in light of the major themes to come out of the analysis and the research questions that inform the study, the dataset was broken down into
four specific “areas” for the final discussion. That is, it looks at four realms of socio-political interaction and action with which the participants have experience and which were shown in the analysis to have significantly informed their understandings about their role as social and political actors in the Australia context. Such an approach to presenting the final discussion, which seeks to present the quantitative and qualitative findings in concert and in a meaningful way, simply breaks down the respondents’ socio-political attitudes and behaviours into discernible categories/sites for study.

The first site of socio-political interaction looked at concerns data about respondents’ interaction with Australian state services and other settlement service providers since their arrival in the country. Secondly it looks at data about individuals’ socio-cultural behaviours, and specifically their perspectives on their social interactions with non-Iraqi individuals and communities in Australia. Thirdly, it analyses data about individual political behaviours and perspectives on political life in Australia. Finally, it reflects upon respondents’ attitudes and activities as citizens, or soon to be citizens, of the national polity. That is, it looks at data about their civic-oriented activity, their interactions as civic agents, and whether they identify themselves as entitled members of the society and polity and therefore involve themselves in activities to forward their particular interests. This realm is to be understood as more socially substantive than a strictly political or electoral meaning of civic activity.

After collating the relevant survey findings and further refining the major thematic findings of the study, the discussion presents the dominant theme relevant to each of these four areas of socio-political interaction. Under each of these overall thematic headings, the dominant findings are discussed in terms of the theoretical concerns of the study. Superficially, positive perceptions and interpretations of these various areas, will lend to an argument that individuals identify with the socio-political system in Australia and are ‘engaged’ with democratic processes, while negative perceptions and interpretations will lend to the notion that individuals are ‘alienated’ or
‘disaffected’ in their current socio-political context and as such are disengaged from or do not contribute to democratic processes in the Australian context.

4.8 Limitations of the research design

There are a number of noteworthy limitations to the research design. Firstly, as with any qualitative research methodology aiming to probe the real world attitudes and behaviors of individuals, it is necessarily limited by the contrived nature of interviews, and the role of the interviewer/researcher who bring their own set of values, normative understandings and biases to the interview design, conduct and analysis. This is a classic issue in any interpretive, social scientific endeavor, such as that put forward by scholars like Habermas. Indeed, the social scientist, the interpreter, is in “a peculiar epistemic predicament,” in that, in any endeavour to see things from another’s point of view “there is no getting around the fact that ethnography or history is our attempt to see another form of life in the categories of our own” (Geertz, 1971, p. 17). In other words, “when faced with interpreting others' behaviour we quickly run into the limits of first-person knowledge simpliciter” (Bohman 2005).

By way of an example that is relevant to this study, alienation is a subjective phenomenon, and the methodological implication of this is that the individual is not always fully aware of his or her alienated state, and is not always able to verbalize it. And so it is up to the external observer, the researcher, to ascribe alienation to the subject’s attitudinal and behavioural outputs at the time of data collection. As Felix Geyer notes,

“there are many clear-cut cases where the ascription of alienation by an external observer—even if used as a critical and normative rather than as a descriptive and merely diagnostic concept—is clearly warranted, even though the persons concerned may deny their alienation because of repression or false consciousness: childhood abuse, clearly traumatizing experiences, living under conditions of extreme economic deprivation or an abject political
system, exploitative working conditions, etc. But there are many not quite so appalling, but still undesirable situations in the Western world nowadays where it seems less useful to ascribe alienation to persons or groups out of a missionary drive to cure others of something they are either blissfully unaware of, or perfectly content with” (Geyer 2001, p 390).

One way to mitigate this, is to acknowledge this limitation, accept the complexity of inter-subjectivity - that there are various forms of practical knowledge - and for the social scientist to be cognisant of her own subjectivity and presumed values, as well as particularly careful not to overstate findings, infer generalizability, nor confuse inference with objective fact.

Another major limitation to this research design was the use of purposive sampling, which is a non-probability or selective sampling technique critiqued as having an inherent tendency for researcher bias. Mack, et al (2005) note that the application of purposive sampling entails categorizing subjects in accordance with ex ante identified criteria based on the research problem. As such, decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research, which introduces issues of researcher bias; the sample is based on the judgement of the researcher, who is concerned with a specific point. This is assuaged to an extent by recognition that the sample in this study is strictly non-representative, and by the researcher implementing strict sampling criteria, and remaining analytically objective, so as not to pursue certain participants or certain sections of the data set that may be seen to best support their theory.

In terms of the recruitment process, there is a growing sense of fatigue with academic researchers who are attempting to undertake qualitative, purposive or theoretical sampling and research, coming into community organisations and/or refugee communities seeking to survey and interview individuals. Firstly, the researcher was not adequately acquainted with the Iraqi community in Victoria, or with caseworkers in the settlement sector before attempting to
recruit participants. As such, the process took longer than planned. For the group under study, and particularly for IMA arrivals, there was a growing sense that, since arriving in Australia, they were being endlessly interviewed – several times upon arrival by Federal Police and immigration officials, several times after arrival by caseworkers and others in the settlement sector – with no tangible benefits to their lives, such as the outcomes of their visa applications. There was a sense that many in the newly arrived Iraqi refugee community were no longer willing to participate in interviews, particularly where they could see no practical use or personal benefits for their involvement. Furthermore, the Iraqi refugee community members encountered by the researcher were wary of the researcher’s aims and could not readily relate to the aims of the study or did not wish to become involved. As such, recruitment took far longer than anticipated as a sense of trust and accommodation needed to be fostered between the researcher and settlement workers engaged to help recruit participants, as well as between the researcher and participants themselves.

Another issue was encountered trying to recruit females to participate in the study. The biggest issue was that of access as the initial point of contact with any newly arrived family tended to be the eldest male of the household. A number of male respondents explained that they did not wish their wives to be involved in the study, and furthermore, that they were not able to make contact with another man’s wife, and as such had no way of asking women to become involved. Most commonly, the males explained this in terms of their wife’s lack of language skills – despite the presence of an interpreter – or a lack of knowledge about the questions being asked. This is despite the fact that women, just like men, and no matter what level of formal education they have attained, are knowledgeable social agents capable of expressing reflective insights about their own life. The researcher did make contact with one Iraqi woman who agreed to help her recruit a group of women to be involved. After four months of communication, however, the third party said that the women she spoke with did not wish to be involved. Given the time restrictions, further effort to recruit female participants was not made, though this issue could have been mitigated if the researcher had greater familiarity and therefore trust with
potential participants. It is important to keep this in mind throughout this study, as the final analysis is significantly gendered, and represents largely male perspectives.

4.9. Summary

This chapter outlined the research methods designed and employed to pursue this research project. The study employs a mixed methods approach, involving a two-stage data collection strategy. Namely, data is collected using quantitative surveys administered to 100 individuals, followed by semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 30 individuals. The data is then subjected to basic statistical analysis and thematic content analysis respectively. The findings of the analysis are then used to reflect upon the research question of this study. The following chapter presents the quantitative data analysis.
Chapter Five

Quantitative Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the quantitative data set. The data analysed was elicited by *Socio-political Practices and Attitudes Surveys*, which were administered to 79 Iraqi humanitarian arrivals. The original target of 100 surveys was not met due to difficulties in recruiting willing participants. Seventy-three of the 79 surveys were deemed viable for use in this analysis. Incomplete surveys were omitted. Data collected in the surveys was analysed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel software. Given that the survey was designed to elicit data from a non-representative, purposively selected sample group so as to complement/augment the qualitative data, and is not aimed at generating statistical comparisons and correlations, only basic frequencies and cross-tabulations were performed.

5.2 Demographic Profile

As per the sampling criteria, the entire sample was born overseas and all respondents identified themselves as “Iraqi.” Given the multiple pathways offered under Australia’s humanitarian program, and the significantly diverse experiences that each pathway may represent or engender for the migrant, it is worth understanding the sample in terms of their mode of arrival and the legal and administrative category under which they were granted protection. A concerted effort was made to achieve an even ratio of individuals who arrived via the offshore and onshore migration pathways. This was roughly achieved with 39 respondents, or 54 per cent of the sample, indicating that they arrived to Australia as refugees via the offshore humanitarian program. Thirty-three respondents, or 45 per cent of the sample arrived to Australia as asylum seekers, and were granted protection under the onshore component of the humanitarian program. Notably, and consistent with the recent displacement
patterns of Iraqis, who comprise the “world’s largest urban refugee population” (Harper 2008, p. 172), only one of the 39 respondents who arrived via the offshore program stayed in a UNHCR camp before arrival (see Figure 5.1).

![Pie chart showing the distribution of respondents by arrival type.](image)

**Figure 5.1: Respondents by Arrival – Onshore/Offshore**

Thirty-two of the 33 respondents arrived to Australia as IMAs and stayed in mandatory detention. While the presence of more IMAs in the sample is to be expected given that, over the past decade, there have been slightly more Iraqi IMA arrivals than non-IMA arrivals, there is still an overrepresentation in the sample. Such an overrepresentation may be due to the snowball sampling technique used and the particular community networks tapped into by the researcher.

Most commonly, the survey respondents arrived to Australia in 2012, with 19 individuals or 26 per cent of the sample indicating as such. Eighteen respondents, 25 per cent of the sample, arrived to Australia in 2008 (see Figure 5.2). This is reflective of broader Iraqi displacement patterns; the deterioration of security in Iraq and the Middle East region led to an upsurge of Humanitarian visas being granted to Iraqis around these times. It may also, in part, be due to the sampling technique used, whereby respondents were contacted through a limited number of community contacts. In any case, the
sample represents a group of relatively new arrivals to Australia. In light of Graeme Hugo’s assertion that the first years - and for the sake of categorisation, the first five years - are particularly salient in determining settlement outcomes of newly arrived humanitarian migrants, it is worth noting that 70 per cent of the sample surveyed are within that initial period (Hugo 2011) (see Figure 5.3).

![Figure 5.2: Year of Arrival to Australia](image)

![Figure 5.3: Time Period of Settlement in Australia](image)

In terms of the age structure of the sample, 35 respondents or 48 per cent of the sample were born between 1971 and 1980. That is, 48 per cent of the sample is between the ages 31 and 40 at the time the survey was administered.
The next largest age group, representing 26 respondents or 36 per cent of the sample, are those born between 1981 and 1990, making them between 21 and 30 at the time the survey was administered (see Figure 5.4). The sample’s age structure is approximately consistent with the age structures present among Australia’s humanitarian intake more broadly (DIAC, 2013b).

**Figure 5.4: Respondents by Age Groups**

The median age of the survey sample is 33. Considering that this study did not include any persons less than 18 years of age, and that the median age for the Australian population is 37 years (a figure which accounts for those 18 years and younger) (ABS, 2010), this cohort is relatively young. Furthermore, the median age for this sample is significantly younger than the median age for all overseas-born people in Australia, which is 45 years (DIAC, 2013a). This is consistent with Graeme Hugo’s findings that “people coming to Australia through the humanitarian program are substantially younger than the national Australian population and arrivals under other migration categories” (Hugo 2011b, p. 14). Such demographic dynamics are set to have a growing importance in light of Australia’s progressively ageing population, the median age of which “has increased by 4.8 years over the last two decades, from 32.1 years at 30 June 1990 to 36.9 years at 30 June 2010” (ABS, 2012).

Although the survey was administered to adults aged 18 years and over, it is worth noting that a large proportion of people arriving to Australia under the humanitarian program are children. Iraqi arrivals in general (Hugo, 2011b) and
this sample in particular reflect this pattern. Sixty of the 73 respondents, or 82 per cent of the sample indicated that they are married with children. Given the young age structure of respondents, it may be presumed that those dependent children who have arrived to Australia are relatively young, and will receive the bulk of their primary and secondary education in Australia (for some IMA arrivals, their children are still in countries of first asylum awaiting feedback on their claims for family reunification – refer to the qualitative data analysis section for further discussion of this dominant trend). Although the survey did not ask respondents to indicate how many children they have, Iraqi women tend to have higher levels of childbearing than Australian-born women, and tend to bear children at a younger age. These factors set this intake apart from the demographic dynamics of the resident Australian population as well as other migrant groups in Australia.

Forty-eight participants, or two thirds of the sample are male. The remaining third are female. One person did not answer this question (see Figure 5.5). This is a slight over-representation of males when compared with the gender ratio of all Iraqis arriving to Australia through the humanitarian program; 110.5 males to every 100 females (Hugo 2011, p. 74). The offshore refugee-humanitarian intake to Australia is more balanced between males and females than any other visa type or migration pathway, such as family and skilled (Hugo 2011). The IMA onshore component, on the other hand, is a more gendered process, with males significantly over-represented among onshore arrivals. For example, in 2012-13, 88 per cent of IMA humanitarian visas were granted to males and 12 per cent to females (DIBP, 2013, p. 30), which is a significant over-representation of males, and a disparity that was relatively consistent across the preceding five years. This is linked to the patriarchal nature of most Iraqi family structures; it is deemed most appropriate for the father – or the oldest male figure – to undertake the dangerous and relatively expensive maritime journey to Australia and arrange for his family to come out subsequent to his arrival.
In terms of the respondents’ current living arrangements, 43 individuals or 59 per cent of the sample indicated that they live with their husband/wife as well as their children. Given that, as noted above, 60 of the 73 respondents, or 82 per cent of the sample indicated that they are married with children, it may be deduced that 17 respondents arrived to Australia without their partner and children. This is tenuously backed up by the fact that 17 respondents, or 13 per cent of the sample indicated that they live with friends. It is common for new arrivals, especially onshore arrivals, to come without their immediate family only to apply for family reunification after being granted protection in Australia. This phenomenon deserves exploration in the qualitative interviews.

Fifty-seven respondents, or 78 per cent of the sample indicated that they are Muslim, and 16 respondents or 22 per cent indicated that they are Christian (see Figure 5.6). This is at odds with the religious profile of the broader Iraqi community in Australia; at the 2011 Census 47.6 percent of Iraq-born individuals in Australia identified as Christian, and 32 per cent identified as Muslim (DIAC, 2013a, p. 3). The over-representation of Muslims in this study’s sample may be due to the sampling process, whereby a majority of the researchers’ community contacts happened to be Muslim. Another factor is that the vast majority of onshore humanitarian entrants from Iraq are Muslim. Again, given that the researcher made a concerted effort to survey an
approximately even mix of onshore and offshore humanitarian entrants, prioritizing these administrative/legal categories over any religious identification of respondents, it was assumed that at least roughly half the sample was going to be Muslim from the outset.

![What is your religion?](image)

**Figure 5.6: Respondents by Religion**

It is worth noting that although some respondents indicated their particular religious sect within these two broader religious traditions - for example, Shia, Sunni, Catholic or Assyrian Apostolic - these responses have been brought under the broader categories of “Islam” and “Christianity” in order to reflect the nature of the majority of respondents’ answers to the question. Furthermore, none of the respondents indicated that they had “no religion”, which is in stark contrast to figures from the 2011 Census, in which 22.3 per cent of the total Australian population stated “No religion” (DIAC, 2013a).

In line with the religious profile of the sample, 60 respondents, or 82 per cent of the sample indicated that Arabic is their native language and the language they speak at home. The remaining 13 participants, 18 per cent, indicated that their native language, and the language they speak at home is “Assyrian” (or Assyrian Neo-Aramaic). When compared with the broader Iraq-born community in Australia, there is an over-representation of Arabic speakers in this sample (DIAC, 2013a, p. 2). This may be explained by the same factors that influenced the religious profile of the sample (as discussed directly above).
5.3 Education Levels, English Language Proficiency and Labor Force Engagement and Participation

The most frequent “highest level of education” among the sample is high school level, which was attained in Iraq by 32 respondents or 44 per cent of the sample. Eleven respondents, or 15 per cent of the sample reached primary school level and one person received no formal education at all (see Figure 5.7). According to DIAC’s 2011 SONA report, “close to 75 per cent of Humanitarian entrants arrived with high school level education or lower levels… Just over 17.3 per cent arrived in Australia with no education” (DIAC 2011, p. 17). Only 60 per cent of this sample has high school level education or lower, and, as stated, only one respondent received no education at all. Such figures indicate that the Iraqi respondents in this study have attained higher levels of education than other birth country groups of humanitarian arrivals to Australia.

As for tertiary education, just over a quarter of the sample, or 19 respondents, have an under-graduate university degree or diploma. Six respondents, or eight per cent of the sample have post-graduate qualifications (either Masters or Doctorate) (see Figure 5.7). Taken together, that means that 34 per cent of the sample has higher education qualifications. These figures compare favourably with ABS 2011 data, which indicates that 25 per cent of the Australian population have higher education qualifications (Norton, 2012, p. 6). That is, the respondents surveyed have higher levels of tertiary level attainment than the Australian population more broadly.
In addition to traditional education is vocational training. Four respondents, or five per cent of the sample indicated that they have some variety of trade or technical qualification. Taking university and technical degrees together, 39 per cent of the sample holds such qualifications. This is similar to ABS 2006 Census data, which indicates that 39.4 per cent of the Australian population 15 years and older has a technical or university qualification (DIAC 2011, p. 2). This sample is consistent with the finding from DIAC’s 2011 report that “people from Iraq… are more likely (compared with all other countries of birth) to have university qualifications before arriving in Australia” (DIAC, 2011, p. 18). Quantitatively, the sample has more formal education qualifications than other humanitarian arrivals, and the Australian population more broadly.

Figure 5.7: Respondents by Highest Level of Education

In terms of ongoing education in Australia, 23 respondents or 32 per cent of the sample were engaged in study at the time they were surveyed. The remaining 50 respondents were not. It is difficult to compare these with existing figures for the Australian population as the type of study being pursued was not asked of the respondents, and therefore useful comparisons cannot be made. Comparisons may be made, however, for English language education. Thirteen respondents or 12 per cent of the sample indicated that they have accessed or are accessing English language tuition. This stands in
stark contrast to findings for humanitarian entrants more generally, 72 per cent of which have studied or are studying English in Australia (DIAC, 2011, p. 14). It also stands in contrast to the ostensible needs of the sample; the most common response, given by 33 respondents, or nearly half of the sample, was that they have low or “beginner” level proficiency in English. Eighteen respondents or 25 per cent indicated that they are fluent in English, and 21 respondents or 29 per cent of the sample indicated that they are at an “intermediate” level. One respondent did not answer this question (see Figure 5.8).

Low proficiency in English is common among new humanitarian arrivals. Research shows that proficiency levels increase over time, with “a majority of Humanitarian entrants indicat[ing] that they can speak English well or very well after 4 years of settlement” (DIAC, 2011, p. 12). Given that 70 per cent of the survey respondents have been in Australia for less than five years (see Figure 5.3 above), low English proficiency may be expected among this sample. Yet, the finding that only 12 per cent of the sample is accessing English language tuition is certainly worth further exploration in the qualitative interviews, to elucidate the reasons for non-attendance.

**What is your English level?**

*Fluent* 45%  
*Intermediate* 29%  
*Beginner* 25%  
*Missing* 1%

*Figure 5.8: English Language Proficiency*

In line with low English language proficiency, though not definitively correlated to it, the sample displays relatively low levels of employment and
labour force participation. Twenty-two respondents, or 30 per cent of the sample, are employed (they have jobs). A majority of 50 respondents, 69 per cent of the sample, are unemployed (see Figure 5.9). It must be noted that the Australian Bureau of Statistics, when calculating official unemployment levels, classifies people aged 15 years and over “unemployed if they satisfy three criteria: they are not employed, they are available to start work and they are taking active steps to find work” (ABS, 2012). Complying with these official standards, 26 per cent of the whole sample is “unemployed” as per the definition used to calculate official unemployment rates in Australia. This is significantly higher than national unemployment levels, which were 5.2 per cent in 2012 (ABS, 2012b) and 5.8 per cent over 2013 (ABS, 2013b). It is also significantly higher than the unemployment rates of other migrants who have recently arrived to Australia under different visa types. The high unemployment rate for this sample supports previous research, which posits that the disruptive effects of settlement for new humanitarian arrivals lead to poor labour market outcomes (DIAC, 2011; Hugo, 2011a; 2011b).

Figure 5.9: Respondents by Employment

Another way of framing these findings is to say that a majority of 41 respondents, or 56 per cent of the entire sample, are engaged with the Australian labour force (the “labour force” being all those who are either employed or actively seeking employment). This is lower than the national average of 64.8 per cent calculated over the year 2013 (ABS 2013a). For the
overall sample, then, this means that a slight minority of 32 respondents or 44 per cent are not in the labour force at all; they are unemployed and not looking for work. This finding is high when compared with DIAC’s 2011 study, which found that 3.3 per cent of their sample was unemployed and not looking for work, while 11.5 per cent were unemployed but looking for work (DIAC 2011, p. 27). According to this report, Iraqis are one of two birth country groups who are least likely to be employed and also part of households that are most likely to receive Centrelink payments. This low labour force participation rate among the sample – despite the sample’s relatively high education levels - is explored further in the qualitative interviews.

![Figure 5.10: Unemployed Respondents by Labour Force Participation](image)

5.4 Perspectives on Formal Political Status in Australia

Twenty-nine respondents, or 40 per cent of the sample are Australian citizens. A majority of 60 per cent are not (see Figure 5.11). Given that 40 respondents or 55 per cent of the sample have been in Australia for four years or more, and are therefore eligible to become citizens\(^\text{11}\), there is a discrepancy between those that are eligible to obtain citizenship, and those that have obtained citizenship. That is, 11 respondents who are eligible for citizenship are yet to obtain it, which may indicate a lack of intention or a low level of intention or motivation to do so.

\(^{11}\) Protection visa holders are required to have lived in Australia for a minimum of four years before they are eligible to become an Australian citizen.
Exploring the respondents’ intentions, it is found that, of those respondents who are not yet citizens, 29 respondents or 66 per cent of this portion of the sample, plan to become Australian citizens. Fifteen of those respondents, or 34 per cent of non-citizens in the sample, indicated that they did not know whether they would eventually become a citizen. Notably, zero respondents indicated “no” or expressed a complete lack of intention to become an Australian citizen (see Figure 5.12). These results are in line with those found for humanitarian entrants in the SONA study, which reports, “Nearly all respondents indicated that they were or intended to be citizens (No but hope to be category). Very few were not intending to become citizens [just one per cent of the sample]” (DIAC, 2011, p. 44).
5.5 Interaction with official Government and Non-government Institutions

This section looks at which government and/or government-funded humanitarian settlement services (HSS) the respondents most commonly access. It also gauges the respondents’ ideas about the accessibility of these services and the quality of service provision and content.

Forty-four respondents or 60 per cent of the sample indicated that they are in receipt of Centrelink payments (see Figure 5.13). This is lower than figures obtained for humanitarian entrants generally, which indicated that around 85 per cent of humanitarian entrants’ households are in receipt of Centrelink payments (DIAC 2011, p. 19). Findings specific to Iraqis in DIAC’s 2011 study found that 93.2 per cent of Iraqi households received Centrelink payments, which was the highest among all other countries of birth. Notably, the number of respondents receiving Centrelink payments is lower than the 50 respondents, or 69 per cent of the sample that currently do not have a job. This raises the question of how respondents are supporting themselves financially. While this is explored in the interviews, the formatting or layout of the question in the actual survey may, in part, explain this result. The respondents were asked to indicate which services they access from a list of services, and asked to mark all that apply. A number of respondents marked only one service from the list, suggesting that there was a misunderstanding in comprehending the question.

Nine respondents or 12 per cent of the sample indicated that they use translation and interpreting services. This rate is relatively low compared to the 44.4 per cent among humanitarian entrants more broadly who access these services (DIAC, 2011, p. 21). It is also relatively low when compared with level of English language proficiency of the sample – 45 per cent of the sample has a “beginner” level. This suggests a discrepancy between the
ostensible needs of the respondents and their actual accessing of the attendant service, which is similar to the pattern observed for the respondents’ attendance to English language tuition. Such a trend is worth further exploration in the interviews.

Figure 5.13: Government Services Currently Accessed

Fifty-four respondents or 74 per cent of the sample indicated that they access health services in Australia. This is in line with findings for humanitarian entrants in the 2011 DIAC report. This report does note, however, “a majority of all streams who use health and medical services find them easy to use. While around 50% of Humanitarian entrants who use medical services find them easy to use, relatively more Humanitarian entrants find health and medical services harder to use than the two other streams.” (DIAC, 2011, p. 24). This is explored further in the interviews.
In order to probe the respondents’ perceptions about the accessibility of government services, they were asked to rate how easy accessing government services has been in their experience. The most common answer, given by 27 respondents or 37 per cent of the sample, was “easy”. The second most common answer, given by 22 respondents or 30 percent of the sample was “A Little difficult.” Six respondents or eight per cent of the sample indicated that accessing government services has been either “difficult” or “very difficult” (see Figure 5.14). While a majority of the sample appears happy with the accessibility of settlement services, it is worth exploring the nature of the difficulties encountered by the other 38 per cent of the sample.

![How easy is accessing services?](image)

**Figure 5.14: Ease of accessing Government Services**

In regards to the respondents’ perceptions about the quality of government services, the most common response given was that they are “good”, with 32 respondents or 44 per cent of the sample indicating as such. Twenty-three respondents or 32 per cent of the sample indicated that government services are “excellent.” Fourteen respondents perceive government services as “adequate”, and no respondents indicated that they were of a “poor” or “very poor” quality (see Figure 5.15). Overall, the respondents have a very positive perception of government services, despite the previous finding that, overall,
28 respondents or 38 per cent of the sample found accessing services either a little difficult, difficult, or very difficult.

**Figure 5.15: Quality of Government Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Government Services</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5.6 Socio-cultural behaviors and perspectives on social life in Australia**

This section explores the socio-cultural attitudes and behaviours of the respondents. It begins by gauging the respondents’ frequency of interaction with particular types of socio-cultural networks. Overall, the respondents tend to interact mostly with their own cultural community. In particular, most of the respondents indicated that they spend the bulk of their time with their family. This is followed by time spent with the Iraqi refugee community more broadly. This is in line with Graeme Hugo’s finding that “new and emerging refugee communities have a strong desire to promote the development of their own communities” (Hugo 2011a, p. 48). In contrast, the respondents display a low level of interaction with groups that are socio-culturally distinct from their Iraqi refugee community. The respondents indicated they spend the least amount of time interacting with “white Australian citizens”. It is worth having a closer look at the sample’s frequency of interaction with each group specified in the survey.
As stated, the respondents spend most of their time with their immediate family. Forty respondents, or 55 per cent of the sample indicated they “always” spend time with their immediate family, while eight respondents or 11 per cent indicated “often” (see Figure 5.16). This is roughly consistent with the findings above, which show that 53 respondents live with members of their immediate family. Seven respondents or 10 per cent of the sample indicated that they “rarely” spend time with their family, while 16 respondents or 22 per cent of the sample responded “never”. Again, these figures are compatible with the findings about the living arrangements of the sample; 21 respondents indicated that they lived with friends or on their own.

![Figure 5.16: Amount of Time Spent with Immediate Family](image)

Overall, respondents whose immediate family are in Australia tend to spend most of their time with them; indeed, it appears to be something of a socio-cultural expectation or norm. Extrapolating from this result, it may be seen that the vast majority of respondents prefer to spend most of their time with this close-knit network. This then leads to a potentially problematic situation for those whose family is not in Australia, by causing or compounding feelings of loneliness and estrangement. This is a point worth exploring in the interviews, in order to gauge how the respondents perceive and feel about their situation,
and what their expectations are for seeing/reuniting with their family in the future.

The respondents spend markedly less time with their extended family than their immediate family. The most common response, given by 31 respondents or 42 per cent of the sample was that they “never” spend time with their extended family (see Figure 5.17). The next most common response, given by 17 respondents or 23 per cent of the sample was “rarely”. Thirteen respondents or 18 per cent of the sample indicated “often”, and six respondents or six per cent of the sample said “sometimes”. Given that Iraqi households tend to be extended, rather than nuclear households, the overall tendency of the respondents not to network with their extended family may be explained by a complete lack of such family members being in Australia, particularly as they are part of a relatively new migrant cohort.

![Figure 5.17: Amount of Time Spent with Extended Family](image)

After immediate family, the respondents spend most of their time with the “Iraqi refugee community.” Twenty-six respondents or 36 per cent of the sample indicated that they “often” spend time with the Iraqi refugee community, while 23 respondents or 32 per cent of the sample indicated “sometimes”. Not one respondent indicated that they “rarely” or “never” spend time with the Iraqi refugee community (see Figure 5.18). Again, this is in line
with the findings of Hugo, who states, “Humanitarian settlers reported that they felt well-connected to their local community—to a greater extent than other categories of migrants. This indicates they have a strong attachment to the immediate communities in which they live.” (Hugo 2011a, p. 48). As well as corroborating his assertion that new refugee communities have “a very strong identification with ethnic networks and communities and this is a major element of their social capital” (Hugo 2011b, 227). The quantitative data from this study corroborates Hugo’s point, but is worth further exploration in the interview in order to explore the meanings that Iraqi respondents ascribe to their behaviour.

![Figure 5.18: Amount of Time Spent with Iraqi Refugee Community](image)

The respondents were asked “How often do you spend time with people outside the Iraqi community?” The most common responses were “sometimes” and “rarely”; 17 respondents or 23 per cent of the sample indicated each of these answers. Altogether, 48 respondents, a majority of 66 per cent, have a low frequency of interaction with non-Iraqis, indicating “occasionally”, “rarely” or “never” (see Figure 5.19). This is significant as it suggests a measure of socio-cultural isolation for this sample group, or at the least a significant social gap between the respondents and others in Australia. While this may be expected for new arrivals to Australia with low proficiency in English, this phenomenon deserves further attention in the interviews so as
to account for the respondents’ perceptions of social networking with non-Iraqis, and to explore the attitudes that inform their behaviour.

**Figure 5.19: Amount of Time Spent with People Outside the Iraqi Community**

Going beyond the very general “non-Iraqi” categorisation, the respondents were asked how much time they spend with three socio-culturally distinct groups; people from a “different religion”, those from a “different cultural background”, and “white Australian citizens”. In terms of spending time with people from a different religion and people from a different cultural background, the respondents’ answers were approximately equivalent to the previous question about “non-Iraqis”. Altogether, 50 respondents, a majority of 68 per cent, have a low frequency of interaction with people from a different religion, indicating “occasionally”, “rarely” or “never” (see Figure 5.20). Slightly more respondents indicated that they spend time with people from different cultural backgrounds, yet the frequency of interaction is still low for the majority, with 41 respondents of 57 per cent indicating that they do so “occasionally”, “rarely” or “never” (see Figure 5.21).
The respondents indicated that they spend the least amount of their time with “white Australian citizens”. The most common response, given by 23 respondents or 32 per cent of the sample, was “rarely”. Taken together, 32
respondents or 44 per cent of the sample indicated “rarely” or “never,” which suggests a significant actual and/or perceived social gap between these two demographic groups, in that they do not interact and network with one another (see Figure 5.22). The respondents’ networking preferences and practices are explored further in the interviews, so as to gauge the attitudes that inform the low levels of social interaction between the respondents and “white Australian citizens”.

**Figure 5.22: Amount of Time Spent with White Australian Citizens**

In addition to questions about the respondents’ preferred and most frequently engaged with inter- and intra-cultural social networks, the survey presented a more general question about whether they participate in social activities outside of the Iraqi community. A slight majority indicated that they do participate in social activities outside the Iraqi community, with 32 respondents or 44 per cent of the sample indicating that they “agreed” and six respondents or eight per cent of the sample indicating that they “strongly agreed”. Twenty-five respondents or 34 per cent of the sample indicated that they “disagree”, and three respondents or four per cent of the sample indicated that they “strongly disagree”. Six respondents or eight per cent of the sample
indicated “neutral”, and one respondent indicated, “I don’t know” (see Figure 5.23).

Figure 5.23: Respondents’ Participation in Social Activities Outside Iraqi Community

It is significant that almost half of the sample have such low levels of interaction with non-Iraqis. This finding lends further evidence to the suggestion that this sample is relatively socio-culturally isolated. In order to explore substantive reasons for such behaviours, this issue deserves further exploration in the interviews - to gauge the respondents’ perceptions and attitudes towards non-Iraqis, and their reasons for not engaging with broader socio-cultural networks.

As a precursor for such an exploration, the survey posed questions that probe the respondents’ attitudes about the social milieu in Australia. Firstly, the respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “It is important to me to maintain my Iraqi culture and heritage.” Almost the entire sample indicated that they agree that maintaining their Iraqi culture and heritage is an important, personal priority. Forty respondents or 55 per cent of the sample indicated that they “strongly agree” with the statement, while 25 respondents or 34 per cent “agree.” Eight respondents or 11 per cent indicated that they are neutral. Notably, none of the
respondents “disagree”, which shows that their origin or “native” culture and
cultural identity is important to the entire sample (see Figure 5.24).

**Figure 5.24: Importance of Maintaining Iraqi Culture and Heritage**

Such findings are in line with data collected in the Australian Humanitarian
Settler Survey and presented in Hugo (2011b, p. 246). When asked in the
AHSS to select the particular characteristics of their living situation that they
value, the most common response, given by 76.4 per cent of the sample, was
“cultural or ethnic practices respected”. This sample appears to place a similar
value on their cultural identity, and implicitly value the notion that their
culture be respected so that they are able to maintain and continue to practice
their specific ethnic, cultural or religious routines, habits and norms. This is
explored further in the qualitative interviews.

Further to this issue of intercultural respect and tolerance, and the capacity for
cultural maintenance in the Australian socio-political milieu, it is notable that
findings from the Australian Social Cohesion Survey (ASCS 2011) indicate
that Australians more broadly feel the same way about their cultures. Respondents were asked, “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement. In the modern world, maintaining the Australian way of life and
culture is important.” The results show a similar pattern to the answers provided by Iraqis in this study’s sample (note that the questions posed to the respondents in this study was worded differently, but the overall meaning was very similar and as such may be used for comparison); 60 per cent of the sample indicated “strongly agree,” (compared to 55 per cent of Iraqi respondents), 31 per cent indicated “Agree,” (compared to 34 per cent of Iraqi respondents), three per cent indicated “Neither agree nor disagree,” which is slightly lower than the 11 per cent for he sample who indicated that they were “neutral.” The only significant difference is that six per cent of Australian respondents in the Social Cohesion Survey answered, “disagree” and one per cent indicated, “strongly disagree,” while no Iraqi respondents indicated either “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” It may be seen that the Iraqi sample in this study, and Australians more broadly display similar attitudes to cultural identity maintenance. Both groups place value on this aspect of their life and seek to maintain their particular cultural norms and practices in the broader plural society.

Having established that the maintenance of Iraqi culture is important to the respondents, they were then asked to assess their own level of understanding of the wider Australian society, the milieu into which they are settling. The most common answer, however, is “neutral”. That is, the respondents’ neither agree nor disagree but seem dispassionate or detached about their personal understanding of the socio-cultural milieu in Australia (see Figure 5.25). This neutrality, in concert with nine respondents indicating, “I don’t know,” suggests that they are, at the least, not confident of their own understandings about life, culture and politics in their new context. Despite the fact that the sample are relatively new arrivals, and their understandings will invariably develop over time, the particular barriers to understanding Australian society, as perceived by the sample, deserves further attention in the qualitative interviews.
Despite a relatively poor self-assessment of their levels of understanding about life in Australia, the sample displays a strong intention to learn about life, culture and politics in the country. Thirty-eight respondents, or slightly more than half of the sample, “agree” with the statement, “I am interested in learning about life, culture and politics in Australia.” Twenty-one respondents or 29 per cent of the sample indicated that they “strongly agree. Notably, none of the respondents indicated “disagree” or “strongly disagree”, which shows overall there is a strong intention to learn about the new society into which they are settling (see Figure 5.26). The respondents’ high level of intention to learn, and the low level of realisation of this intention is discussed with interview respondents so as to gauge their attitudes and perspectives about their understandings, as well as to probe any particular barriers they face.
It is worth exploring not just the extent to which the respondents understand life, culture and politics in Australia, but the extent to which they feel themselves, and their socio-cultural identifications and behavioural norms, understood by the broader Australian community. To this end, the respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the statement, “People I have met in Australia have a good understanding about life, culture and politics in Iraq.” A significant majority did not concur with this sentiment. The most common response is “disagree”, with 33 respondents or 45 per cent of the sample indicating as such. Fourteen respondents, nearly one fifth of the sample, indicated that they “strongly disagree”, while 17 respondents or 23 per cent of the sample indicated “neutral”. Significantly, only 3 respondents or 4 per cent of the sample indicated that they “agree” and no respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” (see Figure 5.27).
Overall, the respondents do not perceive Australians as culturally literate and informed about Iraqi lifestyles, culture and politics (keeping in mind that ‘Iraqi’ in itself denotes a number ethno-culturally and religiously diverse communities). In light of the importance that the respondents place on their cultural identity, and maintaining their Iraqi heritage, and their apparent propensity to socialise within their relatively tight-knit Iraqi socio-cultural community, this perceived lack of reciprocity on behalf of broader Australian society invariably operates to foster socio-cultural isolation, rather than socialisation of this particular cultural group within the wider national, socio-cultural community. In social capital terms, such attitudes and behaviours operate to build in-group bonding capital, but a perceived lack of intercultural reciprocity on behalf of Australia, operates to the detriment of bridging capital and wider socialisation into the national community.

It is important, however, to look beyond the realisation of reciprocal intercultural understanding, and explore how the respondents’ perceive the intercultural intentions of the broader Australian society toward their particular
community. When asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the following statement, “People in Australia are interested to learn about life, culture and politics in Iraq”, the respondents painted a different picture to the preceding question. Indeed, seven respondents or 10 per cent of the sample “strongly agree” and 13 respondents or 18 per cent of the sample “agree” that people they meet in Australia are interested to learn about Iraqi culture. The majority, however, still answered in the neutral or negative, with 21 respondents or 19 per cent answering both “neutral” and “disagree” (see Figure 5.28). As such, despite the respondents indicating that people in Australia are not familiar with and don’t understand their native culture and context, there is a perception among approximately a quarter of the respondents that Australians are interested to learn about their origin culture. Issues around intercultural understanding and reciprocity are explored further in the qualitative interviews.

![Figure 5.28: People in Australia are interested to learn about life, culture and politics in Iraq.](image)

Next, the survey posed a question designed to explore how the respondents’ perceive cultural diversity in Australian society, and Australians’ openness to distinct socio-cultural identities and their attendant cultures, religions and
political opinions. When asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with the following statement, “People in Australia are very diverse and open to different cultures, religions and political opinions,” the respondents painted yet a different picture to that of the previous question. Indeed, 20 respondents or 27 per cent of the sample “strongly agree” and 35 respondents, or nearly half of the sample, “agree” that people in Australia are very diverse and open to different cultures, religions and political opinions (see Figure 5.29). That is, three-quarters of the sample agreed with the statement. This is notable, because although the respondents indicated that Australians are open to different cultures and identities, they don’t perceive that Australians are interested to learn about Iraqi culture in particular. This tentatively suggests that they perceive a stigma attached to their particular socio-cultural identities in the popular Australian context. Such a suggestion, however, is inconclusive and requires further exploration in the interviews to understand the meanings the respondents ascribe to such attitudes.

Figure 5.29: Australia’s diversity and openness

In a similar vein to the previous three questions, the respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement, “I feel welcomed by most people I meet in Australia.” A significant majority of 48 respondents or 65 per cent of the
sample answered in the positive: 23 per cent indicating that they “strongly agree” and 42 per cent indicating that they “agree”. Seventeen respondents or 23 per cent of the sample indicated “neutral” (see Figure 5.30). Only seven respondents answered in the negative, indicating that they “disagree,” and no respondents indicated, “strongly disagree.” This is in line, to an extent, with the findings of the Australian Humanitarian Settler Survey presented in Hugo’s 2011 report, which “shows that only a tenth of respondents did not “feel they are part of mainstream social and cultural life” (Hugo 2011, p. 232). Although “feeling welcome” and “feel they are part of mainstream social and cultural life” are not absolutely equivalent notions, they may be compared insofar as they represent the respondents’ perception that they belong to and are able to act as social agents in the broader Australian milieu.

The results from this question stand in contrast to findings presented in Figure 5.30, and suggest that “feeling welcome” is not necessarily a product of reciprocal cultural understanding, but perhaps a more abstract perception and feeling. That is, although the respondents have made it clear they do not feel that their socio-cultural identity is well understood by other Australians, they feel welcomed in a more abstract, and perhaps superficial sense. That is, they are comfortable to pursue their own socio-cultural agenda, because they are

![Figure 5.30: Feeling Welcome by Australian Society](image-url)
‘welcome’ to do so, even in the face of insubstantial intercultural understanding between themselves and the wider community. It is therefore important to keep this distinction between substantive and abstract forms of intercultural understanding and belonging in mind during the interviews, in order to substantiate and explore these findings.

When looking at the propensity for humanitarian migrants to adjust positively (or settle successfully) in the Australian context, it is important to assess how confident they are that they can make choices about their life and future. Most commonly, the respondents indicated that they are “confident” that they can make their own choices about their future in Australia, with 25 respondents or 34 per cent of the sample indicating as such. The next most common response, given by 23 respondents or 32 per cent of the sample is “a little confident.” At the extreme ends of the spectrum, 16 respondents or 22 per cent indicated “very confident”, and 9 respondents or 12 per cent of the sample indicated “not confident at all” (see Figure 5.31). When compared with the results of the SONA study presented in Hugo (2011), this sample has lower levels of confidence than other humanitarian arrivals. Particular reasons for the respondents’ relatively low confidence levels is explored further in the interviews.

Figure 5.31: Respondents’ levels of confidence in their ability to make their own choices about their future in Australia
Another empirical indicator used to explore the respondents’ attitudes towards, and sense of belonging to the broader Australian social milieu is happiness. The respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed with the statement, “I am happy with my life in Australia.” The most common response, given by 24 respondents, or 33 per cent of the sample is that they “agree.” Twenty-three respondents, or 32 per cent of the sample indicated “neutral.” The third most common response, given by a quarter of the sample, is “strongly agree.” Six respondents or a tenth of the sample “disagree” and only one respondent indicated, “strongly disagree” (see Figure 5.32). The proportion among the Iraqi sample of this study indicating that they are “neutral” about their happiness, or are not happy is significantly higher than the findings of the AHSS survey, in which 47.9 per cent of the sample surveyed “strongly agree” with the statement “I am happy with my life in Australia” (Hugo, 2011, p. 245). Such findings specific to Iraqis is corroborated in DIAC’s 2011 report; “Iraqis are more likely [than other country groups] to indicate that they are not happy” (DIAC 2011, p. 54). This is worth further exploration in the interviews to explore what aspects of the respondents’ lives lend to their unhappiness.

![Figure 5.32: Happiness of the Respondents](image-url)
Volunteering is an empirical indicator used to gauge trust and measure social capital. A significant majority of the sample do not currently volunteer in an organisation or community group in Australia, with 64 respondents or 88 per cent of the sample indicating as such (see Figure 5.33). This is in line with Hugo’s finding that Iraqi-born humanitarian arrivals had the lowest rate of volunteering of all new-arrivals, with 5.8 per cent involved in volunteering, versus 21.6 per cent for the Australian-born population more generally (Hugo, 2011, p. 222).

![Volunteering rates of Respondents](image)

**Figure 5.33: Volunteering rates of Respondents**

While it appears that the sample have relatively low rates of volunteering, which theoretically suggests a lack of trust and therefore social capital and civic network engagement, this finding is problematic. For example, when it comes to measuring volunteering rates, socio-cultural nuances and understandings must be taken into consideration. As Hugo points out, “there are different meanings and ethnic-based understandings of the term ‘volunteer’ and this hides the fact that they engage in a large amount of ‘informal volunteering’” (Hugo, 2001, p. 221). That is, the respondents may be involved in informal or simple civic engagement that is not perceived as “volunteering” by their ethno-specific group. This is explored further in the qualitative interviews.
Bolstering the argument that low formal volunteering rates do not necessarily indicate disinterest or low actual rates of volunteering, are findings about the respondents’ intentions or desire to volunteer. A slight majority of 38 respondents or 52 per cent of the sample indicated that they would like to volunteer (see Figure 5.34). Again, the relationship between the respondents’ intentions and their realisation of said intentions is revealing. This relatively high level of desire to volunteer suggests that a majority of respondents are mindful of and seek civic engagement, yet, for some reasons are yet to do so. The particular barriers to volunteering faced by the respondents are explored in the interviews.

![Figure 5.34: Desire to Volunteer by Respondents](image)

### 5.7 Political behaviours and perspectives on political life in Australia and Internationally

This section explores the political attitudes and behaviours of the respondents. Firstly, the respondents were asked whether following politics in Australia is important to them. The most common response, given by 33 respondents or 45 per cent of the sample was “somewhat.” The next most common response, given by 22 respondents or 30 per cent of the sample was “no.” A quarter of the sample, or 18 respondents, indicated “yes” (see Figure 5.35). The sample displays low levels of interest in politics compared to the Australian
population more broadly. Data collected in the Australian Election Study (AES) in 2013 shows 42 per cent of the Australia-wide sample indicated an answer equivalent to the “yes” given by a quarter of the respondents in this study (McAllister & Cameron, 2014, p. 33). Notably, while only five per cent of the AES sample indicated that they have no interest in following politics, a far greater proportion of the Iraqi sample in this study – 30 per cent – indicated as such. The tendency for almost a third of the Iraqi sample to remain aloof from Australian politics altogether deserves further exploration in the qualitative interviews to account for this choice.

Next, the respondents were asked whether following international politics was important to them. The most common sentiment among the sample was “somewhat”, with 30 respondents or 41 per cent of the sample indicating as such. The next most common response, given by 23 respondents, or 32 per cent of the sample was “no.” A little over a quarter of the sample, or 20 respondents, indicated “yes” (see Figure 5.36). As with the preceding finding, the tendency for almost a third of the Iraqi sample to remain aloof from international politics altogether deserves further attention in the qualitative interviews to explore the respondents’ reasons for this choice.
Having asked the respondents about their abstract perceptions of following politics, the survey then asked about their actual behaviours when it comes to accessing information about politics in Australia and internationally. Firstly, it asked the respondents to indicate how often they access information about politics, both in and outside of Australia. Contrary to the relatively similar answers given in the preceding two questions, the respondents’ actual behaviours – that is, how much they seek out and access information about politics – show that their political interests/curiosities are more oriented towards the international arena than the Australian context. Figure 5.37 shows this comparative picture.

While a majority of 41 respondents or 56 per cent of the sample access information about international politics “most days,” only 19 respondents or 26 per cent of the sample access information about politics in Australia at the same frequency. Further to this trend, 41 respondents, or 56 per cent of respondents indicated that they “rarely” or “never” access information about politics in Australia. Indeed, “rarely” was the most common response – given by 32 respondents, or 44 per cent of the sample - to the question “how often do you access information about politics in Australia?” In contrast, 19 respondents or 26 per cent of the sample indicated that they “rarely” or
“never” access information about politics outside of Australia. This shows that the respondents’ political interests and/or orientations are transnational, rather than national.

![Frequency of access to information about politics](image)

**Figure 5.37: How frequently respondents access information about politics in and outside Australia**

The respondents’ involvement in political parties or civil activist groups is minimal. Ninety-seven per cent of the sample - all but two respondents - indicated that they were not involved in any political organisations in Australia (see Figure 5.38). Furthermore, this same vast majority – 97 per cent of the sample - indicated that they do not intend to be involved in such organisations in the future (see Figure 5.39). This lack of involvement in political organisations, and the complete lack of desire to be involved in the future, is noteworthy. Unlike previous questions, where there has been a disjuncture between the respondents’ desires for engagement and their realisation of these desires, their responses to these two questions suggest that their behaviours reflect their attitudes. For example, whereas respondents who are yet to socialise outside their immediate community do not rule out doing so in the future, it appears the respondents purposely remain aloof from political
involvement, politically oriented civic activities or political activism, and wish to remain as such in the future. This firm reticence toward political involvement deserves further attention in the qualitative interviews.

Figure 5.38: Respondents’ involvement in a political party or civil activist group in Australia

Figure 5.39: Respondents’ desire for involvement in a political party or civil activist group in Australia
The same behavioural and attitudinal patterns are evident in the respondents’ approach to political parties or civil activist groups outside of Australia. In fact, no respondents indicated that they were involved in political organisations overseas, and none indicated that they would like to be involved in the future. Again, this suggests a firm and purposive choice by all respondents to stay away from such organisations. This phenomenon deserves further exploration in the qualitative interviews.

5.8 Perspectives on Human Rights in Australia

This section explores the respondents’ understandings and perspectives of human rights in Australia, on a personal level and a more abstract, national and governmental level. Firstly, the respondents were asked whether they think that the human rights of all individuals are upheld in Australia. A majority of 64 per cent, or 47 answered “always”. Sixteen respondents, or 22 per cent of the sample answered “mostly,” while 14 per cent answered, “I don’t know” (see Figure 5.40). No respondents answered “sometimes,” “occasionally” or “never.” While the majority of respondents agree that people’s rights are respected in Australia, it is worth exploring in the qualitative interviews why some respondents answered “mostly” and others, “I don’t know.”

![Bar chart showing responses to “In Australia, are the human rights of all individuals upheld?” with 64% answering “Always,” 22% answering “Mostly,” and 14% answering “I Don’t Know.”]
Figure 5.40: Respondents’ opinions on whether human rights are upheld in Australia

The respondents were then asked to reflect upon their own experiences in Australia, and whether they think that their personal human rights have been respected and upheld since arriving. A majority of 66 per cent answered that their human rights have “always” been respected and upheld since arriving in Australia. Eighteen respondents, or 22 per cent of the sample answered “mostly” while four respondents or 6 per cent indicated, “sometimes.” No respondents answered “occasionally” or “never” (see Figure 5.41). While the majority of respondents agree that their have been respected in Australia, it is worth exploring in the qualitative interviews why some respondents answered “mostly” and others, “sometimes.” Such answers suggest that there have been instances where their rights have not been upheld and it is worth understanding at what sites of socio-political interaction these perceived breaches have occurred, and whether there is a recurring pattern or area of concern for this particular group of Iraqi refugees.

Figure 5.41: Respondents’ opinions on whether their human rights have been upheld in Australia

Since arriving in Australia, do you feel your human rights have been respected and upheld?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Don't Know</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</table>
The respondents were posed the question “In your opinion, is the Australian government’s treatment of asylum seekers in line with ideas of human rights?” a majority of the sample – 58 per cent or 42 respondents – answered “yes”. Twenty-five respondents or 34 per cent answered, “I don’t know.” While these findings are roughly similar to those for the previous question, one point of difference is that more respondents – seven individuals or 20 per cent of the sample – answered “no” (see Figure 5.42). That is, seven respondents think that Australian Government treatment of Asylum Seekers is not in line with human rights principles. This is worth further exploration in the qualitative interviews.

![Figure 5.42: Respondents' opinions on whether Australian Government treatment of asylum seekers is based on human rights principles](image)

**Figure 5.42: Respondents’ opinions on whether Australian Government treatment of asylum seekers is based on human rights principles**

**5.9 Brief Summary of Quantitative Analysis**

Overall, the survey sample represents a newly arrived, young demographic with high levels of childbearing. All the respondents identify with a religion, whether it is Islam or Christianity, and none indicated that they have “no
religion,” which is in stark contrast to Australian population more broadly. The respondents are highly educated yet they have significantly high rates of unemployment and labour force participation and, as such, a majority are reliant on Centrelink and other welfare services. Compounding this, the respondents display low levels of proficiency in English and low levels of access to English language tuition, a service offered them by the Australian state.

The respondents exhibit a desire for intercultural contact and understanding with the broader Australian society, yet this remains largely unrealised, as they tend to socialise exclusively within their immediate socio-cultural community. Notably, they appear to socialise the least with “white Australian citizens.” In line with this, the respondents place great value on maintaining their cultural values and practices, yet also have a strong desire to learn about and understand the dominant national Australian cultural and society into which they are settling. The sample displays relatively low rates or volunteering, and low levels of confidence and happiness when compared with other humanitarian entrants, and the Australian population more broadly.

The vast majority of survey respondents are relatively politically apathetic, as is clear from the extremely low levels of engagement with civic or political groups. Despite this, the respondents appear to follow political news somewhat regularly, with their interest directed more to international than domestic concerns and events. With these key findings in mind, the next chapter presents the qualitative data analysis.
Chapter Six

Qualitative Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the qualitative data. To recap, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 Iraqi refugees who were granted protection in or after 2003, and currently reside in Australia. The interviews were conducted in Arabic with the assistance of interpreters, and were then translated into English and transcribed by a NAATI-accredited translator. As stated in the methodology chapter, the interview questions were designed to elicit data about the subjective meanings that individuals ascribe to their socio-political attitudes and behaviours. The qualitative data was then subjected to systematic thematic content analysis with the initial help of NVivo software.

This chapter is divided into four sections, or categories. Each category represents a period in the life story of the respondents, from their personal history through to their current circumstances. The categories are labelled, “Personal stories up until arrival in Australia,” “Settlement in Australia,” “Current social life” and “Current political life.” The analysis presented under each category focuses on the dominant patterns and themes that became evident in the data after three rounds of coding and analysis. These themes highlight the prominent ideas, perceptions, interpretations, expectations, behaviours, relationships and meanings that were raised and articulated by respondents, thereby giving an overall understanding of each of the broad categories being addressed. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the qualitative analysis, and an introduction to the theoretically integrated, conceptual discussion presented in the following chapter.

6.2 A Brief Overview of the Qualitative Sample.

Twenty of the 30 interview respondents, a third of the sample, arrived to Australia seeking onshore protection. One arrived by plane and nineteen
arrived by boat. The rest of the sample were granted offshore protection and were resettled in Melbourne, Perth, Sydney or regional Victoria. Those who were resettled in Sydney and Perth subsequently relocated to Victoria, either to Melbourne, or the regional towns of Shepparton or Cobram. Four of the 30 respondents had family already living in Australia before they arrived and only two of the respondents were female. All but three respondents were married with offspring, ranging from one to ten children. On average, each respondent had three children at the time the interviews were conducted.

All twenty respondents who arrived as onshore asylum seekers, and three of the respondents who were resettled via the offshore pathway, were in situations of protracted displacement before arrival. That is, 23 respondents were displaced for more than five years before arriving in Australia. Many were internally displaced, while others were living in countries of first asylum, most commonly in Iran and/or Syria. The most common route taken by respondents to Australia involved employing the help of people smugglers; most respondents procured a forged passport, travelled by plane to Malaysia, then travelled by boat or plane to Indonesia, and then onwards to Australian waters by boat. Those who arrived seeking onshore protection spent varying lengths of time in immigration detention, from three months to three years. The four respondents who spent the least amount of time in detention - between three and six months – arrived after August 2012, and were released into the community on bridging visas. Most commonly, the respondents in this sample were interred in the Christmas Island camp before being transferred to the Darwin camp, and then released into the community. Four respondents were held in the Manus Island detention facility, and one of the female respondents was interred with her children in the Broadmeadows camp in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

Four of the interview respondents worked as interpreters for the Australian Defence Force in Iraq (as “locally engaged employees”), and were subsequently provided “In-country Special Humanitarian Visas” for themselves and their families by the Australian state. In May 2008, an act of Parliament provided for 500 extra visas under Australia’s humanitarian
program, to be given to Iraqis who were employed by the coalition forces as interpreters. The four interpreters in this sample arrived to Australia as part of this cohort.

6.3 Personal Stories

Push Factors: Identity and Suffering

It is well established in the forced migration literature that the majority of people applying for refugee status do so in order to escape persecution in their home country (indeed, such is the definition of “refugee” in the UN Convention and Protocol). That is, while forced migrants’ motivations are complex, informed by a variety of overlapping and even conflicting factors that cannot be neatly disentangled and placed under the definite categories of “push” and “pull factors,” research has shown that their desire to flee persecution and insecurity often outweigh “pull” factors – incentives that exist in destination countries - in their calculations at the time of flight (Marfleet, 2006; Castles & Miller, 2009). Furthermore, the factors that motivate flight tend to involve traumatic and challenging experiences that are inextricably linked to a displaced person’s personal identity and safety.

The forced migrant’s flight and struggle to find refuge/asylum in foreign lands is a formative socio-political experience, one that is central to their long-term physical and mental condition. It is important to explore the respondents’ stories of flight and to gauge the recurring patterns and experiences for this sample. To this end, the interview respondents were asked to describe the factors that led them to apply for resettlement through the UNHCR and/or to seek asylum in Australia. Most of the respondents shared their stories candidly, and did so with a fervour that suggests they are still deeply affected by their personal histories. Out of all the topics broached throughout the interviews, the respondents’ stories of flight and initial displacement were the most emphatic and detailed responses.
The overarching theme to come from the data about the respondents’ lives before arriving to Australia, and their reasons for fleeing Iraq, is a profound sense of suffering. All the respondents talked of suffering in a variety of ways: from mental and emotional suffering to physical abuse and trauma. In every case, their suffering was borne of politically-motivated violence or harassment that was justified in broad terms of identity; some respondents suffered abuse due to their own religious beliefs and practices, or their socio-political affiliations, actions and behaviours. In other words, the respondents’ suffering was a consequence of authoritarian and militant manifestations of identity politics that prevail in Iraq, and have, according to the respondents, intensified since 2005.

A complex mix of religious persecution, militant sectarianism, and the political oppression of certain socio-cultural and political groups are key causes for all the respondents’ flight from Iraq. This is evident in a remark made by the respondent named Abu Bakr: “There are reasons. First of all, the fighting between the Sunni and the Shia [is a major factor]. Then there is the persecution from the rest of the political parties. Due to your background – if you’re Sunni, if you’re this or that - they will persecute you… so because I am Sunni they consider me to be a follower of Saddam Hussein, [and I was harassed by a Shia militia]” (Author interview with Abu Bakr). Another respondent named Akil, noted that the general socio-political situation prevailing at his time of flight was characterised by “no safety, and many, many other things… Sectarian groups, Islamic parties and the general problem, like a lack of safety associated with them” (Author interview with Akil). These responses typify the perception conveyed by all respondents that a political culture of persecution and violence existed in Iraq at their time of flight.

A secondary theme that came out of the interview data about the respondents’ decisions to eventually flee Iraq was the desire to protect their family, and to prioritise aspirations for the future of their offspring. Twenty-two of the 30 respondents stated that their family was a main source of motivation to flee. As Husayn, explained, “So I was thinking about my family, my children… I
couldn’t imagine that one day they may kidnap my son or my daughter” (Author interview with Husayn). A desire to protect family members was present throughout many of the respondents’ stories of flight, and seems to have sustained their motivation to seek long-term safety.

Across the majority of respondents’ stories were recurring claims about how their persecution manifested. Clusters of respondents suffered in similar ways, as they were members of, or were identified with certain socio-political communities or religious groups in Iraq that were persecuted at certain times by actors who had particular modes of operation. In order to present the patterns of persecution prevalent in the sample, this section is divided into two subsections. The first highlights the major patterns in the stories of respondents who were already displaced prior to 2003, and the second presents the stories of those who were displaced after 2003.

**Flight Before 2003**

A majority of 23 respondents were living in situations of protracted displacement before arriving to Australia. That is, 77 per cent of the sample was displaced for more than five years before coming to Australia. Of those, eleven were displaced even before the US-led occupation in 2003. Most commonly, these respondents were protractedly displaced in countries of first asylum in the region, most commonly in Iran, either as stateless guests or as asylum seekers. The dominant cohort or “vintage” (Kunz 1973) among the respondents is a group of seven individuals who were displaced and stateless, along with their families, since the Iran-Iraq War started in 1980. They are Shia Muslims, and identify themselves as coming from the “Middle (Business) class” (Author interview with Hassan). They were living in Southern Iraq when, in the early 1980s and into the nineties, they were displaced as part of a systematic attempt by the Ba’athist regime to subdue, disperse or eradicate the influential Shia majority – seen as coming from a Persian, or non-Arab background - in this region.
Four of this cohort were either deported or fled to Iran. One of these respondents was Hakeem, a Shia man from Southern Iraq, whose story captures many aspects of the narratives told by all the respondents; the powerlessness, humiliation and suffering he felt throughout his years of persecution and protracted displacement. Born and raised in Iraq, Hakeem’s family was deported to Iran in 1984 when he was fifteen years old. He explained that his family was deported when his brother had to join the army during the war between Iran and Iraq. He explained, “if he didn’t they would capture him and execute him. So he went to apply, and that was when the door opened for us.” The Sunni Arab Ba’athist regime imprisoned Hakeem’s brother immediately and went about locating and deporting the rest of his family.

In Iran, Hakeem and his family were placed in camps and given limited rights. The Iranian government then offered them the option to leave the camp but added, “we [will] have nothing to do with you.” Taking this option, Hakeem and his family moved to Tehran where “there was a cemetery… that cemetery had a room [about five square metres in size]… we all lived in it, with my family, and the toilets [we used] were the ones for the people who come to visit the cemetery.” Hakeem and his family lived in this room in a cemetery for seven years. He reflected, “There was not even electricity; we had to use a lamp…. It very much exhausted us”. Hakeem was now the family’s only breadwinner. Under his charge were his chronically ill father, his mother and five sisters. Hakeem could not attend school and struggled to make ends meet in a context where “no one was supporting us” (Author interview with Hakeem).

As Hakeem grew older, his “situation became worse and worse.” Due to his residency status, he was regularly exploited on the labour market and had no recourse to justice. He explained, “if my employer didn’t give me any money or [treated me unfairly], there was nothing I can do… I used to feel humiliated… but I cannot even say a single word back to them” (Author interview with Hakeem). Then, in the late 1990s, fed up with the vicious cycle of oppression, exploitation and alienation in which he was caught, Hakeem left
Iran, forfeiting his Iranian residency papers as he did, and travelled to Syria with the express purpose of registering as a refugee with the UNHCR, so that he could be resettled elsewhere. He explained, “I tried to register with the United Nations … The timeline they gave me said within a year but I could not remain in Syria as my [papers that allowed me to stay in Syria] had expired.” Hakeem was again stuck due to his lack of identity papers - that is, the absence of official political membership in a recognised national polity - and was forced to return to his family in Iran via a smuggling route. Back in Iran, Hakeem was in a worse situation than before, facing immediate imprisonment should police find him. Hakeem continued to struggle to make ends meet and care for his family until 2005 when he heard of a smuggling route to Australia and decided to buy a forged passport and leave Iran. This story is characteristic of the chronic suffering, socio-political alienation and violent identity politics that have shaped the course of many of the respondents’ lives, particularly those living without status in Iran.

Three other respondents in this cohort faced similar persecution in Iraq for their Shia and/or perceived Iranian backgrounds. They were not deported to Iran, but fled to Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia where they were denied substantive social and political rights, were exploited and humiliated and, ultimately, remained protractedly displaced. This theme of suffering as a result of perceived identity is captured in the narrative of Haider, who was forced in the early 1990s to flee across the border into Saudi Arabia where he lived in a refugee camp. His narrative brings together many of the common anecdotes or stories of suffering that came up in the interviews, and is in many ways an exemplar of the patterns of socio-political repression, militant identity politics, physical and emotional trauma, displacement, flight, internment in refugee camps, protracted displacement and the search for a secure life and future, a “durable solution,” that were apparent in the sample more broadly.

Haider shared his story in a solemn voice, with his face turned down towards the ground. He became increasingly upset as his tale went on. Before flight, Haider was imprisoned in the “general national security section, with Saddam’s secret intelligence services, for approximately six months.” His
family had no news of his whereabouts. He was subjected to persistent interrogation and suffered various forms of torture – including not being allowed to use the toilet, being hung from a window by his hands for several hours at a time, being whipped with hoses, beaten, and force-fed boiling water. Haider, touching his scarred eye, said, “one day I asked one of the officers [for some water to drink]… and he kicked me with his shoes right [in my face] so that my eyes became [damaged].” Around this same time, Haider’s brother and cousins had been taken from his neighbourhood by state forces – “from our suburb they had taken about 500 or 600 people that day” - and executed. Upon being released alive, and learning of these events, Haider immediately fled over the border to Saudi Arabia.

Of his seven years living in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia, Haider recalls, “they treated us like animals… they bring food and throw it on us. We didn’t see cities or towns for seven years… a life miserable to the maximum.” He notes that the camp was run by Saudi military men, who “were Sunni, so they considered themselves at war with us … they beat me up really well, one of them kicked me with his shoes on here and I stayed a whole week with my ears ringing from it” (Author interview with Haider). This story of demoralising persecution and ongoing physical abuse continues to define much of Haider’s perspective on life and struggle, even after he was smuggled to Australia and eventually granted humanitarian protection in 2005. He reflected on his life with a sad sigh: “I have not seen in my life something good… there has been nothing but torture. I have seen nothing else. … 4 years in jail, 2 years in the army, 7 years in Saudi, don’t know exactly how many years in Iran, and now I am in Australia” (Author interview with Haider).

It is clear that systemic persecution of Shia in the South of Iraq and other state violence perpetrated by the ruling B’aathist regime under Saddam Hussein was prevalent from the early eighties, and was the cause of eleven respondents’ initial displacement, which then persisted until their arrival to Australia. Throughout this long period of time, the respondents were repeatedly oppressed and exploited, ostensibly due to their religious and/or perceived ethnic identity, and all suffered in turn, becoming highly disillusioned,
mentally affected, and alienated from the authoritarian systems to which they were subject. Eventually, all of these respondents sought a circuit breaker to the vicious cycle in which they were trapped, and worked outside the global governance system charged with managing forced migration, paying people smugglers to get them out of the region.

Flight After 2003

Nineteen respondents in the sample were residing in Iraq when the occupation started in 2003, and have subsequently fled the country. Of the 19 who fled in 2003 or after, 12 lived in situations of protracted displacement before settling in Australia. A significant cluster among this group were seven Shia individuals who were harassed out of their neighbourhoods by local militias of various political and/or religious persuasions in Southern Iraq, as part of the escalating violence from 2005 onwards. Many among this group were internally displaced before fleeing to countries of first asylum; these individuals tended first to facilitate the passage of their families – wives, children and parents – to relative safety in Jordan or Syria and arranged for them to stay and live there. They themselves tended to remain mobile, travelling back and forth from Iraq. As Ali explained “I kept moving from one place to another so I maintained seeing my family once or twice a month” (Author interview with Ali). These respondents engaged in circular migration as a coping strategy; to earn money, remain abreast of the security and political situation in Iraq (commonly with a mind for voluntary return), and to get their affairs in order should they be forced to leave more permanently.

In many cases, the interviewees perceived themselves as being threatened because of their religious and ethnic backgrounds and identities generally and in light of the indiscriminate violence in Iraq at the time, and not necessarily because of explicit actions on their behalf, such as overt political opposition and activism or controversial/politically charged religious affiliations with certain militant groups or leaders. In fact, most of the respondents appeared politically apathetic and actively avoided being involved in any political movements in Iraq.
There is a discernible pattern among the sample of individuals being harassed because of their choice of vocation/profession or the way they carried out their jobs. Ali owned a shop and an Internet café in Iraq, and towards the end of 2008 began to be harassed and threatened by a local Sunni Islamist militia. He recalled, “It was just this group’s mentality… the ones who [do not accept men who] shave their beard”. Ali explained that this fundamentalist group were ordering him to monitor and censor what his customers browse on the Internet. He explained his point of view, “When a person sits on the internet in my shop it is not my responsibility to monitor what they are looking at… I can’t have control over how people can use the Internet”. He added, “but there is no arguing with them, there is no discussion between you and this group, its only one way, its either yes or you get hurt” (Author interview with Ali). Ali was threatened and later stabbed in the face by a member of an Islamist militia for the manner in which he conducted his job, which was not to their taste.

Further to individuals being persecuted in Iraq due to their professional vocation, four respondents in the sample worked as interpreters for the Coalition forces in Iraq, specifically with Australian troops, and felt their lives in danger as a result. When Australia withdrew its troops from Iraq in 2008, the interpreters feared that they would be targeted for having worked with the Coalition forces, and would no longer have the patronage and protection of said forces. They and their immediate families were offered Special Humanitarian Visas by the Australian Government, which granted them refugee status and resettlement in Australia. Many of the interpreters chose to move to Australia, though according to the respondents some remained in Iraq despite the danger.

One of the interpreters, Abdur Rahman, spoke of the rising violence in Iraq, the growing prevalence of disparate fundamentalist, religious groups in the years leading up to 2008. He recalled, “It was very dangerous to live in Iraq if you are an interpreter because Al Qaeda and other groups, they attack many interpreters and they kill them because they are working with the coalition forces.” He relayed the following story: “There were about twenty
interpreters… working with the coalition forces in Basra airport.” He explained that as the interpreters were leaving their work, they were ushered to their bus by “people [that] were dressed as security forces, like police or Iraqi army, but they were fake.” Once inside the bus, the fake Iraqi security forces opened fire on the interpreters: Twenty-three persons… they killed all of them” (Author Interview with Abdur Rahman). In fear of his own and his family’s life, and despite reservations about leaving his home country, Abdur Rahman decided to leave Iraq. Each of the interpreters witnessed or suffered violent experiences and were characterised as “traitors” by certain groups in Iraqi society, which informed their decisions to resettle in Australia, where they hoped to find security and education for their family.

**Identity politics, Violence and Suffering**

The respondents were all targeted due to their religious and/or ethnic identities, or association with certain political groups or persuasions. They were threatened, scared and emotionally and physically harmed as result of their experiences within this system of socio-political relations. Most felt humiliated, traumatised and alienated, lacking any agency or control over their lives and futures. This is exemplified by Hakeem’s comment: “In Iran, they used to tell us ‘you are Iraqis.’ In Iraq they used to tell us ‘you are Iranians’”. He lamented, “So I could not stay. I didn’t have a country, I didn’t have the documents, so I decided to come to Australia just to belong to some country, to have proper documents, to have a proper identity” (Author interview with Hakeem). At the time of flight, none of the respondents could continue to abide the oppressive system of militant identity politics to which they were subject. Each maintained that physically removing themselves from their context at that time, and applying for refuge and political membership elsewhere (no matter the means of achieving such a goal) was their only option for ongoing survival.

(ii). Pull Factors: Spatial Security Rights
The dominant theme that came out of the interviews about “pull factors” was the respondents’ desire and search for spatial security rights. In this context, “spatial security rights’ include “the right to enter a territory of a state, to remain there, to work and/or study there – in short, to plan a future in a more or less secure manner” (Yuval Davis, 2011, p. 57). All of the respondents cite personal, spatial security rights as the main drawcard to seek asylum in a country outside of Iraq and other countries in the immediate region, such as Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria, who are not signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and Protocol. Most of the respondents answered the question simply and in few words: “I needed the refuge” (Author interview with Hafiza).

As a corollary to this, the majority of respondents noted that along with security and safety they hoped their destination country would provide them a right to an official identity, such as residency or citizenship, and a concomitant respect for their identity and background, as well as an education and a future for their children. “Here there is safety, and a future for my children” (Author interview with Malikah). Another, Abu Bakr, said, “Australia is good for my kids… that’s why I decide to come. It’s good for them, the education here is better” (Author interview with Abu Bakr).

Few of the respondents were drawn to seek asylum in Australia by virtue of it being Australia per se. Rather, they sought asylum in any safe, stable country where their identity and rights would be respected and upheld. Interestingly, none of the interviewees who arrived to Australia by boat and applied for onshore protection, knew much about Australia, or knew anything substantive about the culture or the political system before arriving. They did, however, have a vague, positive impression of the country as democratic and respectful of human rights, regardless of a person’s background. As Ahmad noted, “You don’t know anything about the country. You don’t know about the culture. You didn’t know anything about the people. You didn’t know if you would live there safely or you would suffer like your country. So you didn’t understand what is going on. So it is not an easy idea or decision to make”
The decision to come to Australia, for the most part, was extremely difficult.

It is apparent from the responses that smuggling networks to Australia were being advertised throughout the displaced Iraqi community after 2003. Yusuf noted that when he was in asylum in Syria, he would hear rumours; “I heard the people talk about Australia, the freedom in it, and the democracy in it, and the good living environment. All this talk made me think about it” (Author interview with Yusuf). Those respondents who mentioned that Australia was the specific end goal to their flight only did so in the context of smuggling. That is, they came to Australia because a smuggling route or passage to Australia was open to them. This is particularly true of those respondents who departed from Iran. Many of them mention the “rumours” they had heard about going to Malaysia and then Indonesia, and finally to Australia, and were convinced that this was a viable option for them to take when they saw or heard of acquaintances leaving on the journey. On this, Hakeem noted, “there was no available open route for me except this one to Australia. You go to Indonesia and then you come by boat… either you make it or you die… some of my friends were leaving, or had left… from what their family told us, yes they left using this available route” (Author interview with Hakeem). It appears that, irregular migratory pathways, even to geographically distant place such as Australia, were being etched out in line with rising number of protractedly displaced in the region, people with fading hopes for a durable solution to their situation via UNHCR resettlement programs. This lends support to De Haas’s contention about irregular migration being a function of attempts to restrict human movement through border controls and other mechanisms, rather than a cause of migration per se. For most of the sample, smuggling provided a means to an end. The end, in this case, being spatial security rights, not necessarily an end based on any clear insight into the precise nature of socio-cultural and political conditions in the destination country.

Five of the thirty respondents chose to come to Australia as they had existing networks here, whether they were family or friends. In these cases, the
existence of social networks in Australia complemented the existence of known smuggling networks. As Fazil said of his decision to seek asylum in Australia, “Why Australia? Because it was easier than the European countries and everyone in Iran was talking about, you know, going to Australia… so I just followed what everyone was talking about.” He adds that some people, including himself, had existing social networks in Australia. Through these social connections, they “had seen that their lives [in Australia] were different from the life they had in Iran and that’s why they were more focused on Australia than other countries… My relatives are here” (Author interview with Fazil). It is interesting to note that, despite their networks in Australia, they chose not to pursue more official channels – such as arriving through sponsorship. These respondents suggested that they knew it would be more expedient to be smuggled than to apply through the bureaucratic channels available to them.

(iii) The Journey to Australia: Cognitive Dissonance

The interview respondents who were granted offshore protection visas had little to say about their journey to Australia. In contrast, many of the interview respondents who arrived seeking onshore protection (only one onshore arrival in the sample came by plane and the rest by boat) spoke at length about their journey. Similar to the importance placed upon “push factors” by the respondents – that is, their enthusiasm and willingness to share a detailed account of the repressive conditions that forced them to flee their homes – the journey to Australia appears to have deeply affected many of the respondents. Their asylum seeking journey appears to be an extension of their stories of flight, in that it constituted a great personal, mental, emotional and, at times, physical challenge, and appears to remain fresh and relevant to their current state of mind.

The dominant theme across the respondents’ stories about their asylum-seeking journey is a strong cognitive dissonance. The respondents clearly expressed the sense that they lacked agency and therefore any control over their route to Australia. Indeed, each of them felt they overcame great fears
and unprecedented trials to reach Australian shores; many had never seen an ocean before, nor been in a boat, and put their safety in the hands of people (smugglers) who they did not know, and who, often, did not speak their language. Despite their fear, discomfort and stress about the risky journey they embarked upon, and the warnings they received along the way to not attempt the journey, they continued to pursue this course of action, denying the trepidations of the means to pursue the end; reaching safety in Australia.

Hakeem, whose story of protracted displacement and exploitation in Iran was outlined above, recalled how his future was entirely in the hands of the smugglers. He said the smuggler in Indonesia gave him two route options for reaching Australia: “One is 16 days and the other four days,” the smuggler said. “But the four day route is dangerous. You will get there quicker but you have to go through the middle of the ocean. The 16 day one is a safe route, so if the ship was to sink or something, there would be mayday available.” Hakeem, not wishing to draw out his displacement any longer, and despite explicit warnings, decided to take the riskier “four-day” route to Christmas Island. He was more focussed on expediting the process and reaching the destination, than concerned for his safety.

Such a sentiment was common throughout the sample. Haider noted that he felt he would inevitably die on the journey to Australia, yet still he went ahead and boarded the boat: “we saw death with our own eyes, we thought there was no way to escape death” (Author interview with Haider). Lutfi said of his own feelings of the journey from Indonesia, “On the boat, I considered myself dead… yes I can swim, but what good is swimming in the middle of the ocean?” (Author interview with Lutfi). Despite their acute fear and at the risk of death, each of these respondents pushed on towards Australia, feeling it was their only hope.

Three respondents were stuck in Indonesia for many years, having been detained during or before making the journey by boat to Australia. While in Indonesia, they were given refugee status by the UNHCR, but effectively left marooned, with little indication of when they may be resettled. Faiz’s story
exemplifies a sense of cognitive dissonance and will to keep heading for Australia in the face of protracted displacement, poverty, a strong sense of alienation and a lack agency or hope, sentiments which were apparent throughout the entire sample, particularly among the onshore arrivals. Faiz explained how his boat was lost on the ocean for seventeen days, and ended up on an Indonesian island, where they were held for several weeks in a town hall-like building of a small village, waiting for the Indonesian authorities to come and deal with them. He explained, “That place was very filthy, with bugs and flies. We all got very ill… even one of my mates died there.” After two months spent living on the floor of this village hall, the group was relocated to Lombok where they were given accommodation in a small hostel and interviewed by UNHCR representatives to determine their applications for asylum. Most of the group were granted refugee status but not resettled.

Faiz stayed in Lombok for five years, during which time he “suffered a lot... no one to help us, all doors in front of us were closed, we didn’t have money, and we can’t return to Iraq.” In 2006 the UN “transferred” Faiz and others from his boat to Jakarta. Faiz recalled, “they put us in hotels, two, three people in one room… we refrained from food[ in protest]. I was hospitalised for many days… some people even sewed their lips together.” Nothing came of their protest and Faiz said he “gave up and thought ‘I may as well live in this country because going overseas is not going to happen, and I can’t go back to Iraq,’” Finally, in 2009, after almost ten years in Indonesia, an immigration official rang Faiz and said, “‘in September you are going to Australia.’” He recalled, “I couldn’t believe it. It was a miracle” (Author interview with Faiz). After years of displacement, poor living conditions and suffering, Faiz arrived to Sydney and then moved to Cobram where he had a loose contact.

Australia has a poor record of using official humanitarian channels to resettle the thousands of mandated refugees from Indonesia; from an annual intake of 56 between 2001-10, the current intake now sits at zero per year (Sulaiman, 2014). This is not so much a poor record, as a policy purposely designed to act as a supplementary deterrence mechanism for people seeking to use Indonesia as a launch pad to reach Australia. Immigration minister Scott Morrison
described the move, which took affect in August 2014, as “taking the sugar off the table”. As the sugar was being removed from the table, however, the Abbott government simultaneously reduced Australia’s humanitarian intake from 20,000 to 13,750, which only acts to further reduce the availability of viable “regular” migratory pathways available to forced migrants. Indeed, Indonesia, like Nauru and Manus Island, has become something of a legal sinkhole, where those found to be genuine refugees are trapped, potentially waiting years to have their resettlement location decided, if it happens at all. More asylum seekers on Manus have died since August 2012 than have been resettled elsewhere. The government’s approach to refugees in their immediate region has shifted from carrot and stick to mostly all stick. Respondents such as Faiz, who continue to be plagued by severe mental health issues as a result of their protracted displacement and punitive treatment in Indonesia are testament to the fallout of Australia’s deterrent approach to displaced humans at its border; the real world manifestations of the Australian state no longer providing the sugar.

To recap, all of the respondents who arrived to Australia by boat expressed feelings of ongoing uncertainty throughout their journey, yet remained dedicated to the end goal; they all expressed a powerful cognitive dissonance. Many spoke of not having any other choice but to undertake such risky actions. It was either that or remain displaced and in perpetual fear for their safety. Abdul Aziz exemplifies this in his remark, “I thought it was death either way, whether I stayed in Iraq or came to Australia” (Author interview with Abdul Aziz). Despite the respondents’ immense fear and, at times, sense of outright futility, they were motivated by a vague promise of a better life, and a hope of reaching long-term safety.

(iv) Camp Life: Punishment and Mental Health

For all 19 respondents who arrived by boat, immigration detention was their first experience of the socio-political system in Australia. The vast majority perceived their detainment and their treatment by staff in detention as punitive. As such, many of them quickly formed the impression that they were
characterised as unwanted outsiders by the Australian polity. That is, their first impression of their place in Australian society was one of exclusion; they were alien, outsiders, punished for seeking asylum. Some felt that such treatment was unwarranted, given their lawful intention of seeking asylum in Australia. As a consequence of their detention, and the perception of their treatment as punitive, a number of respondents developed feelings of isolation and alienation, which in many cases manifested as mental illness, from anxiety, stress and depression to extremely passive behaviours or more aggressive and reactive behaviours.

All 19 respondents felt their freedom was unjustly curtailed while in detention. Ali said simply, “Six months I stayed in the camp… from all aspects it wasn’t good. We were treated like prisoners…” (Author interview with Ali). Yasin, who was living in the community on a Bridging Visa at the time he was interviewed, noted that the camp staff were friendly, but that his experience in the camp, nevertheless, felt punitive and was a contributing factor in his developing mental health issues. He explained, “I felt like I was really inside a prison… [I developed] emotional problems and stress, depression and then things [got] worse … when I was released I felt better because I feel more freedom” (Author interview with Yasin). Though still frustrated that his application for asylum has not been resolved, Yasin was more emotionally stable outside of detention and in the community, where he felt the freedom to move around and have some control over his day to day life.

Four respondents mentioned that they perceived camp administrators’ treatment of the detainees as unfriendly. Hakeem was among these respondents, and perceived the administrators as providing services, yet also as patronising and at times manipulative. He said, “Despite the care, they used to play with our head... I think that they were playing, you know, with our mental capacity, just in order to break us or to give us a lesson to punish us…” (Author interview with Hakeem). It is clear that Hakeem interprets his experiences in detention as a purposeful effort to denigrate and punish him, which suggests he was feeling very much alienated throughout this time. Ali expressed a similar alienated sentiment, and felt that this punitive approach
caused and/or compounded the detainees’ sense of hopelessness and related mental health issues. He said, “[the employees at the camp] cause nervousness [anxiety]… they drain your nerves… they play on your mental health” (Author interview with Ali). Such perceptions suggest the respondents were not only dissatisfied with their treatment, but alienated by it; they felt personally targeted, misunderstood and rejected, many developing mental health issues as a result.

Hassan also interpreted his experiences in detention as punitive and further perceived the existence of racism in the administration of the camp – “you have to face it on a daily basis,” he said. In particular, he perceived that the camp administrators had a strong Christian-bias and lacked intercultural understanding, or enough intercultural literacy to provide culturally sensitive and/or religious-based services for non-Christians. He said that there was a clear sense that Christians received more favourable treatment from camp administrators and staff, and that some Muslim asylum seekers claimed to be Christian in order to improve their chances of good treatment, as well as a faster application processing time. He explained his point of view, “The most damage caused by the camp is the racism that occurs within… it was the people working there, they lacked full understanding about all the religions..” He perceived that “Christian people have more freedom than us, in the sense that if we wanted to conduct any religious or cultural activity, they are basically useless…. they don’t have that understanding in order to help us.” He went on, “they humiliate the Muslims by use of the Sijada [prayer mat] to play cards on, or drawing degrading pictures and comments on their shirts against Muslims. Many of these kinds of instances occurred and no one could assist us.” Hassan interpreted these actions as deeply offensive to his religious beliefs.

Hassan felt disaffected, uncared for by the camp administrators, and acted in order to rectify this by organising meetings with the camp administrators. He explained, “I organised three meetings with the head of immigration on Christmas Island… I told him you have to stop the humiliation of Muslims, if you lack any idea of Islam that is your problem, but there should remain
respect for the Muslims” (Author interview with Hassan). That is, he engaged
democratically with the camp administrators and appealed for more Muslim-
sensitive behaviours and services. Ultimately, though, he felt his voice was not
valued nor listened to, and his concerns were left unaddressed, which cause
him mental distress and led him to feel alienated. This manifested in Hassan’s
case as extremely passive behaviours, as he began to sleep some 20 hours per
day, “prayed” for the remain four. He said, “This is in addition to the
estrangement from one’s homeland and loneliness, and the way you’ve had to
travel and the current environment in which you’re forced to live”. He notes it
was difficult to be openly humiliated and then have your complaints ignored,
but ultimately “didn’t want to cause trouble”(Author interview with Hassan).
Hassan’s attempt to engage the camp administrators to further his substantive
rights fell upon deaf ears and contributed to Hassan developing more intense
feelings of alienation and exclusion, and leading him to spend his life
medicated and asleep, so as not to deal with the waking realities of his
situation.

Muhammad noted that life in detention on Christmas Island “destroyed” him
mentally. He said, “What we were not expecting when we arrived here was the
island… which had a negative impact on us and destroyed us mentally. We
were completely mentally destroyed…” (Author interview with Muhammad).
Abdul Aziz explained that they had no clear idea of where their life was
headed, and what would be the likely outcome of their applications for asylum.
This uncertainty caused mental stress and anxiety. As he explained, “they
started to bring us the news on the island, saying, ‘you will not stay in
Australia and we will take you back to Iraq.’ My circumstances, my life
flipped upside down” (Author interview with Abdul Aziz). It appears that
detainees commonly suffered from depression and other mental illnesses while
in the camp, and were medicated regularly with psychoactive drugs, such as
anti-depressants.

There were dissenting voices in the sample, with two respondents reflecting
positively on their time in detention. One of them, Yusuf identified with and
understood the Australian state’s approach to immigration detention, saying,
“it’s true that you start to consider yourself in detention if it’s over a long period, you feel like you have been imprisoned and restricted, but the reality is that it’s their right to check the person and whether they will let him into Australia… They have to check you. It’s their right.” He was happy with the facilities available, saying, “there was some [activities], there was gardening, exercise and gym and sports activities… and Internet…” (Author interview with Yusuf). Yusuf adopted a very rational approach to interpreting his treatment in detention and understood it in terms of what he saw as the Australian state’s legitimate prerogative.

Overall, detention significantly disrupted the migration pathways and negatively affected the mental health of many of the respondents. Not always detention in and of itself, but the length of detention and the treatment received inside detention centres made these respondents feel that they were unjustly detained; treated like criminals for seeking asylum and dehumanised, which in many cases made the respondents recall the injustices with which they were familiar in Iraq. In turn, it appears to have corrupted the participants’ capacity to readily develop a sense of belonging or potential belonging to Australian society, as they felt imprisoned, isolated and to an extent, unwanted. Moving on from this, these respondents who had a hard time in detention find it difficult to eschew the “Asylum seeker’ or even the “refugee” label, which they view in a negative light; a label that brings them shame and makes them feel stripped of agency and entitlement to act as empowered individuals in the Australian context. They have internalised this stereotypical identity, and act as passive subjects, unwanted guests and/or victims, with little motivation or sense of entitlement to seek redress for the injustices they feel they have suffered under the Australian legal system.

6.4 Settlement/Re-settlement Process
(i) Pre-arrival expectations: Ongoing struggle

Research has shown that, generally, refugees have high expectations about their new life, especially regarding their economic and occupational adjustment (Stein, 1981). Many humanitarian migrants do not expect to lose anything because of their migration, but instead expect to find opportunities to recover their lost social status and life. In light of this, the respondents were asked about their expectations before arriving to Australia, and whether their expectations have been met. The majority of the respondents indicated that they had no idea about Australia, or what to expect, and therefore feel neither acutely vindicated nor disappointed, but an ongoing sense of struggle. The second largest group among respondents said they held high expectations for their life in Australia, but that their expectations were subsequently disappointed. It is this group of interview respondents who provided the most detailed responses on this topic, and whose responses tended to dominate the analysis.

Overall the major theme to come out of this section of the data is one of ongoing struggle - a clear sense of chronic frustration as the respondents try to navigate an unfamiliar and daunting society. Their efforts largely leave them feeling restless yet exhausted, uncertain and lacking a sense of control over their lives. This is in line with the quantitative findings, which found that the Iraqi sample surveyed has significantly lower levels of confidence about their lives than other humanitarian arrivals in Australia. This lack of confidence appears to be related, in part, to a sense of disappointed or failed expectations, which have caused the respondents to revise their understanding of their position in their new society, and realise that recovering their lost social status will require ongoing struggle. This is made all the more difficult given the sense of exhaustion and embattlement that many of the respondents feel.

A majority of respondents took the opportunity to reiterate that they were more focused on getting away from Iraq - or wherever they formerly resided – than concerned with where they would end up. Even many of those who set out on a long and dangerous asylum-seeking journey said that they weren’t overly
concerned with what, exactly, they would find in Australia, and were content to know that the country offered the prospect of spatial security rights. This is typified by the following remark from Abdullah; “I wasn’t expecting much, we were just trying to flee… We didn’t know what, for instance, is and is not in Australia” (Author interview with Abdullah). Ahmad noted how his lack of knowledge about Australia made the decision to leave all the more difficult.

Many respondents said that before arriving, they heard amazing things about Australia, platitudes about rights and freedom that painted a picture of a somewhat utopic or idealistic society. These rumours tended to build up their expectations of the life they would realise in Australia. To their disappointment, their expectations were not met, as they arrived to a very different scenario to the one they had imagined. Notably, many of those who expressed the greatest sense of disappointment were those among the sample who had never been displaced before. These respondents still had a strong sense of having a lot to lose by leaving their homes in Iraq, and expected that they would have a greater sense of control over how their lives panned out. After arriving, they felt let down in various ways, with some simply suffering from a strong feeling of homesickness, a sad nostalgia for their past, and others struggling with finding work, being on bridging visas, and applying for family reunification.

Across the board, the ADF-employed interpreters had high expectations for their lives in Australia, and all but Ibrahim felt as if their expectations have not been met. This lends to a sense that they lack control over their lives in Australia specifically, and their (and their families) longer-term future more broadly. In light of his experiences with Australian military personnel in Iraq, Husayn expected to settle in Australia easily. He said, “I expected maybe at least I’m going to settle very easy here. And maybe that I’m going to get more support, more than any other refugees because we felt that the Australian government was indebted to us.” He was disappointed, however; “But the tragedy is that here they regard us as equal to other refugees… They refused even to write a reference for us” (Author interview with Husayn). It is noteworthy that this respondent felt himself more entitled than “any other
refugees,” which indicates there is a social stigma attached to the refugee identity/legal status that constructs them as less entitled to rights and services than others in society. Furthermore, it is clear that Husayn felt alienated by the Australia society after arrival, which was in stark contrast to his former perceptions of Australians he met and worked with in Iraq, and his expectations of Australian society.

Others in the sample had high expectations for their futures in Australia, looking forward to finding good jobs, safe and affordable homes and education for their children. For many of these respondents, their expectations have not been met as they struggle to deal with a lack of cultural literacy, difficulties in the job and housing markets, and the culture of settlement service providers and social support more broadly. Ahmad, for example, was looking for a job for four years before securing a low paid position. Such circumstances have led some to feel disappointed. While in many cases this may be a case of culture shock, the effects of which may wear off over time, it is felt intensely by these respondents, and has contributed significantly to the impressions they are forming of Australia’s socio-political system, and the community.

The analysis showed that the respondents whose expectations have been disappointed most dramatically were those still on Bridging Visas at the time they were interviewed, and those whose applications for family reunification are yet to be finalised. They feel they are in an ongoing state of limbo and therefore remain relatively unsettled, unsure of their futures and in many cases, anxious and depressed. Abu Bakr, who was on a Bridging Visa, living in abject penury in a house he shares with several other Iraqi men on bridging visas said, “Since we have been released from the camp, it’s been all suffering… I expected a different life to the one I live now,” Of arriving in the community he recalled, “I was completely shocked… when I left Iraq and risked my life, and crossed an ocean, I did it first for myself but mostly not for myself but for my family” (Author interview with Abu Bakr). All the respondents on bridging visas, or awaiting the outcomes of their applications for their family to come to Australia, expressed an acute sense of disappointment, which informs their self-perceptions as excluded or alien in...
Australian society and lends, in most cases, to disaffected or alienated attitudes, and passive behaviours.

Those respondents whose expectations about their lives in Australia have been disappointed are struggling to orient themselves in society, feeling dissatisfied and disaffected, or in a number of cases, alienated and unwanted. For those who arrived with low expectations, their attitudes are more upbeat as they tend not to feel disappointed or let down by the socio-political system. Even so, many of the respondents’ expectations have not been met and this adds to their sense of ongoing struggle and disenfranchisement by yet another socio-political system.

(ii) Settlement Experiences: Culture Shock, Disconnection and Adaptation

The first five years of settlement are challenging and potentially dislocating for refugees. Throughout this time, their first impressions of their new polity take shape, and their socio-cultural preferences, habits and routines begin to develop out of these impressions. All of the interview respondents expressed conflicting emotions about their experiences in the first year of settlement. Their perceptions of their new context, their reactions and attitudes to unfamiliar socio-cultural norms and phenomena, and their behaviours tended to evolve over time and in line with their understanding of their particular place, or social status, in their new country. The dominant themes from this section of the data set were an initial culture shock and disconnection, followed by what may be described as a relatively one-sided effort at acculturation and adaptation.

Common among all of the respondents’ testimonials was the perception that the first months, even years in Australia were very sad and alienating. Many of the respondents reflected deeply on what they had left behind; from having social and occupational status, and a network of family and friends who socialised and related to one another in recognisable and comforting ways, to perceiving themselves as having relatively little, if any, job prospects or social
support, as well as a poor understanding of how they were supposed to engage, communicate, and socialise with people beyond their familiar Iraqi community. For many there was nostalgia for the familiar world in Iraq – despite its current turmoil – made more acute by a feeling that they had lost this familiarity for good; they may never return permanently to their “home”.

Each of the respondents, in turn, developed perspectives and behaviours – coping mechanisms - that were oriented to alleviate this sense of disconnection and culture shock; they acculturated. Most sought out fellow Iraqis and lived in solidarity with them. A majority of the respondents appeared to internalise the sense that they lacked a valued identity in the new, Australian context and became passive and disaffected, recoiling from contact with people outside of their familiar and comforting, close-knit Iraqi community. Many of these respondents struggled in their day-to-day lives, and became anxious and depressed, while others seriously contemplated going home, even at the risk of death. Overall, their acculturation was perceived as non-reciprocal, in that they lacked substantive social relations and connections with non-Iraqi communities in Australia, and they felt the onus was on them alone to understand and work within the available parameters of the dominant Australian culture.

Upon arrival in the community in Australia, all of the respondents quickly confronted the feeling that they had lost their culture. Indeed, it is clear from the data that many of the respondents had previously overlooked the importance of their culture and its associated norms, or at least taken it for granted as an important source of support and comfort in their day-to-day lives. They felt they had lost a clear sense of quotidian aspects of their identity, that their habits and routines were obsolete or misunderstood, or in some cases frowned upon and derided in the Australian context. Indeed, their arrival to such a starkly new and unfamiliar socio-cultural context caused the vast majority of respondents to feel like aliens marooned in a strange, unfamiliar and at times, hostile environment. Most of them adopted an “us” and “them” scenario, where “they” were the dominant and unfamiliar Australian mainstream. The respondents regarded themselves - “us” - as relatively
powerless guests of this dominant Australian host community. This tended to reinforce their sense of dislocation, estrangement and powerlessness which caused many to reflect on what the content of their native culture means to them in their daily lives, and come to terms with how their cultural preferences, habits and routines provide meaning to their social relations.

In the new Australian context, where the respondents felt poorly understood or misunderstood, if not invisible, each of them suffered and struggled to find dignity and meaning in their life. Ali spoke plainly of the difficulty he encountered when he first arrived in the Australian community. He said, “[When I first came] it was the most difficult time in my life… the life I suffered at the beginning in Melbourne was more difficult than the suffering I experienced in Iraq” (Author interview with Ali). Malikah noted the loneliness she felt when she first arrived, and how this was compounded by a loss of agency and entitlement, a feeling of alienation and a sense that her struggle to exist in a positive frame of mind, to have a happy life, was ultimately futile. She said, “The loneliness of being away from home in a foreign land [is indescribable]. Al-gurba kurba… Al-gurba is feeling like a stranger, away from home, like homesickness... kurba means heavy burdens. I am struggling. But I get nowhere because I am a stranger here” (Author interview with Malikah). Most respondents recalled similar feelings of dislocation, sadness and alienation.

A majority of respondents spoke of their initial culture shock in their first year in Australia, and lamented how disconnected, and even inadequate or humiliated, they felt during this period. Husayn said it made him and his family feel as if they were in a play, acting out or improvising unfamiliar roles; “My children were shocked first. My wife was shocked. I was shocked… A new life. A new culture. Everything was new. Now we are cut off from our roots. So we felt that this is not our life at all, we are just playing a role…” (Author interview with Husayn). Jihad, thinking about the most challenging aspect of initial settlement, said simply and without hesitation “First thing is the culture. The culture is different. Even if Australia is a multicultural country, but still the major culture here is the Australian culture.
I didn’t know about the Australian culture” (Author interview with Jihad). Ahmad expressed his perceptions of the difference between his native socio-cultural norms and the norms he has found in Australian society. He said, “It is not easy because the Iraqi community are very connected to each other. We are very sociable… our lives were totally different from Australians’, because our community is very connected to each other and we have social lives. Also, we participate in each other’s happiness and sadness and so on. We share. Not here. We don’t have this now” (Author interview with Ahmad). This comment gives a clear sense that the respondent perceived himself as an unknown outsider, standing at the margins of Australian society, looking in on a relatively individualistic cultural mainstream to which he does not easily identify and relate. Among all of these responses is a sense that the respondents feel their culture is lost in the Australian context.

This deep culture shock made the respondents acutely aware of their own cultural illiteracy in the Australian context and, for most, drew attention to their lack of English language proficiency. Half the sample, or 15 of the interview respondents, explicitly mentioned their struggle with issues relating to language. This compounded an acute sense that they lacked agency or any sort of control over their lives in Australia. Indeed, a lack of cultural literacy and linguistic proficiency were overwhelmingly the most commonly cited problems that the interview respondents encountered during their initial settlement, as it affected all aspects of their life: from procuring employment to socialising. Yasin spoke of the disconnection he felt, saying, “The most difficult is the isolation and loneliness of being a foreigner. And the language, it’s an essential aspect and it’s difficult when a person cannot speak, cannot communicate” (Author interview with Yasin). Many noted how a lack of English made even menial tasks, such as grocery shopping, a significant challenge.

In line with the results of the quantitative survey, most of the respondents who highlighted their difficulty with language were not attending English language tuition (10 of the 15 who spoke of language as their most intensely perceived challenge). Most said that they simply don’t have the mental capacity to attend
classes and study the English language. That is, they are mentally ill or feel too exhausted to do so. Muhammad noted, “[Language] is the most difficult issue I am facing [now]… it’s like a nightmare for me… I would like to take classes but, like I told you, I’ve just barely got my life to settle. I just wanted to settle in life so that my brain can be clear and when I get into school I can benefit from it” (Author interview with Muhammad). This provides meaning to the disparity in the quantitative data between the aspiration to learn and the actual number of respondents attending English classes. It appears that many would like to, but as stated above, do not feel they are in a sound mental state to do so.

Many respondents brought up the issue of family separation, and how this has hindered their capacity to settle in various ways. Hakeem was particularly forceful on this issue. Indeed, the complexity of Hakeem’s answer is typical of the issues faced by many in the interview sample, with one issue compounding the next, and the respondents themselves feeling unable to understand or disentangle their various problems, and begin to try and find a positive outcome. Hakeem has dealt with numerous lawyers and migration agents, and paid fees for multiple family reunification applications, yet still his applications are not resolved. He said, “[my family] are still in Iran, and it will take merely a match stick to light the situation over there on fire.” He added, “All my thinking is constantly worrying about them, until the early morning I cannot sleep… this is the biggest challenge to ever face me…. what am I supposed to do? I have no ability to do anything. That’s why I am taking tablets [anti-depressants] to calm me down” (Author interview with Hakeem). Hakeem’s testimony shows that his efforts to engage with the mechanisms and institutions supposedly designed to support him - both in the camp and now his dealings with the immigration department, agents and lawyers – have consistently failed. He internalises this - as is clear in his remark “we wondered what we had done” - and interprets it to mean that he and his interests are not valued and supported by the system to which he is subject, leaving him feeling as if he lacks agency and control over his life.
Other areas of social life that the majority of respondents encountered and struggled with are the labour and housing markets, and tertiary education (many of the respondents continue to struggle with these aspects of their lives, beyond the first year of settlement). In most instances where these topics were raised, the respondents’ remarks expressed a strong sense of hopelessness and at times humiliation. Ahmad felt that there were not enough jobs in Australia available to people of different cultural backgrounds, and that bureaucratic systems in Australia are overly complicated, to the point where it precludes people such as himself from participation. Ali was left feeling deeply humiliated and powerless after not finding any housing, and being left homeless in Melbourne. He explained, “I was degraded, I would reside with one [friend] for two days and then go back to another for two days… it was a humiliation process” (Author interview with Ali). Ali’s struggle in the housing market was echoed by a number of respondents, and may be seen as yet another problematic area of social life, along with employment and education, which adds stress and, at times disaffection, into the mix of mental burdens weighing upon many of the respondents in the sample. Ironically, and to the detriment of humanitarian arrivals to the country, popular discourse in Australia, and many Australians’ actual contention is that refugees are taking “Australian” jobs and “our houses” (Spinney & Nethery, 2013).

Overall, the data about the respondents’ initial year of settlement shows they suffered from culture shock and perceived themselves as disconnected from Australian society. This culture shock and disconnection compounded their struggles to settle comfortably, which manifested most obviously in issues with cultural literacy and language proficiency, difficulty in the job and housing markets, and mental health issues related to family separation and bridging visas. The respondents’ experiences led many to recognise that being culturally literate potentially facilitates a sense of successful socialisation, and affords a measure of social privilege. In practice, however, they perceived themselves as lacking agency or any social mobility in their new context, and most of the respondents felt overwhelmed and ill equipped to engage with the dominant Australian society. As such, they felt their acculturation and adaptation to their new socio-cultural world was one-sided. That is, they didn’t
interact so much with the mainstream Australian society or other socio-cultural communities, but acted inwardly, towards their own, familiar community to alleviate the alienating potential of initial settlement.

(iii) Government/Government-funded Settlement Support Services: Gratitude

The provision of settlement support services is a major element of the Australian state’s refugee policy suite. Administered through Human Settlement Services (HSS), it is a primary means of facilitating inclusive settlement of newly arrived refugees. As such, and in line with the survey results, all of the respondents have accessed government services in some capacity. Overall, all but two of the respondents expressed heartfelt gratitude for the welfare provided them through various organisations, such as migrant resource centres, other social service providers and Centrelink. In line with the quantitative findings, most respondents found accessing services relatively straightforward, and were humbled to receive such support from the state, which they felt they could not have survived without.

In terms of expressions of gratitude, many of the respondents compared what they may expect of the state in Iraq with the generosity they found from the Australian and Victorian governments. One such respondent was Mubarak, who said, “[The Australian government] treatment has been very good and much better than our own country. With much respect, sometimes I wonder to myself, ‘why are they doing what they do?’” (Author interview with Mubarak). This comment is noteworthy in that Mubarak conveys a sense that he is not entitled to such provisions, and feels genuinely heartened to receive what he perceives to be a great generosity afforded him by the state. Haider, too, was thankful for the support provided him, saying, “Australia has provided many paths for people… we don’t find this in our own countries” (Author interview with Haider). Welfare support seems to be welcomed and genuinely appreciated by the respondents, and to a degree has facilitated a
means by which the respondents can identify with and relate to the objectives of the Australian state in this particular area of policy.

Seven of the 30 respondents, including all but one of those respondents still on Bridging Visas, were somewhat conflicted about their perception of government services and support. Negative perceptions tended to crop up around issues of family reunification, poor relations and communication with caseworkers. Indeed, Ali perceived a complete failure of settlement service providers to register his existence. Ali said that after leaving detention “The [immigration officials escorting us] said nothing, they offered us no accommodation. Basically they left us at the airport and said wherever you go, go… As for like any assistance from a nation or organisation to have assisted me to help myself or provided me with assistance, none.” (Author interview with Ali). Since this initial experience, Ali managed to register with Centrelink, but his perception of government services by that time was decidedly negative. According to Ali he wished to work as a truck driver, and even procured a truck license, but the staff at Centrelink told him he would not get work and that he must apply for the pension or he could get work as a cleaner, but was provided no further explanation. Ali felt stripped of agency and social choice, degraded and patronised, being treated as if he was incapable of making choices and conducting his life; “They make you feel humiliated… All what they want, no thought to our situation” (Author interview with Ali). Ali’s comments are particularly interesting in light of popular and political rhetoric in Australia that characterises refugees as drawn to Australia by generous welfare provisions and economic incentives, and generally having high unemployment rates at the expense of Australian taxpayers. To the contrary, Ali does not wish to be dependent on welfare, nor on the pension, but wishes to pursue a vocation of his choosing, yet continues to be told his choice is not valid, and he must go on the pension or work as a cleaner. Welfare in this case appears to have been provided in such a way as to disempower not empower the individual.

Ali was clearly developing a negative orientation to the socio-political system in Australia at this time, feeling out of control of his life, and went on to
explain that his applications for his family to join him in Australia were taking so long, and appeared so futile, that he took matters in his own hands, and worked outside of the official systems to bring them here. He explained, “After that, I brought my family but most of what happened to me was from god’s willingness…” [yes but how did you make that move. For example, god wouldn’t have just given you the housing?] “No it was from god, he told me to enter here…” [Where did you enter?] “I’m not telling…. but as for like any assistance from a nation or organisation to have assisted me to help myself or provided me with assistance, none.” (Author interview with Ali). It is clear that this Ali felt alienated by the socio-political system, and defected from the official channels to pursue his desired ends on his own – presumably nefarious – terms. Like Ali, Husayn also felt so acutely let down by his caseworker that he came to reject settlement service provisions altogether. Both Ali and Husayn felt alienated and acted to assuage this feeling by disengaging from service providers all together, which placed them in a situation of further socio economic uncertainty and disadvantage.

One respondent, Rashid, reflected on his feelings about government services more broadly, observing that what they provide for people like himself is not designed for the long term. He said, “What was provided was merely to get us through the day.” He added, “They never endeavoured to help us with our future…. they are only concerned with what we are facing at the day that we are presenting our problems… so there was no like broader vision to our situation.” (Author interview with Rashid). This highlights a disjuncture between the aims of refugees in the community, trying to build a life, and the aims of the social welfare system and its staff, which are to achieve systemic outcomes. Similar to the previous theme, the respondents’ impressions of government services and support - ranging from deep gratitude, and feeling supported, to feeling unsupported - informed their subsequent behaviours. Most were grateful for the support and passively subsisted on welfare. Significantly, those who did not feel supported by the system of settlement services defected from it by rejecting services or pursuing alternative means to achieve their settlement needs.
(iv) Social Support: Lack of Community Awareness and Support – Isolation

This section looks at the respondent’s perceptions and interpretations of the more social, or community-derived support they received throughout settlement. Overall, the participants did not feel supported by the wider society or their local communities in Australia. Indeed, there were only two respondents who provided anecdotes about times they felt supported by non-Iraqis. Instead, the respondents tended to rely almost exclusively on their connections with other Iraqis, comforted by a sense of in-group solidarity and understanding. In particular, the respondents turned to family and/or those that arrived in the same cohort. This dominant theme is in line with the quantitative findings, which painted a definitive picture of the respondents networking and interacting almost exclusively with their fellow Iraqis, and spending little time with people outside their immediate ethno-cultural or religious groups.

Most commonly, the respondents perceived their behaviour – which in social capital theory equates to a reliance on fostering bonding capital, or relations within their own cultural group, rather than looking to establish or develop bridging capital with socio-culturally distinct groups - as related to the language gap and cultural differences between themselves and other Australians. They pointed to a lack of shared understandings and recognisable cultural norms between themselves and the Australian community, and an inability of most Australians to fully appreciate and empathise with the respondents’ situation - an insurmountable “us” and “them” scenario. Many of the respondents felt invisible in Australian society, and did not feel entitled or confident to approach people outside of their immediate community for friendship, support or even conversation. Others perceived the lack of social interaction, and certainly any form of support from members of the Australian public, as an outcome of prejudice and discrimination. Despite the interpretation or justification arrived upon by the respondents, their disconnection left them feeling isolated and at times bored.
In many cases the respondents felt invisible in Australian society, and did not feel that people had much interest in them or their situations. This is in line with the quantitative data analysis, which showed that the respondents did not perceive Australians to have a good understanding of the Iraqi identity, nor a significant desire to learn about it. Yusuf said, “the Australian society does not know much about me… it is the Australian government who helps, not the people” (Author interview with Yusuf). Said felt bored and lonely after arriving to Australia, and felt that they were placed in Dandenong as a means of keeping them isolated from the rest of Australian society. He said, with conviction, “As refugees [we] should see more support to help us to settle into social life. Especially in social life. We were kept isolated” (Author interview with Said). Said felt left out of society, disaffected from the dominant mode of social relations, which manifested not in alienation so much as boredom. He acted to alleviate this feeling of isolation, engaging in study and trying to establish a more social routine.

Malikah, whose husband was kidnapped in Iraq and missing, relayed a story in which she lamented her lack of family, friends and female social networks in Australia, and expressed a deep sense of isolation and loneliness. She said, “I came here pregnant, for the first months [of my pregnancy] I was [in Iraq] with my mother, and she was caring for me and my children… and here, there is no one”. She recalls her child birth, saying,

“I was lost; I didn’t know where to take my kids. I didn’t have anyone [to help me]. I went to the hospital by myself and saw death in my own eyes, and there was no one next to me… So I wished that my mother, my sisters, or even my husband, or just for someone, someone, to be there next to me because I didn’t know, maybe I will live through it, maybe I will die” (Author interview with Malikah).

This is a clear moment of alienation, loneliness, sadness and desperation at such a seminal and potentially traumatic moment as childbirth. Malikah maintained a feeling that she was alone in Australia, trying to raise her children with no support.
The accounts given by the former ADF employees were poignant. It appears they felt particularly unsupported after arriving to Australia, as they had high expectations that they would be well looked after by the ADF. They expected and were sure that they would remain in contact with the soldiers with whom they were working in Iraq; this did not eventuate. Kadeer noted that in reaction to their lack of social networks, they started a civic organisation designed to encourage solidarity amongst Iraqis in Australia. He said, “Actually we don’t [feel supported by the community in Australia] … now we have the Iraqi/Australian solidarity association … this is our community… we don’t have a direct connection or a strong connection with the wider community” (Author interview with Kadeer). In this case, Kadeer responded to his feelings of isolation by establishing a representative, civic organisation for himself and his Iraqi friends. This is a clear case of actively engaging with democratic processes to further his interest in cultivating a sense of belonging and solidarity for his community in the broader Australian context, and suggests the conditions for a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism did exist from Kadeer’s perspective.

Some perceived a lack of community support in Australia as an outcome of prejudice and discrimination, yet remained unsure of exactly why they were being discriminated against. One female respondent, and a male respondent speaking about his wife, speculated that perhaps people in Australia don’t like their Islamic head coverings. Another, Abdullah, who encountered discrimination on the housing market, did not offer any basis for the discrimination per se, but definitely felt himself as the outsider. He said “not all of the community [supports us to settle]. For instance, in relation to Shepparton, if you look for a rental property, it’s very difficult to obtain one.” He expressed his perceptions that it is easy for “Australians” – “them” - to rent a house, “whereas with us, they won’t give us any properties for rent as easily” (Author interview with Abdullah). This is a recognised issue in the Shepparton local government area, where the unemployment rate for people with no or poor English language proficiency in Greater Shepparton is “four times that for people who speak English only (20.7 per cent compared with 5.2 per cent)” (DEEWR, 2013). In turn, this negatively affects new arrivals’ prospects of
securing leases on the housing rental market, which further entrenches their socio-economic disadvantage.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents’ perceptions of the social conditions in Australia, and their understanding of their own role or place within this society, led them to pursue social connection and solidarity with their own cultural group. As stated, not just with Iraqis, broadly, but often the same ethno-religious groups and the same immigration cohort. This behavioural tendency is compounded by a lack of intercultural understanding, which precludes intercultural dialogue and inhibits their ability to try and establish and build social relations with people from the Australian community. Thereby, it inhibits their capacity to readily develop cultural literacy and belonging in the Australian national context.

6.5 Current Social Life

(i) Social Milieu: Disconnected Community Relations

The respondents were asked about their views on the social milieu in Australia, including their perception of socio-cultural norms in the society, and any impressions of how members of Australian society relate to one another and cooperate. Unsurprisingly, many of the respondents reflect on the society in Australia in light of their own experiences within it. As such, the dominant theme for this section of the data was one of unfamiliarity and disconnection, reiterates many of the findings thus far.

The respondents spoke about their perception of disconnected social relations in Australian society in a number of ways. Some spoke of society in Australia as guided by individualist norms, rather than people having interest in and looking out for the collective and enacting more communitarian values. The respondents tended to perceive people in Australian society as pursuing their own individual interests and affairs, remaining aloof from others in their community who they don’t directly know, or whose interests are not aligned
with their own. This observation was made in contrast to their experiences of Iraqi society, which they perceived as far more community-focused. Akil shared his observations about relations between neighbours in Australia, which highlights this sentiment. He said, “I don’t even know my neighbours’ names… I lived in [that] house for three years.” After several attempts over the years to engage his neighbours in conversation, and a number of occasions where he felt snubbed by his neighbours, he gave up – “I felt that those people are not friendly… I didn’t say hello anymore, I stayed silent with them” (Author interview with Akil). Akil was genuinely surprised that it was possible to live so close to another human and never interact or get to know them. This captured for him the individualistic and aloof manner that he has come to associate with Australians more broadly. Said said in a similar vein, “The culture [in Australia] is very challenging… Individualistic culture… we are disconnected from neighbours, from everyone. Even from organisations. We are disconnected.” (Author interview with Said). It is clear that Said, along with others in the sample, feels disconnected from what he perceives as an individualistic Australian mainstream society. He interprets such cultural differences as a significant barrier to inclusive socialisation.

A number of respondents pointed to the existence and propagation of popular stereotypes, and a concomitant discrimination against certain ethno-cultural groups as informing the disconnection they observe in the Australian milieu. Five respondents explicitly mentioned that they perceive a sense of racism in Australian society, particularly a widespread prejudice against Islam and Muslims. One respondent, Mubarak, spoke of how his daughter experienced racism at school. “This thing, [Islamophobia], I can feel it and even my daughter, who started to wear a hijab last year, was abused by children at school. And she was only in grade one.” Mubarak’s daughter would cry after school saying to her father, “the kids did that, they pulled my hijab, they said you are bald.” Mubarak spoke with his daughter’s teacher who said she knew nothing of the bullying. Mubarak explained, “then we gave up because she was young… just to let her feel settled.” The next year, Mubarak decided to send his children to a private “Islamic” school but, not being able to find a job, could not afford the expenses and sent them back to public school. “So I felt
discrimination against Muslims,” he explained, adding with a shake of the head; “Now my younger daughter refuses to wear any hijab ever. She’s saying the kids will hate me… And I think a lot about that” (Author interview with Mubarak). Mubarak was deeply affected by this incident, and though he adapted his behaviour significantly, aligning with what he interpreted as “Australian” standards in order for his daughter to fit in and feel like she belongs at her school, he was disappointed and disturbed to have done so, however. The episode gave him a sense that he cannot practice his religion in the Australian context, and felt he was forfeiting an important aspect of his identity; which, ironically, was a factor in his seeking refuge in Australia in the first place – to seek respect for his identity. This was not lost on Mubarak, who has developed a bitter and somewhat angry and defensive attitude toward the Australian mainstream, as he perceives hypocrisy in public rhetoric about multiculturalism and liberal freedoms. He feels the social reality for migrants in Australia is more akin to assimilationist, or conformist, “love it or leave it” style, xeno-racial ideals.

One respondent, Ahmad, noted that a lack of intercultural understanding fuelled the existence of negative stereotypes, especially about Muslims and Iraqi culture. Negative stereotypes, in turn, perpetuated the dearth of intercultural understanding and contact between him and Australians in the community, as if trapped in a vicious cycle. He also interpreted intercultural ignorance and popular stereotypes as informing Australians’ lack of curiosity, will or interest in interacting with and learning about newly arrived Iraqi migrants like himself. This observation is in line with findings of the quantitative survey, in which a majority of 64 per cent of the sample disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “People I have met in Australia have a good understanding about life, culture and politics in Iraq.”

Ahmad said, illustrating the ‘us’ and ‘them’ scenario he has come to perceive in his new context; “There is not a good understanding between my culture and Australian culture… we don’t have one way, we have two ways… There is two ways and they are not meeting with each other. They are separate,” He goes on to remark that the onus is entirely on new migrants to learn about
Australian culture and society and fit in accordingly, saying, “we live in this community and we did the citizenship test… but for them they didn’t know about us… Australians they are not aware of other cultures. This is what causes negative stereotypes” (Author interview with Ahmad). Ahmad argued that without reciprocity, interest from both sides of the socio-cultural divide, notably from more settled/privileged Australians towards newly arrived Iraqis, the onus is on the Iraqis alone to adapt to Australian norms (again, akin to assimilation), rather than building genuine bonds across the cultures and celebrating difference, as is supposed to be the credo of a multicultural, liberal democratic society.

(ii) Personal Social Life: Social Aspirations, but no Inter-Cultural Social Life

Analysis of the data about the respondents’ own social attitudes and behaviours in Australia shows that while most in the sample have aspirations to socialise beyond their immediate community, they do not yet do so. Indeed, and as has already been stated, all of the respondents tend to socialise exclusively with their particular network of Iraqi friends, as well as maintaining strong transnational ties with their family and friends overseas. The respondents’ social networks or friendship groups are most commonly formed around families and people who arrived to Australia at the same time and by the same means. It is worth noting that many of the respondents did not elaborate on this question, indicating that they spent most of their life at home with their immediate family, and while not adverse to socialising more and with various networks, they did not actively seek this out. These findings are in line with the findings of the quantitative analysis.

The respondents raised four dominant reasons for their relatively isolated social behaviour. For most, it was a matter of the language barrier - their lack of proficiency in English. The next most common reason given was their mental health and wellbeing; in many cases the respondents were under mental pressure as a result of their unresolved applications for asylum or efforts at family reunification. A few in the sample pointed to their perception of
negative stereotypes and discrimination as informing their behaviour. And, finally, some respondents’ tendency to socialise only with their Iraqi in-group was a strategy of cultural and religious identity maintenance.

For a number of respondents, their lack of social interaction with non-Iraqis in Australia was justified as a case of a language barrier. Abdullah said, “If I feel I can talk with them in full English then I’ll have a chance to make friends… but I haven’t studied it because the circumstances restrained me” (Author interview with Abdullah). Yasin said, “I have not had this opportunity [to socialise with non-Iraqis] because I am not able to communicate with them” (Author interview with Yasin). Notably, all of the respondents who said that the language barrier precluded them from inter-cultural networking in Australia are not studying English in an official capacity, either because they are on bridging visas and not allowed to study, or for most, because they feel too mentally exhausted and preoccupied to undertake study.

Many respondents were facing various mental health challenges, from anxiety and stress to depression, and felt incapable of engaging with people outside their immediate ad familiar ethno-cultural and linguistic group. These respondents tended to aspire to develop social relations with others in Australian society, but ruled it out at the current moment due to their own feelings of mental exhaustion. Yusuf said, “I am not involved in any social activities, although I wish to do so, but I don’t have the motivation just yet… I would like to participate for instance in a sports activity or intellectual seminars, I like all this… but I can’t now” (Author interview with Yusuf). For most of the respondents who cited mental health issues as precluding them from engaging in various social networks, their mental stresses were related to issues with their applications for family reunification. Faruk, for example, was in a state of despair about being separated from his family, who were in Syria at the time of the interview. He said, “No [I do not participate in social activities]… a person who thinks of his family, even if you put him in heaven he will not be comfortable or happy” (Author interview with Faruk). This estrangement from family is negatively and profoundly affecting all aspects of the affected respondents’ lives.
Six respondents mentioned that they felt that some people in Australia had negative stereotypes about Iraqis or certain types of Iraqis, and were prejudiced against them. Other respondents were unsure whether non-Muslims in Australia would want to be friends with people of Islamic faith, such as themselves. This perception led to them turning toward their fellow Muslims for social solidarity. Three respondents spoke of their desire to maintain their Iraqi identity, and socialised exclusively with their Iraqi community as a strategy of cultural maintenance. Ahmad, for example, explained that he wanted his kids to maintain their Iraqi and Muslim identities, and was worried about the effects that acculturation and adaptation would have on their outlooks. He said, “As you know we are Muslims. And we want for our children to maintain their identity.” He perceives this desire as difficult to achieve in the Australian context, as “the environment is totally different from over there in Iraq”. He argues, “If we want our children to maintain their identity, their origin, it is very hard here… We can’t control our children when they are growing up here… So it is very hard” (Author interview with Ahmad). Ahmad is mindful of the challenges of maintaining his native cultural identity in the Australian context, and the potential for a future intergenerational cultural conflict or disconnect between himself and his children who will have spent most of their life in Australia. He expresses trepidation, and even sadness, at the thought that his “traditional” cultural values will not be maintained in the next generation.

Nearly all of the respondents maintain strong transnational ties with family and friends back in Iraq, or in the Middle East region. Indeed, many of the younger male respondents who arrived by themselves seeking onshore protection spend much of their time online, and do not socialise much outside of that. Some of those whose family is still in Iraq or the region toy with ideas of returning in order to be with them, even at the risk of death. Hassan said, “My wife is in Syria… I have two children, two daughters, eight years and three years of age, also in Syria… my wife and children need to see me as the situation is deteriorating there, they feel unsafe” He added, “I am intending to go in [December]. Maybe I won’t come back. Maybe we will all just die there
and it will all be over. You know a grenade or an explosion” (Author interview with Hassan). There was a sense that many of the respondents often think of returning to be with their families, but ultimately choose to remain in safety despite missing their family to distraction.
Overall, the tendency for the majority of respondents to socialise exclusively with their family and close Iraqi networks is mostly a function of the understanding and care they find with in these groups. The following statement exemplifies this, “I just have my immediate family in Australia… and Iraqi friends. We visit each other. We support each other… Just to check whether everything is good or not. So we depend on our social network” (Author interview with Said). Despite this behavioural tendency to rely on “bonding capital”, nearly all of the respondents expressed attitudes of openness, and at times aspiration, to the idea of socialising outside of their communities.

(iii) Accessing Labour Market: Unemployment

In line with the findings of the quantitative analysis, a vast majority of the sample – twenty-seven respondents - are unemployed. Interestingly, most of them were silent about the reasons for their inability to find work, yet under that silence was a sense of disappointment and for some, humiliation. First, it is worth noting that the four respondents on bridging visas do not have the right to work in Australia. The two female respondents said they do not work, as they are the primary caretakers for their young children. For those who did elaborate, they most commonly cited mental or physical health issues as the main reason for being unemployed. Indeed three respondents were on the pension as a result of physical disability. For others, their unresolved application for family reunification impinged on their ability to do anything else, and many noted that until they are together with their family, they couldn’t concentrate on much else, including employment. As Hassan noted, “I am not working… I do have the intention to work as soon as my family arrive. Until then, I cannot” (Author interview with Hassan).

The three respondents who are employed spoke about the practical challenge that seeking a job entails; from being unable to access and read job advertisements to the unfamiliar process of recruitment. It took Ahmad four years to secure a low-paid, unskilled job. Another issue was the occupational and social status that respondents had in Iraq, but felt they lost when moving
here to Australia. Recognizing this, these three respondents - all of whom had advanced English language skills prior to arrival, and therefore were at a major advantage to the rest of the sample - adapted their behaviour in order to get by, taking jobs they perceived as underemployment. All of these respondents thought it unfair that their qualifications and experiences seem to have no value or credit in the Australian context. As Ibrahim said, “Looking for the job is one of the most difficult things… if I want to get a job with my qualifications it is hard… So I changed my position, I did some courses, security courses, so this can get me an easy job, like part time” (Author interview with Ibrahim). While Ibrahim’s adaptive behaviours represent social mobility, he appears to have lowered his expectations for work and taken a job below his self-assessed skill level: it may be seen as downward mobility.

While the majority of the sample does not work, those that do are employed in unskilled labour or work in the refugee settlement sector. For many in the sample, their silence on the issue of their unemployment seems to be informed by a sense of shame about their lack of employment and social status, but nonetheless they feel ill equipped to address this situation to meet their desires. Under such circumstances, the vast majority are receive ongoing welfare payments.

(iv) Happiness: Conflicted

Overall, the respondents were conflicted about whether they are happy in Australia (happiness here being treated as a subjective, descriptive concept, rather than an empirically measurable one). All of the respondents perceived their safety in Australia as relieving, to some extent, the fears and tensions of their life in Iraq and so derive a certain amount of happiness from this. Furthermore, they are deeply grateful to the Australian state for providing them legal protection and welfare services, which gives them a sense that they should feel happy. Despite this, the respondents do not equate safety and material welfare with substantive emotional satisfaction and happiness *per se*. Many were quick to note that they are happy to be safe, but that there are
various conditions for their happiness, which are yet to be fulfilled. In most cases, the respondents expressed feelings of being in limbo; estrangement from their home culture and loved ones, as well as lamenting their lack of belonging in Australian society and ongoing feelings of anxiety and longing for the social status and cultural literacy, which they feel they have left behind.

The pattern of answers given by respondents about their happiness in Australia is similar to the survey findings. That is, most of the interview respondents expressed that they were happy, just as 58 per cent of the survey sample marked “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the statement “I am happy with my life in Australia.” As state above, the interview respondents tended to cite security in Australia as a significant source of happiness. Ibrahim noted, “I am happy because sometimes when I watch the news on the TV, or the gulf news, or the Iraq news, I feel I am lucky to be here… we are safe” (Author interview with Ibrahim). Faiz, who was asked “Do you feel happy here in Australia” didn’t reflect on his own feelings per se, but simply stated, “It’s a safe country” (Author interview with Faiz), as if it was self-explanatory that a sense of security alone was enough to make him happy.

One difference between the quantitative and qualitative findings, however, was that more of the interview respondents admitted feeling of unhappiness. This may be due to the qualitative nature of the interviews, which gave the respondents more of an opportunity to reflect upon their conflicting emotions, and the reasons for unhappiness, and thereby give a more nuanced answer than that demanded by the survey question. Many of the respondents were conflicted about how they feel in Australia, indicating that they sit somewhere in the middle of happiness and unhappiness. Indeed, twelve of the interview respondents (almost half the qualitative sample) expressed that they were substantively unhappy in some aspect of their lives. This is in contrast to only 12 per cent of the survey sample indicated feelings of unhappiness. The respondents’ tend to feel conflicted because of a perceived lack of belonging to the Australian community, and in some cases, the respondents feel somewhat unwelcome in the country. Hassan noted that he has not met or ever felt welcomed or supported by other Australians in the community, “I am
happy because I have arrived safely, in this sense am happy but as I have said before I haven’t seen anything from Australians” (Author interview with Hassan).

As mentioned above, nearly all of the respondents premised their expressions of unhappiness or dissatisfaction with expressions of gratitude for the safety they have been afforded since arriving to Australia. This is likely so that they do not feel or appear to feel ungrateful for what they have received in the way of protection, rights and welfare from the Australian state. Yet, still, Lutfi noted that his separation from his family caused him unhappiness, saying, “I feel like there is a good law, that make me a little happy… that is the thing that mostly makes me happy. But I am happy and not happy… unhappy because I am far away from my family (Author interview with Lutfi). Overwhelmingly, the respondents are conflicted about their feelings of happiness; relieved and happy to be safe yet they feel estranged in Australian society and lack belonging to the socio-cultural community at large.

6.6 Current Political Life

(i) Political Milieu: Respect

The respondents were asked about their perceptions of the political milieu in Australia. That is, their perceptions of the political system in Australia and the culture of politics, from political debate to policy. Overall, the respondents expressed respect for the political system in Australia, as it promotes human rights and is governed by the rule of law. A minority of respondents pointed to hypocrisy in the political system, particularly in regards to their applications for family reunification, and express a sense of alienation from it. Many mention that although they respect the political system in Australia they do not view themselves as active agents within it, and instead are somewhat disengaged (this point will be taken up in the next section).

A majority of respondents expressed a sense of respect for the political system and community in Australia. Most commonly, this perception that the system
is worth “honouring” stems from the gratitude they feel for having been granted refugee protection and spatial security rights in Australia. They tend to perceive the system from the vantage point of guests, outsiders or non-members of the polity. Other common elements of the political system that they mention are the existence of rule of law, and a functioning democracy in which people are able to claim their rights. Yusuf expressed a sense of patriotism towards Australia, saying, “I love this country and respect it because it’s a country that respects humanity… In Arab countries, a person’s opinion is not respected. How can you not respect this country when it deserves all the respect and honouring?” (Author interview with Yusuf). This statement resonates with Benhabib’s contention that solidarity and belonging can be fostered through the democratic, politico-legal framework. Yasin said, conveying a clear sense that he was an outsider looking on, and not an actual part of the Australian polity itself, “In Australia they have an administration and rights… yeah they are better than us, they have, you know, democracy” (Author interview with Yasin). Such comments suggest Yasin identifies with the political system and views it as positive, yet does not feel included in it, as an active member of the Australian polity.

All but one of the respondents who expressed positive attitudes about the political system in Australia took a comparative approach when evaluating and expressing their perceptions. That is, they frame their positive attitudes towards the Australian political milieu in terms of what they lacked as member of the Iraqi polity, which was viewed as authoritarian and corrupt. Abdur Rahman noted, “you know, if you have a right here, you can get it. It’s better than in Iraq.” He went on, “It’s messy [in Iraq]. No laws and corruption. Corruption is spread all over the country, so anybody can take your right and pay money to take your right. Buying people…. It is different [in Australia]” (Author interview with Abdur Rahman). The respondents across the board saw virtue in the rule of law and the availability of “actionable individual rights” (Flynn, 2003, p. 431), suggesting they identify with this system of governance.

A minority of four respondents did not identify with the political system in Australia but expressed feelings of alienation from it. Ali noted that the trials
that the system in Australia has put him through have left him feeling exhausted and unable to even follow the political situation. He suggests that immigration policy, in particular, is designed to exhaust him, “They give us no opportunity to even follow their politics, as much as they have exhausted us with their decisions” (Author interview with Ali). Hassan explained his perceptions of Australia’s responsibility to protect displaced people such as himself and his family, and feels that the Australian state does not provide substantive solutions, expressing particular discontent about policies and bureaucratic processes for family reunification. He provided the following analogy about himself and his interaction with the Australian political system:

“If a person’s house is on fire… when he runs and picks up the phone, he doesn’t call, for instance, the supermarket owner or the nightclub owner… he would call the fire brigade, knowing that the brigade is the only one that can save him. So, for instance, if someone calls the fire brigade, and they tell him, ‘we don’t have time, you just sit there and wait, drink your tea and drink something,’ and, for instance, his family is in the fire burning, shouldn’t they go and help him? This is similar with our situation now. We went out to Australia, first of all because we knew Australia would practically save us, but they got us and put us in camps. Our families are in bad situations… in bad circumstances, and [the Australian officials] say to us, ‘why are you so concerned? You have made it to safety. Sit, [eat] food - you have been fed, you have been given drinks, and you are making telephone calls. But what about our families?’” (Author interview with Hassan).

Hassan clearly states that he feels estranged from the aims of the Australian state, and his politicised values are in stark contrast to the values of Australian policies to which he is subject. Furthermore, he feels inefficacious to reduce this conflict, as per Schwarz’s theory of political alienation (Schwarz 1973).

Overall, many of these respondents framed their ideas about the Australian political milieu in light of their experiences in Iraq. They tended to speak of the Australian political system as something honourable yet unknown and
foreign to them; a polity they respect, but to which they do not personally belong. Many respondents appear disillusioned as a result of their experience of politics in Iraq, and as such remain purposefully disengaged from even following debates in the political sphere.

(ii) Personal Political Life: Apathy

The overall theme from data about the respondents’ personal involvement in politics is a clear sense of political apathy and disengagement. The majority of respondents do not involve themselves in political processes, and many do not follow political news and developments, nor do they wish to do so in the future. This is in line with the survey findings, which showed that 75 per cent of the sample were either “somewhat” or not at all interested in following Australian politics. Of those respondents who do follow politics, they tend to focus on the situation in Iraq and the Middle East region or on any developments to refugee and migration policies in the Australian domestic setting. Notably, the respondents who worked as interpreters for the ADF were the only respondents who have been actively involving themselves in political processes in Australia; a type of civic activism, in order to claim and receive what they perceive as their due rights.

A majority of 19 respondents explicitly indicated that they have no interest in politics. Their answers were often short and direct. Many justified their lack of engagement in terms of being a personal choice or preference, claiming that they don’t like politics. Haider said simply that he doesn’t like politics and therefore remains purposely disconnected from it. He said, “I don’t like politics… I just like to watch the news… but I don’t like politics. I don’t talk about politics. I have nothing to do with it. I don’t want to get involved in politics” (Author interview with Haider). Similarly, Akil said, “No, I don’t like politics… Me and politics, never” (Author interview with Akil). These 19 respondents are purposefully disengaged from politics in Australia and view this as a personal behavioural choice that reflects their dislike of political affairs.
Four respondents said they do not follow politics, as they do not have the headspace to do so. That is, they feel mentally consumed by their current situation - in most cases, these respondents were either on bridging visas or tying to arrange for their families to come to Australia, and felt their future was insecure and that they lack substantive control to determine their desired outcomes. Hakeem said, “We’re all at home drowning in our problems and don’t really have anything to do with the television, and we really don’t want to get into the politics on top of what we have because these things have really exhausted us” (Author interview with Hakeem). These respondents are preoccupied and burdened with stress and uncertainty, and do not have the capacity to engage with politics.

There was a tendency among other respondents to justify their lack of political activity in terms that suggested they did not perceive it as being their role or entitlement in Australian society. That is, there was a sense among many of the respondents that politics was the remit of politicians and governments alone. They perceived their voices as irrelevant in that context. Many were bemused or laughed slightly upon being asked questions about their civic and/or political activity in Australia, as if it was not their right to get involved. One such respondent, Abdullah, said, “I don’t have any opinion. I don’t have any opinion…. It’s really up to the government. I have no opinion” (Author interview with Abdullah). While Yusuf said, “I have nothing to do with it… In terms of politics and things like that, why would I discuss it? I am nobody. It is their jobs” (Author interview with respondent 3). Theses respondents perceive their position in Australian society as being passive subjects, outside of politics and political debates.

Nine respondents said they followed the political situation in Iraq and the Middle East region. Rashid said that even though watching what is happening in Iraq makes him feel anxious, he couldn’t help but follow events. He said, “I follow the situation in Iraq, in the Middle East in general… Even the doctor advised me that I have to stop because it makes me anxious… But I can’t” (Author interview with Rashid). Most of the respondents who follow political news in Iraq do so out of concern for their family and loved ones who are still
living there, many of them displaced. Others noted the political situation in Iraq, explaining that it is difficult to be effective if you are involved in politics there, and offered this as a significant reason why Iraqi civilians do not engage with political issues; as they have been victim of politically-driven repression their whole lives.

Two respondents, who formerly worked as interpreters for the ADF in Iraq, actively engaged with the political sphere in Australia in one particular instance. They involved themselves by taking their story to the media, in order to claim public recognition, which they felt they did not receive after leaving Iraq and arriving to Australia as refugees (bearing in mind that “refugee” is a pejorative in Iraqi society). It is clear that these respondents feel like veterans of the war, given their contact with Australian troops and their support of the Coalition’s intervention in Iraq. They perceive themselves as literate in all aspects of life in Australia and entitled to more than what they found after arriving. Yet, after arrival, they lost all contact with the ADF. Husayn said plainly, “So that’s why we started claiming for our rights. We can because we know the system here.” A journalist from The Age newspaper picked up their story interviewed a number of these former-interpreters and published their story. Husayn made such points as – “We didn’t expect [the Australian Government] to bring us and just keep us in a house and that’s it… To start a life means not to come here and just to stay at home watching the children” (Author interview with Husayn). Such activism suggests that these respondents are engaged with democratic mechanisms – in this case engaging the media - and feel entitled to act as full members of the Australian polity in order to address their discontents.

Their story got some traction in the media and Husayn and his friends were contacted by ADF and immigration department representatives and asked to a meeting to discuss their situation. They attended the meeting but felt that many officials in the room were “sarcastic about us. They were not serious. They even made some jokes. So we gave them our demands … they refused every point.” Feeling dejected, Husayn and his friends asked for a reference from the ADF so they could rent a house on the private housing market, and apply for
jobs. Their request was initially denied. Husayn was “very angry”. “I started shouting,” he said. “Saying ‘you let us down.’ And that officer was looking like this… like amused.” They left the meeting feeling unvalued and disappointed. A few months later, however, the ADF sent them each a reference letter. The letters were “signed by [ADF] Chief [Angus] Houston.” As Husayn recalled, “he signed a paper of appreciation, saying that we are very grateful for your support and help… And that paper was so useful… To rent a house in the private sector.” Husayn and his friends used the letter to rent themselves homes on the private property market, so that they did not have to rely on government housing but could not use it for a job reference.

It is clear from this story that Husayn felt invisible in Australian society and short-changed for his work for the ADF in Iraq. Even as he tried to talk with the Defence force representatives, to claim what he felt entitled to, he felt mocked and humiliated, as if his cause was not legitimate. Although this respondent was satisfied to an extent by the reference letter he received, he still faced what he perceived as the society’s discrimination against people with “refugee” status in Australia. He remained angry about his situation, and after this affair very much turned into his own close-knit community for solidarity, no longer wishing to seek help from elsewhere. It may be seen here, that his sense of entitlement in the Australian context led him to engage the system to further his own interests. In the long run, though, he has not been substantively recognised and has become somewhat alienated from the socio-political sphere in Australia. Indeed, he was angry. Overall, the respondents’ experiences with the political realm both in Iraq and Australia have informed disaffected, at times alienated attitudes, which manifest as politically apathetic behaviours.

(iii) Politics of Forced Migration: Over-simplified and Exclusionary

The respondents were asked about their understandings of the politics of forced migration as it plays out in the Australian context. Despite a distinct sense of political apathy and disengagement among respondents, as has been found thus far, the answers to this part of the interview tell a different story.
That is, although a vast majority of the respondents indicated a lack of interest in politics, a majority of the respondents expressed relatively complex political understandings of the issue of forced migration, particularly in light of their experience as forced migrants. They reflected critically on Australian government policies in the area.

Overall, the respondents perceived many of the Australian government’s policy decisions as over-simplistic, and as having chronic or unwanted affects that the government chooses to ignore. Many of the respondents recognised the complexity of political issues in this area, with a few teasing out issues commonly associated with the “liberal paradox” or the inherent tension between the inclusionary nature of universal rights, and the exclusionary nature of particular, nationally framed rights. Most of the respondents felt the Australian government takes an exclusive approach to the issue of forced migration, which has a corollary of negative effects for refugees themselves. Those respondents who expressed such an opinion tended to point to negative stereotypes of refugees, asylum seekers and Muslims, and issues they are personally having with certain areas of policy, especially the nature of immigration detention and issues associated with family reunification. Despite a range of measured responses and reasoned opinions about this topic, most of the respondents appear to have internalised the refugee or asylum seeker identity, which they perceive as having a relatively low status in Australian society. They perceived themselves as unentitled to contribute to the debate, or be politically active on this issue. This is despite their first-hand, unique knowledge of the practical effects of forced migration policy and legislation as they play out in the lives of refugees themselves.

A number of respondents perceive that the Australian government purposely simplifies or misrepresents the phenomenon of forced migration to the public as it lacks the political will to address the issue comprehensively and find durable solutions for displaced persons globally. They view the Australian government’s approach towards forced migration as inadequate. Hassan said, “I think [the politicians] know about the situation about asylum seekers globally and locally but because they don’t have an
answer and don’t come out and say, ‘you are welcome,’ they
make themselves not knowing what is happening, as if they are
not expecting this large number of people coming over and
things like that. But they know that is happening in the world,
they just pretend they don’t” (Author interview with Hassan).

Mubarak, who arrived to Australia by boat, noted how governments from both
sides of Australian politics take the same approach to the issue. Of Julia
Gillard’s election win against Tony Abbott in 2010, he said, “We used to refer
to her as our Aunty Julia… but then she turned out to be on the other side
anyway” (Author interview with Mubarak). He suggested that the issue is used
for political points scoring, and represents a sort of political apathy on the part
of the political elite, a lack of will to find comprehensive policy solutions for
the displaced.

Many respondents made the argument that people would not try to reach
Australia by boat if they did not have reasons to do so – pointing out that it is
an act of desperation and hope. Hakeem said in this vein, but specifically
about onshore maritime arrivals, “I wish that the Australian government would
recognise the real problems - these people are obvious, crossing the ocean is
crossing death, you can’t imagine, this should be evidence for them” (Author
interview with Hakeem). These respondents lamented the state’s portrayal of
refugees as unwelcome guests or economic migrants; depictions that tend to
understate the reasons for refugees’ flight and instead focus on the burden they
represent to the Australia national community. This, according to a number of
respondents, serves to preserve refugees’ suffering and creates a popular-level
misunderstanding of the motives of displaced people.

Six respondents explicitly pointed to negative stereotypes surrounding the
asylum seeker and refugee identity in Australia. Most argued that the
government propagates such negative perceptions, whether it is intentional or
not. Ali said, “well we know that now they detain asylum seekers for seven
years on an Island… they are definitely not giving a good picture of refugees.”
(Author interview with Ali). Yasin spoke at length of the consequences that
the government’s approach has on forced migrants themselves, indicating that
government treatment amounts to dehumanisation and persecution, and ultimately causes mental stress for forced migrants trying to settle into Australian society. Indeed, Yasin was on a bridging visa at the time he was interviewed, and said, “I feel like Canberra is waging an emotional war on us”. He goes on, “they see that this person has come here after suffering and abuse but don’t provide humanitarian support… it caused us a great deal of depression, not on a small scale” (Author interview with Yasin). Yasin was in a state of indefinite limbo, unsure if he can stay in Australia or even where he will be next month, leaving him feeling thoroughly depressed, unwanted, alienated, yet powerless to redress his discontents.

Despite a general interpretation of Australia’s forced migration debates and policies as inimical to the demands of universal rights and refugee law, many respondents nonetheless noted that it is a nation-state’s prerogative to protect their borders and try and control who enters. That is, they point to a political dilemma for the Australian state. One such respondent was Husayn, one of the interpreters, who said, “It has two different directions here. Maybe they have the right to protect their homeland. I mean the Australian politicians… They need to protect their economy, to protect their society from being invaded by those refugees let’s say.” From the refugees’ perspective, he contends, “they have the right to look for a better life” (Author interview with Husayn). Husayn perceives the issue as complex and hard to approach, and clearly empathises with both the prerogatives of state and the rights of forced migrants who have no control over their displacement. Husayn is one of three respondents who sympathise with the Australian state and side with its current approach, having internalised popular rhetoric and believing that those who arrive to Australia by boat are “illegal”. Nevertheless, they tend to sympathise to a degree with those trying to seek asylum.

As stated above, although the respondents are personally familiar with the various issues of forced migration policy, most of the respondents appear to have internalised the “refugee” or asylum seeker identity, as it is perceived in popular political debates. That is, they have internalised an “other” identity relative to the Australian mainstream socio-political community. They
perceive themselves as having a relatively low social status in Australian society. Yusuf exemplified this feeling among the majority of respondents, saying of political debate about refugees, “I don’t follow it… besides, what difference will my opinion make? It will not make any difference. This is a country with its own flag and government; it provides therefore it determines. I am just an asylum seeker.” (Author interview with Yusuf). This statement is a strong indication that this respondent – along with most of the respondents - felt unwelcome to contribute to political debates, and lacked a sense of entitlement and agency in the Australian political context. This informs their disengagement from political processes.

(iv) Societal Understandings of Forced Migration: Ill informed and Biased

The respondents were asked what they thought of the Australian community’s perceptions of forced migration. Overall, the respondents perceive the Australian community, generally, as having a lack of contact with forced migrants themselves, and therefore are ignorant of the actual social conditions that lead to displacement and the real-world ramifications of lacking membership in a secure polity. That is, the respondents think that most people in Australia lack the knowledge and understanding needed to empathise with the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. According to the respondents, this lack of contact between Australian citizens generally and forced migrants allows people to believe negative, racist stereotypes and form their opinions based on incomplete, politicised information.

A majority of respondents, whether they thought people in Australia had good or bad intentions towards forced migrants, felt that there was a distinct lack of understanding amongst mainstream Australians about the suffering the respondents experienced before arriving to Australia. As Akil said plainly, “I don’t think people in Australia understand where refugees come from… I think they have not mixed with them enough, and just don’t know (Author interview with Akil). Fazil was more cynical in his interpretation; he perceived the Australian community’s approach to the issue of forced migration as based
on a feigned ignorance. He says people “play dumb” so that they don’t need to grapple with a complex and politically contentious issue. In doing so doing, they ignore the root issues and act to protect and galvanise their privilege within Australian society; “I think [people in Australian society] understand but they act like they don’t understand… it is easier for them if they don’t see the problem, because then it is not theirs and they can stay as they are” (Author interview with Fazil). Such cynicism speaks to a measure of disaffection. Overall, there was a tendency for respondents to site a lack of social contact between refugees and mainstream Australians as a key factor driving a lack of understanding or misunderstandings in the Australia community.

Similar to Fazil’s point above, Rashid perceived that unless the issue of forced migration affects Australians directly, they are happy to ignore it. And, in the case that the issue is perceived to affect them directly, it is usually framed such that refugees or asylum seekers are problematic for Australian citizens and residents. He suggested that refugees resident in Australia are used as political scapegoats for a number of larger, usually macro-economic or infrastructure issues. As he explained, “The people in the street, they have no opinion, none of them have an opinion unless they are confronted with problems that flow from the refugees.” He illustrated his point, saying, “If [a person in Australia] was not able to obtain employment and the government or employer or something tells him ‘it’s the number of the refugees’… he will think that the refugees have a negative impact on him” (Author interview with Rashid). Rashid has a keen perception that mainstream and government rhetoric in Australia tends to label and stigmatise refugees such that they may legitimately be used by political elites as scapegoats for other issues.

Like Rashid, a number of respondents pointed to stereotypes and stigmas attached to the refugee identity as obscuring understanding amongst people in the community, as well as inhibiting their capacity to empathise with the situation of the respondents. According to Yusuf, a lack of substantive intercultural contact, or an effective channel of communication between forced migrants and members of the mainstream community allows misperceptions
and negative stereotypes to persist, particularly amongst everyday Australians. He said, “[Everyday Australians] don’t know. They don’t even ask what happened to me.” Yusuf interpreted his treatment by others in Australia as superficial, and felt he is judged on his “Arab” appearance. He further perceived few opportunities to create contact with others in the Australia. It is clear that Yusuf interprets the lack of communication between refugees resident in the country and Australians more broadly as facilitating ignorance about the issue of human displacement.

Four respondents pointed specifically to popular negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, saying that such stereotypes foster discrimination and perpetuate social division. As Said put it, “One of the main misunderstandings is against Muslims. They think all Muslims are fanatics and terrorists.” He goes on, “I think media is playing a motivating role here. They motivate the community to view Muslims as fanatics or as terrorists. This is one of our sufferings in this country,” Said goes on to point to common, explicit identity markers that invite negative treatment from others in Australia; “if they know your name is Mohammad, for example, or your wife’s wearing a hijab, they will see that you are Muslim and treat you bad. It is those people who are fanatics” (Author interview with Said). Said here interprets Islamophobia as a form of fanaticism or extremism in itself, an unjust use of identity markers to justify political violence and exclusion, a stigma that operates to cause suffering among Muslims in Australia.

Overall, the respondents perceive a lack of social contact between the majority in Australia and refugees as informing a lack of understanding between these two groups. They further perceived this lack of contact as perpetuating the existence of negative stereotypes, against refugee and Muslim identity markers, which in turn inhibits the facilitation of communication and contact.
(v) Human Rights: Not Universal in Practice – A Political Tool

The respondents were asked to share their perspectives on human rights and how they function in global and domestic politics. The main theme to come out of this discussion was the idea that human rights, for the most part, are not inherent nor universal, but are granted by powerful states and bodies selectively and in line with their political interests; not universal in application and political practice. Most respondents felt, giving different anecdotes or experiences to back up their view, that human rights were most often used as political tools by developed, wealthy and politically powerful states to manipulate socio-political conditions globally.

Hassan best summed up this dominant attitude of the sample, taking the Australian state as an example. He said the Australian government “uses human rights in a way - everyone does not just have them - in accordance with their motives, and what they desire. They take the aspects that are most suited to them.” Hassan then points to the illusion of universality associated with human rights principles, saying, “This is a very illusive concept. Government, I think, in dealing with this concept do so according to the way they like.” He points to Australia’s detention facility at Nauru, which the Australian state use despite “the United Nations, in respect of human rights, has placing a red line on Camp Nauru” (Author interview with Hassan). Hassan is cynical about the real world application of human rights principles by powerful states.

A slight majority of respondents pointed to instances where countries like Australia have been complicit in actions that are out of line with human rights principles, though they are, ironically, waged in the name of said principles. Most poignantly, they pointed to the occupation of Iraq and foreign policy toward the Middle East region generally, as cases in point. The respondents argued that these actions are taken in the national interest, and are geo-political manoeuvres, not human rights campaigns. As Husayn said, “If you are talking about the war in Iraq, human rights are biased.” He went on to illustrate his
point further by speaking about Western governments distinct approaches to issues in Syria and Bahrain (as it stood in 2012). His remarks speak to the existence of IS-like groups in Syria at the time, saying, “

So [Western states] support the Syrian demonstrators and even those people from [Islamist groups]. [People from this group] are very fanatical; they are using bombs, they are using suicide bombs, you know. But the rich countries keep supporting them, calling for human rights.”

Shaking his head as he talks, Husayn goes on to say that the West does not intervene in places like Bahrain, even though peaceful democracy protestors are being killed by the Bahraini state. He states unequivocally “the reason is very clear. It’s not a matter of human rights. Human rights have been modified in a way [so as] to be side by side with some agendas… it’s not really a humanitarian thing going on” (Author interview with Husayn). In the same vein, pointing to the selective approach taken by global political elites to the actual enforcement of human rights, Jihad said, “the governments in the western countries, they give the human rights to the people they like. They don’t give human rights to the people they don’t like.” A majority of the sample expressed this attitude that human rights are often used as a rhetorical and political tool by wealthy states rather than being guided by a commitment to a universalistic political philosophy.

The respondents also pointed to transgressions in the human rights of people supposed to be protected under Australian law. They noted experiences in detention camps and the plight of people being held in community detention on bridging visas. Of a protest on Christmas Island, during which a fire broke out and the Australian Federal Police intervened and brought the protesters into submission, Hassan said, “they justified Christmas Island… saying that ‘if the army had not intervened the refugees would have occupied Christmas Island, they would have occupied it in its entirety.’” Hassan, who was in the detention facility when this occurred, contended that despite the government’s public justifications for the fire it was the federal police officers that started the blaze. He said,
“The police were not able to contain [the protest] without the use of live bullets. I have made a collection of the bullets... this in itself is a violation of the laws of human rights, I think... the Federal Police caused the fire. They fired live bullets, which hit the wires of the [electric] fence and it caused a spark which caused the fire” (Author interview with Hassan).

It is worth noting here that the tenor of much of the media reporting of this incident placed the blame for the fire on the actions of the detainees, not the police. Hassan perceived that the detainees were unfairly scapegoated, which contributed to negative stereotypes about asylum seekers, and renewed support for the state’s detention policies.

All the respondents were deeply sceptical about the use of human rights rhetoric by powerful global political elites to justify certain aggressive international, geo-strategic policies – policies that in practice, they felt, rescind the human rights of civilians in various countries – was evident among the vast majority of the respondents. Yasin captured this best, and without care to elaborate, “Human rights are a dream that is impossible to come true” (Author interview with Yasin). Overall, the respondents reflected on the positive ideal that human rights principles represent, but lamented that such rights do not really exist under the current socio-political conditions. Instead they perceive human rights to operate in political practice as a rhetorical and political tool used selectively by powerful, wealthy countries such as Australia to pursue parochial interests.

(vi) Democracy: Positive about potential for representation

The respondents were asked to reflect on their views about democracy as a system of governance. Overall, the respondents were positive about democracy in societies where the rule of law is respected, as it allows activism and political representation for individuals and/or communities. Many take a comparative perspective to make their point, saying that democracy in Iraq is farcical - a mask for tyranny - as there is no rule of law. While most think that Australia’s democracy functions relatively well, a number of respondents point
to instances where democracy masks tyranny in the Australian context, too. In saying that, the respondents’ sceptical attitudes towards democracy were far less pronounced that their overall attitudes of cynicism about human rights.

The vast majority of respondents – 28 of 30 - saw democracy, when functioning under socio-political conditions where the rule of law thrives, as a positive and desirable system of governance. They tended to equate a well-functioning democracy with respect for human rights, such as freedoms of speech and association, and the availability of safe channels for activism, through which individuals can lawfully claim rights to which they are entitled. This is reminiscent of Benhabib and Habermas’s discursive and inclusive conception of democracy. Like a vast majority of respondents, Ahmad said that in a democratic system people are able to express “ideas and opinions legally.” He noted the importance of representation in democracies – “you choose your people who are to act or represent you at government fairly, and when you live, practice your religion and culture freely, this is democracy” (Author interview with Ahmad). The key principles of democracy pointed to by most respondents are freedom of expression and association within a system that strives to represent citizen interests and is ruled by law.

A number of respondents mentioned the importance of the rule of law to mitigate corruption and ensure the ideal functioning of democracy. Many made this point by comparing the political system in Iraq (where, they argue, rule of law is non-existent and state practices tend to be corrupt) and Australia. As Jihad put it, almost mimicking the work of democratic theorists such as Habermas and Benhabib, “Democracy is good, but it needs laws to arrange the relationships between the people and the government.” He goes on to apply this principle to analyse the situation in Iraq saying, “Not like what happened in Iraq…For example [one group] cut off the roads, and they said ‘this is a democracy, and we have a right and we need this right, so we didn’t open the road until we get our right.” Jihad perceives such interpretations of democracy as problematic, as the rights claims of one group significantly curtail the rights of others in the society. In this case, the right to use the public road. He said, “Actually, if you want to get your right just make a demonstration, don’t go to
the public services and cut the entire road, damage the building and say, I have a right. I need my right” (Author interview with Jihad). Ibrahim noted that any democratic claims making or activism must be premised on lawful intentions and behaviour, saying, “You should respect the laws of this country and then [you] can talk and can do, and say anything in the newspaper, on the TV, even against the government... This is democracy... always within the law” (Author interview with Ibrahim). The respondents have an acute appreciation of the role of law and legal principles in ensuring the functioning of democracy. That is, the respondents value the same liberal democratic principles that have been characterised in popular discourse about migration as “Australian values”. Such a characterisation erroneously lends this notion a culturally parochial aspect, which is problematic for culturally “distinct” groups who, in reality, adhere to the same values yet are depicted otherwise.

Hassan focussed on a more specific aspect of democracy as it functions in Australia and pointed to immigration as a particular area of Australian government policy that is disconnected from democratic processes. He said, “[Democracy] is good... unless it reaches the mafia. When it gets to the mafia there is no democracy... now, don’t you think the immigration is like a mafia? Outside the control of the government? I think that the way the migration officials operate is like the mafia. They are the only ones who have [control] over decisions ... you ask any organisation, and they say we will help with anything but the immigration issues... And all the other organisations, the same, they’ll help with anything but the immigration. No one will go near it... It’s almost a non-accessible organisation” (Author interview with Hassan).

Hassan perceived this area of policy as being handled in an undemocratic or “mafia-like” fashion and points to the importance of rule of law, which is supposed to ensure that democratic processes are not corrupted. His argument is reminiscent of Mary Crock’s “secret immigration business” (Crock & Ghezelbash, 2010) and is even more relevant in light of recent legislation in Australia, not least the Border Force Act, which effectively gags immigration and detention centre officials and staff.
Overall the respondents have positive attitudes about democracy as a system of governance but are aware of the ideal conditions under which a democracy must operate for it to be functional and legitimate. None purported to believe that democracy exists in their home country of Iraq, but see it functioning more fully in Australia despite some pitfalls, such as a populist level stigma of Muslims and the secret, non-transparent function of the immigration department.

6.8 Summary

The meanings the respondents ascribe to their various socio-political attitudes and behaviours were complex and varied. Generally, all the respondents were deeply affected and traumatised by their flight from Iraq (and surrounds) and were profoundly grateful for the protection afforded them by the Australian state. However, the vast majority have struggled to identify with and feel included in the Australian socio-political system after arriving into the community. Issues tend to crop up around practices of the Australian state, such as immigration detention, slow family reunification procedures and issues with the immigration department. Further problematic aspects are related to unfamiliar cultural norms and political rhetoric associated with forced migration discourse, which they interpret as propagating negative stereotypes about forced migrants. Furthermore, there were persistent issues of poor mental health, perceived racism in the Australian milieu and issues of entrenched socio-economic disadvantage among the sample, all of which compounded a sense among respondents that they lacked entitlement and social status. The following discussion discusses the large dataset meaningfully, so as to reflect on the theoretical concerns of the study and address the research questions.
Chapter Seven

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the major themes to come out of the data analysis and discusses them in terms of the theoretical approach of the study so as to reflect upon the project’s research questions. It is worth reiterating that this project sought to elucidate data about the attitudes and behaviors of a sample group of Iraqi refugees in Australia in order to explore whether the macro-level assumptions of democratically grounded cosmopolitan theory are founded in their context. More specifically, it seeks to reflect upon their qualitative experiences of political membership in Australia. It looks at whether, overall, their subjective orientation to the democratic socio-political system lends to the argument that they identify with this system – with all its social and cultural values and norms, discourses, policies and laws - and therefore engage with democratic processes and discourse, and contribute to legitimate democratic reproduction. Alternatively, it explores whether they feel disaffected or alienated in the Australian socio-olitical system and do not engage with democratic processes. Such an orientation may be seen to sustain their position at the margins of the political community, relatively unrepresented and included only by name.

In order to meaningfully discuss the findings from the data analysis, and reflect on the respondents’ subjective orientation to the socio-political system in Australia, the discussion is broken down into four categories, each of which represents a particular site of socio-political activity and interaction, or space in the public sphere. Firstly it discusses the major theme to come from data about the respondents’ experiences and interactions with government-funded organisations and service providers. This is followed by a discussion of the major theme to come from the data pertaining to the respondents’ interactions and experiences in the social milieu in Australia. Thirdly, it looks at the major theme to come from analysing the respondents’ interactions and experiences of the political
milieu in Australia. And finally, it discusses the major theme to come from the respondents’ experiences as rights-bearing members of the Australian polity – either as citizens or soon to be citizens in Australia – which represents a culmination of the previous three themes and provides a meaningful segue to the conclusions of this research, which are presented in the subsequent and final chapter.

6.2 Welfare without Welcome

This section discusses the respondents’ experiences and interactions with state-funded institutions, services and service providers, particularly upon arrival to the country and within their first six months of living in the community. It explores their perceptions and interpretations of the two distinct policy approaches that the Australian state has institutionalised to manage the state’s border protection objectives in the first instance, and the settlement needs of forced migrants in the second. These institutions may be seen as the state’s juxtaposed, two-pronged vanguard; frontline immigration defence, detention and processing institutions designed purposely to send a message of exclusion (for onshore humanitarian arrivals only); and the country’s social services and support institutions designed ostensibly for social inclusion, to orient and assist new humanitarian arrivals to settle into Australian society (for all humanitarian arrivals).

The respondents’ experiences within these institutions are discussed in light of Seyla Benhabib’s concern with subjective claims making and political contestations that occur at the boundaries of political communities. It engages with Benhabib’s definition of political membership as “the principles and practices for incorporating aliens and strangers, immigrants and newcomers, refugees and asylum seekers, into existing polities” (Benhabib, 2004, p. 1). It discusses how the “principles and practices” used to “incorporate” the respondents in this study were perceived by the sample, and how those perceptions, in turn, affected the respondents’ qualitative understanding of the new polity to which they
were arriving. The way a nation state treats people such as asylum seekers and refugees, who stand at the boundary of the democratic community and seek entry, acts as something of a litmus test for how that political community imagines and constitutes itself, how it defines membership within its polity, and, ultimately, what it deems an appropriate response to outsiders who make political claims for protection and entry based on human rights precepts (Benhabib 2004; 2007). In other words, how the national polity mediates universalist norms and expresses to new entrants the “principles under which it has constituted itself as a polity” (Benhabib, 2013, p. 4).

With this in mind, this section looks at the themes to come from the data about respondents’ experiences within state facilities or with public service providers upon arrival to the country. It reflects on how the respondents’ dominant experiences informed their first impressions of the liberal democratic political system into which they were being politico-legally included, as well as their perceptions of their personal socio-political role or place within their new polity. As such, this section looks at how the respondents’ reflexively reconstitute their own self-identity in light of their first experiences within state structures and with state representatives in Australia, and explores whether they, overall, identified with the state’s aims, and developed feelings of belonging to the national polity, or whether their experiences led them to feel disaffected or alienated. That is, it explores whether their experiences at the boundaries of Australia’s polity have led them to reconcile their individual motives and selfhood with the shared referential narrative of the Australian polity, as is manifested, to an extent, in the institutional arrangements that greeted them upon arrival. Alternatively, it explores whether their aims and personal political subjectivity stands in contrast to that of their new polity, leaving them feeling disaffected or alienated.

As stated, the respondents’ experiences within the state’s institutions at the border – literally (detention) and figuratively (settlement services for those in the community) – gave them their first insight into the qualitative nature
of political membership in the Australian polity. It allowed them to form an impression of the popularly constructed boundaries of the demos, in a both a politico-legal and a socio-cultural sense. Firstly, the respondents’ experiences of mandatory detention indelibly shaped their first impressions of the socio-political system in Australia, as well as their reflexive understanding of how their politico-legal identity as “asylum seekers’ or “refugees” and aspects of their socio-cultural identities, such as “Iraqi” and “Muslim” are depicted and perceived in the Australian polity. In turn they came to form a view of the social role, and attendant behaviours, that the national polity in Australia ascribes the bearers of such identity markers; that is, the role they felt they are expected to play within the Australian community.

The majority of respondents perceived their politico-legal status as onshore asylum seekers, as conferring upon them a measure of criminality. Indeed, as the qualitative analysis showed, the majority of respondents felt they were detained by the Australian state as a form of punishment for seeking asylum in the country. Their detention immediately conveyed the impression that they were unwanted in Australia, and most perceived themselves as prisoners, being isolated from society and punished for a crime. Their perceptions of the conditions in detention and the treatment they received from camp staff and the Australian Federal Police further added, with the passage of time, to this dominant interpretation among the respondents that they were detained in the fashion of criminals; prisoners wholly subject to and restricted by the prerogatives of the Australian state. The respondents reflexively understood themselves as lacking any political or social agency in their new context. They perceived themselves as entirely subject to the state, rather than as effective, valued human actors within the system.

Their qualitative experiences while in detention tended to further inform a clear impression among respondents that aspects of their socio-cultural identities – particularly their Islamic religious identity– were poorly understood or misunderstood in what they perceived as the predominantly
Christian Australian context. The respondents perceived their attendant social role in their new community, as ascribed by the Australian national milieu, as that of a culturally and religiously distinct, largely misunderstood and unwanted outsider. This impression was particularly present among those respondents who witnessed and experienced discrimination, racism and violence at the hands of camp administrators and staff. Such experiences led a majority of respondents to interpret that the Australian polity did not value them as capable humans with potential to make positive contributions to Australian society, or seek to invite them to feel welcome in their new context.

None of the respondents who stayed in immigration detention, with the exception of Yusuf, understood their incarceration in terms of an administrative necessity. Instead, there was a clear perception among the respondents of a significant stigma attached to the asylum seeker identity in Australian society, which they viewed as justifying and perpetuating their lengthy detention and punitive treatment. This stands in stark contrast to the Australian state’s claims about the aims of mandatory detention policy, as they stood up to 2013. Even Yusuf, who identified with the aims of the state, and conceded “the reality is that it’s their right to check the person and whether they will let him into Australia” added a disclaimer in regard to lengthy detention periods. He noted, “it’s true that you start to consider yourself in detention if it’s over a long period, you feel like you have been imprisoned and restricted” (Author interview with Yusuf). Such punitive practices of the state affected not just the respondents’ qualitative experiences inside detention; it communicated to the respondents how they were being received, perceived and discussed in the Australian polity more broadly. Overall the respondents did not identify with the way they were treated inside detention; they felt their reception was unjust, and interpreted this to mean that the Australian polity deemed them deserving of such unjust treatment.

Beyond the existence of mandatory detention for onshore arrivals, lengthy detention times and popularised stigmas associated with the asylum seeker
and Muslim identity markers, a number of respondents elaborated on the poor conditions and treatment inside detention facilities, which added to their sense of imprisonment and the dominant perception that their particular socio-cultural identities are not valued, or at least widely misrepresented and misunderstood in the Australian polity. Given that detention was an institutional arrangement designed with exclusion in mind, and sits embedded in Australian law and condoned by the majority of the Australian public, it may be seen that such legal arrangement met its aims: to exclude. The “state practice for incorporating aliens and strangers” (Benhabib, 2007, p. 1) made the respondents feel substantively, qualitatively excluded from the demos that lay inside the borders, beyond their reach. That is, their politico-legal attachment to the democratic polity via the state institution of immigration detention did not encourage identification, belonging and solidarity with the polity more broadly. Though it operated to eventually include them officially, as per the arguments of democratically grounded cosmopolitan theories, it simultaneously sent a strong, emotionally profound message that they had not been invited and thus should expect nothing, but simply take what they are given and be grateful. A paternalistic and, ultimately, dehumanising institutional arrangement from the perspective of the respondents.

To recap, for all the 19 respondents who arrived via the onshore humanitarian pathway, immigration detention was their first experience of the nature and quality of the socio-political system in Australia. As such, many of them quickly understood that they were characterised, by and large, as unwanted outsiders by the Australian polity, worthy of unjust treatment. That is, their first impression of their place in Australian society was one of exclusion; they were alien, outsiders, punished for seeking asylum, stripped of liberties and agency, and therefore unable to redress their concerns. In terms of social capital theory, the respondents’ first experiences with Australian state institutions acted to reduce trust, and deny respondents the opportunity for any sense of local connectedness or reciprocity. As a consequence of their detention, and their perception of their treatment as punitive and significantly curtailing their liberties and
social choices, a number of respondents quickly developed feelings of isolation and estrangement.

Given the respondents’ backgrounds, many having suffered persecution and violence in the name of militant identity politics and the vast majority having lived in situations of protracted displacement, their experiences in detention became something of an extension of the persecuted life they already knew, but had been trying to escape. Detention was something of a last straw for many of the respondents, who described their experiences using disruptive metaphors, such as, “destroyed us mentally” (Muhammad) and “My life flipped upside down” (Abdul Aziz). This tended to inform alienated attitudes among the respondents, who perceived their treatment by the Australian state as symbolic of “a fundamental conflict between their basic politicized values and those exhibited in the polity” (Schwarz 1973, p. 14). Furthermore, due to their incarceration and lack of substantive membership to the national polity at this point, they perceived “both themselves and the political system to be inefficacious to reduce this conflict” (Schwarz 1973, p. 14). The respondents felt powerless to redress their concerns and the Australian state was unwilling to cease or improve their system of detention, even in the face of official complaints made by respondents via legitimate, communications channels such as several meetings with camp administrators. In many cases these feelings of powerlessness manifested as mental illness, from anxiety, stress and depression to extremely passive and despondent behaviours or more aggressive and reactive behaviours.

Overall, immigration detention is a socio-political institutional arrangement that is sanctioned by Australia’s courts and the community at large, which acted to severely disrupt the migration pathway of the respondents in this study. Those affected perceived their incarceration by the Australian state as another chapter in their personal histories of protracted displacement and persecution, which had time and time again been waged on the basis of how aspects of their social identity were perceived by an external actor. Such symbolically violent and physically
coercive externalities were in stark contrast to their personal expectations, understandings, feelings, aims, and motives. That is, the Australian’s polity’s ascription of asylum seekers’ undesirability and illegal motives was at odds with their self-identity narratives. As a result, the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of the respondents’ experiences in detention tended to be chronic disaffection and alienation, leading to entrenched mental health issues and a concomitant passivity associated with psychoactive medication, or disillusionment with what they viewed as their ongoing and unfair persecution and a concomitant withdrawal from interacting beyond their tight knit networks. Across the board, mandatory immigration detention adversely affected the mental health of the respondents and ultimately corrupted their capability and potential to readily develop a sense of identification, belonging and inclusion in mainstream Australian society.

As alluded to above, the second prong of Australia’s institutional arrangements designed to “incorporate aliens and strangers” (Benhabib, 2007 p. 1) is delivered through the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program. The framework of Australia’s refugee settlement sector is currently based on a welfare model (Hugo 2011). HSS aims to “provide initial practical support designed to build the independence of newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants, generally for the first six to 12 months” (HSS 2015). It is worth noting again that the vast majority of Australia’s humanitarian intake is via the offshore pathway, and the country’s refugee settlement programs have been well established since the 1980s. Indeed, the design of Australia’s resettlement program is such that services and service providers represent the frontline of Australian society’s relationship with most forced migrants arriving in the community, and are the primary means to facilitate initial orientation, settlement and inclusion. The institutional arrangements in place are seen as relatively progressive and effective models by global standards for the political management of newly arrived, culturally diverse migrants and are regularly touted by politicians (UNHCR, 2009).
All the survey and interview respondents accessed government-funded settlement services since arriving to Australia. The majority of respondents were still accessing welfare support at the time of research. Overall, the respondents were extremely grateful for the material support provided them by the Australian state and the logistical and emotional support provided by settlement sector staff, such as caseworkers. The gratitude felt by all the respondents was informed to a large extent by a sense of relief that they had found a safe place to live. Indeed, given that the vast majority of interview respondents – twenty-three of the thirty - were displaced for more than five years before arriving to Australia, and that all fled from their former life due to profound suffering as a consequence of authoritarian and militant manifestations of identity politics, their sense of relief at finding safety in the Australian community was profound. Furthermore, and counter to all their previous experiences of state beneficence, they received material, and for those with effective caseworkers, emotional support via government funded programs. This arrangement may be seen to have endeared the respondents to the socio-political system in Australia, as they closely identified with the aims of the settlement sector, engaged with settlement service providers and tended to benefit directly from this institutional setup.

The majority of respondents reflected positively on the welfare they received through settlement services, as it provided for their immediate material needs and allowed them to feel secure at a time in their lives that was otherwise characterised by dislocation and uncertainty. This seems to have built up among the respondents a significant level of gratitude and good will for the Australian socio-political system; heartfelt gratitude that an unfamiliar nation-state would provide them such support. Indeed, for some respondents, they felt genuinely surprised to find such levels of state support, as they had not held any expectations for such services to be provided them on arrival.

This overall attitude of gratitude among the respondents saw them identify with the system, particularly because it was, in the view of many, their
only inlet to Australian society. In their initial months of settlement in particular, in lieu of social networks in their new and unfamiliar context, or any perception of the wider community caring about their arrival or settlement, it was visits to caseworkers and doctors and other such relatively instrumental activities that facilitated a sense of inclusion in the Australian milieu. This is captured in Yusuf’s remark, “the Australian society does not know much about me... I am thankful to... the community after the Australian government, because when you get out [of detention], it is the Australian government who helps, not the people” (Author interview with Yusuf). The settlement sector and the welfare services provided by the Australian state may be seen to have achieved the aim for which they were designed; to facilitate democratic attachments between new humanitarian arrivals and state institutions and representatives.

Despite this overall positive impression of settlement services on a short-term, material level, a deeper look into the substantive experiences of the respondents, particularly as their time in the country progressed, exposes two main points of contention with the settlement sector. Firstly, there are instances where settlement and government services and service providers explicitly failed, variously leaving respondents homeless, severely stressed and anxious, living in a state of economic desperation and unemployment, completely unaware of the progress and outcomes of their application for protection and/or family reunification visas, and conflicting with their caseworkers. According to the respondents affected, such instances contributed significantly to the development of attitudes and behaviours premised on feelings of disaffection and disillusionment, and in some cases complete alienation and disconnection from the socio-political structures that are supposed to be designed for their benefit and inclusion.

One incident elucidated by Ali illustrated the deleterious effects that a breakdown in settlement service provision can potentially have on new humanitarian arrivals. Ali, after being released from his yearlong stay in detention on Christmas Island, was left homeless in Melbourne, reliant on
his few social acquaintances (people he had met in detention) for shelter. Ali perceived this period of his life intensely, noting, ‘the life I suffered at the beginning in Melbourne was more difficult than the suffering I experienced in Iraq’ (Author interview with Ali). His subsequent behaviours were deeply affected by this event, as he actively avoided the mainstream settlement system, and pursued other means in order to procure money as well as a passage for his family to come to Australia. He refused to elucidate the means by which he came to reverse his fortune, putting it down to “God’s willingness.” Yet, whatever his precise behaviour was, he indicated that it was premised on a feeling of alienation from the formal systems of settlement in the country. He felt alienated by the settlement system and anxious about his condition, which appears to have precipitated purposive behaviour that saw him withdraw from the public sphere and, though left unspoken, engage in behaviour that was probably nefarious in nature.

The second major point of discontent to come from analysis of the data about respondents’ experiences with settlement services relates to a perception that the government pursues a short-term approach to welfare provision. A number of respondents felt frustrated that their cases are treated by service providers as yet another number being processed by a bureaucratic machine, instead of being approached as a long-term investment in their life and future. This perception was most commonly noted in relation to respondents’ interactions with various immigration services and agents, as they tried to understand complex, lengthy and bureaucratically rigid family reunification procedures and arrange applications for their families. Indeed, issues pertaining to family reunification and interactions with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, or lack thereof, affected more than half of the interview respondents and were among the most intensely felt, stress-inducing discontents. Themes that persistently cropped up among the interviewees included severe anxiety about being separated from their family, having no indication of when they may be reunited with family and perceiving
themselves as unentitled to ask the Immigration department for more information than what they freely offered.

Furthermore, there was a perception among some respondents that refugees generally are stigmatised in the Australian context. These respondents pointed to instances where the refugee label or social identity is used by government representatives and media commentators to justify wider macro-economic discontents. For some, they feel they are offered welfare and then maligned for taking welfare provisions. Rashid pointed out that, unless the issue of forced migration affects Australians directly, they are happy to ignore the issue. And, in the case that the issue is perceived to affect them directly, it is usually framed such that the refugee or asylum seekers are causing problems for Australian citizens and residents. He suggested that refugees resident in Australia are used as political scapegoats for a number of larger, usually macro-economic or infrastructure issues, which is backed up by research in Australia (Spinney & Nethery, 2013). Such observations made by the respondents suggest only an instrumental and superficial level of identification and engagement with the socio-political system – what Calhoun calls out as overemphasising bare inclusion into the legal-political framework afforded by the constitution. By highlighting the instrumental “rational bureaucratic” relationship between the respondent and the socio-political system more broadly, the state is able to fulfil its own systemic outcomes and thereby symbolically shoulders the burden of refugee settlement. Yet, in doing so, state policies and practices ignores and masks the disaffection and alienation that better characterises the respondents’ self narratives. That is, it disregards the way the respondents ascribe meaning to the practices of the Australian welfare state when trying to understand their personal position and options within this new system. That is, the state, by focusing on its own systemic outcomes for inclusion, ignores the fact that the respondents in this sample tend to feel wholly subject to the state system and constrained by it, rather than substantively included and able to pursue personal social choices.
What’s striking here is the marked disconnect between popular perceptions and mainstream depictions of forced migrants in Australia, and the perceptions the respondents have of themselves and their identity. It is worth noting, for example, that few of the respondents were drawn to seek asylum in Australia by virtue of it being Australia per se. Rather, they sought asylum in any safe, stable country where their identity and rights would be respected and upheld. Interestingly, none of the interviewees who arrived to Australia by boat and applied for onshore protection, knew much about Australia, or knew anything substantive about the culture or the political system before arriving. In light of this, populist claims that refugees such as the respondents in this study are purposefully seeking to milk Australia’s generosity and live their days out at the expense of the Australian taxpayer are unfounded; such widely held popular misperceptions nonetheless persist and add to the social stigma attached to the refugee identity in the Australian context.

Overall, the attitudes and behaviours of the respondents’ in regard to state-funded settlement support and welfare services, speak to a complex of positive interaction and engagement, largely driven by a sense of material need and a profound gratitude for welfare provisions and safety provided them. This is accompanied with a sense of disaffection that grew up over time among many respondents. In two cases there was a clear sense of alienation. These passive or negative orientations to the settlement sector are generally informed by experiences of perceived neglect on behalf of service providers, and the mechanistic and impersonal delivery of said support services. There was a distinct impression among the respondents that they felt fortunate to be the recipients of welfare, and that they, in turn, were expected by the mainstream society, the generous host, to accept welfare as sufficient in terms of what they feel they need to settle successfully. Yet, the more long term aims of the respondents, such as the intention to secure their families passage to Australia, or a desire for gainful and satisfying employment and a more genuine inclusion into the social fabric – often borne of a desire to plan an independent future, as per
the purported aims of HSS policy – seem elusive for most respondents, which feeds an ongoing feeling of social exclusion, political and legal discontents and an overall sense of disaffection among the sample. In short, they are profoundly grateful for the welfare provided them; yet feel substantively unwelcome in the Australian community despite it. They continue to struggle with mental health issues and are heavily reliant on state structures, which dictate what choices are available to them. The respondents express great difficulty breaking this situation. Such a socio-political condition feeds a sense of ongoing powerlessness and an overall lack of entitlement to full, self-directed liberal democratic socio-political membership.

The Australian state’s institutional arrangements – detention and HSS – sent a two-toned message that the respondents’ received loud and clear; they are provided for materially, but are not particularly welcome to act as full democratic members who feel they belong to the national community and are therefore entitled to claim the resources of the community and contribute to public discourse. Instead, they felt a popular level expectation, or opinion that it is befitting them to act as passive subjects. This resonates with the populist slogan, “Love it or leave it” and places the respondents in a bind. For although the respondents are hardly “loving it” and continue to battle with serious personal and political discontents, they can hardly “leave it” either, given their social and politico-legal reality as refugees. Indeed, material welfare and their protection, in a sense, operate to coerce the respondents, or to buy the respondents’ compliance to state and what they perceive as national, popular demands. This message is reminiscent of the age-old paradox built into the logic of highly controlled yet expansive immigration to Australia; highly controlled in terms of the type of migrants the countries wishes to receive. The immigration program and popular rhetoric about migration into the country continues to be built on this central axiom; a logic that says it is the role of the nation state to determine “who comes to this country and the circumstances under which they come” (Howard 2001). This rhetoric deems certain migrants as desirable, and others as undesirable. The fact that asylum seekers in
particular are “undesirable” in the Australia context was not lost on the respondents and corrupts their ability to identify with the socio-political system.

In terms of the behavioural consequences of the respondents’ conflicted attitudinal disposition – gratitude mixed with discontent and disaffection - a majority of respondents have appropriated, to an extent, the role of an unwanted guest. They act as passive recipients of political largesse. Such a state of affairs suggests that more inclusive and dynamic conceptions of democracy, as expounded by Benhabib and Habermas, which are contingent on the ideal, active and substantive role of members within such systems, are trumped by a more populist, liberal egalitarian understanding of the democratic political system. For example, many in the sample perceive themselves as not entitled, or lacking the capacity to claim full substantive rights in the Australian context, despite the existence for some respondents of deeply felt discontents. Furthermore, many respondents did not feel they were given substantive support and encouragement to become economically independent, and in control of their own lives over the long term in Australia. Instead, there is a sense that they were provided the basic tools for survival in the short term, which given their backgrounds experiences of depravity and persecution, is more than many have been offered before. Such welfare, however, was provided with a dose of hostility and in effect does not go far enough to afford them full agency within the socio-political structures of the welfare state. Instead, the welfare system operates to locks them into an instrumental relationship with the state, playing the role of the passive recipient, socio-economically marginalized and feeling socio-culturally unwanted and isolated.

Under such dominant socio-political institutional arrangements, the social and political lives of the respondents are rendered passive. As Robinson and Twormey argue, “

Statist sanctions are the least accessible, the least ‘democratic’ so to speak, of all the forms of sanctioning activity. They create the possibility of arbitrary power,
despotism and tyranny… Concentrated formal sanctions are clearly the least compatible with diversity, and the least likely to entail listening to others; their very concentration disempowers the other” (Robinson and Tormey 2009, p. 1401).

The democratic system in Australia, as interpreted by the respondents in light of their experiences in detention and with HSS, appeared to function less as a bottom-up political process in which active members of the demos cooperate with one another to represent their interests, but a top-down formulation of the “political class”. According to Habermasian logic, then, such a situation eschews and/or corrupts effective public deliberation and potentially gives rise to anti-democratic or authoritarian tendencies, and, theoretically, controverts the inclusive potential of liberal democracy for this sample.

Such a state of affairs lends credence to Calhoun’s contention that “citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law” (Calhoun, 2002, p. 153). For although the country’s “boundaries are fixed by positive law and are therefore subject to the force of democratic iteration” (Benhabib, 2007, p. 33), the actors in this sample, who may be seen to present the state with new political subjectivity and challenge the imagination to go beyond unitary citizenship models, do not regard themselves as being in a position to throw down such politico-legal contestations. Indeed, outside an instrumental relationship with the welfare state, they are not directly participating in the polity’s democratic discourse at all.

6.3 Culturally Distinct and Socially Isolated

This section discusses the respondents’ social interactions and experiences since arriving in the Australian community. Before discussing the findings, it is worth briefly revisiting the relevant macro-level theoretical suppositions under exploration. Habermas posits, “the strength of the democratic constitutional state lies precisely in its ability to close the holes
of social integration through the political participation of its citizens” (2001, p. 76). Similarly, Benhabib (2004, p. 221) argues, “Identification and solidarity are… to be leavened through democratic attachments and constitutional norms”. These scholars emphasise democratic processes and legal frameworks – a symbiosis between the socio-political and the legal - as engendering a “constitutional patriotism” which acts as a key mechanism of social inclusion for individuals (Nickel 2009). That is, they insist that it is in particular the role of modern law in concert with public autonomy - the availability and use of “actionable individual rights” (Flynn 2003, p. 431) – to ensure social integration in complex societies. Yet, as was discussed in the theoretical approach chapter, a number of cultural critics are not convinced by such legal-rationalist arguments, which are seen to whitewash the complexity and pervasiveness of cultural attachments, including stark power differentials across various cultural groups, and provide only a weak, secondary account of solidarity and belonging (Calhoun, 2002, Sen, 1992).

In Calhoun’s view, for example, such arguments rely too heavily on the assumption that the public’s sense of belonging and solidarity will result from the strength of an adherence to a legal framework. He argues that such a suggestion is insufficient because it places too much emphasis on bare inclusion into the legal-political framework afforded by the constitution: ‘Citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law’ (Calhoun 2002, p. 153). Both political scientific and sociological literatures, which have taken a “cultural” or “representative” turn in recent decades and emphasise the importance of human agency (Kurasawa 2007; Dahlgren, 2006; De Haas 2008; Tormey and Robinson 2009, Castles 2001), tend to back up this view, suggesting that in plural societies such as Australia, intercultural understanding, trust and reciprocity are contingent to and constructive of strong social ties and networks within and across cultural groups (bonding and bridging capital, respectively). This lends to more engaged and inclusive socio-cultural relations and overall cohesion in a national society such as in Australia. In order to facilitate strong social ties, individual agents must identify
themselves as valued members of society and, to an extent, feel entitled and able to communicate in meaningful terms with the broader community to which they are supposed to be in positive relations with. This stands for all members of a community, newly arrived refugees or otherwise.

The findings from this study lend credence to Calhoun’s critique of the Habermasian rationalist approach to social inclusion in democratic systems, as the respondents consistently cited issues pertaining to culture as informing their understandings of their social place or role in the Australian milieu and their subsequent social habits, routines and preferences. Overwhelmingly, it is found that the respondents’ identify themselves as culturally distinct from the broader Australian community and exhibit culturally isolated social behaviours. Indeed, the majority of respondents socialise exclusively within their Iraqi refugee community (and more specifically with the particular cohort with whom they arrived). They display low levels of cross-cultural formal or informal networking and interaction. Those that do socialise outside of their community, according to the interview data, tend to do so with colleagues during their working hours (though these relationships tend to be impermanent) or with other refugees with whom they have become acquainted throughout their journey (this is especially true of those who have spent time in immigration detention).

The interview data found that most respondents admit to being substantively unfamiliar with and not identifying with the norms and habits of social life in the Australian community. In addition to the perception that they lack a certain cultural identification and literacy, most feel they do not have the linguistic or mental capacity to initiate social interactions. Indeed, the major theme to come from analysis of the qualitative data about the respondents’ settlement experiences, was ‘culture shock, disconnection and adaptation.’ That is, their qualitative experience of social membership in Australia is one of relative isolation. Indeed, the respondents perceived themselves as markedly, even insurmountably culturally different from others in Australia, and acted reflexively to
manage this sense of disconnection by engaging in culturally parochial social behaviours. The respondents further perceived a ‘lack of community awareness’ about their identities and their background stories of struggle and persecution. This led to and reinforced a sense that they lacked meaningful social support for their settlement into the Australian social milieu. This sense of a lack of reciprocity or interest in their self-identities engendered feelings of disaffection and alienation, as opposed to solidarity and belonging, which by and large reinforced their tendency to stick with their tightknit, familiar cultural networks.

Furthermore, and in light of their experiences and observations since arriving, a majority of respondents view social relations in the wider Australian community as relatively disconnected and individualistic, which is distinct from their own social values, norms and habits which they view as far more communitarian. As Faiz said starkly, “there is no socialising here … it feels as though we live in a cemetery … there is no social life, only dead people” (Author interview with Faiz). Again, this dominant perception informed a sense of disconnection and social alienation among the group, which led the respondents to purposefully socialise within their own familiar cultural groups. They felt incapable and unwilling to cooperate or socialise with fellow members of the demos, which does not bode well for Habermas’s logic that democratic legitimacy is attained through a “fair and open deliberative process in which all citizens may freely continue to participate whatever the outcome” (Bohman, 1996, p. 89). The social position of the respondents in this sample see them shy away from participating in social activities at all, let alone in an ongoing manner.

Despite these socio-culturally isolated attitudinal and behavioural patterns explicit in the survey and interview data, a closer look at the respondents’ attitudinal patterns reveals a willingness and desire to socially engage with people from outside the Iraqi refugee community. This is backed up by the major theme to come from analysis of the data about respondents personal social life, which was “Social aspiration, but no inter-cultural life.” In
exploring the disjuncture between respondents’ relatively isolated socio-cultural networking behaviours and their apparent desire for cross-cultural engagement, understanding and socialisation, two patterns of justification became clear from the qualitative interviews. Firstly, a majority of respondents referred at some point in the interviews to their perception of popular stereotypes and stigmas associated with various aspects of their identity, and six interview respondents referred to instances of direct discrimination. In light of such instances, the respondents feel that they are deprived of agency in the Australian context, and are expected by the broader milieu to assimilate and conform to mainstream social behaviours. This perception tends to inform feelings of disaffection and alienation from the broader social milieu and informs isolated social behaviours, as the vast majority of respondents place great importance on maintaining their origin culture and heritage.

Secondly, a number of respondents framed their decision to socialise exclusively within their cultural group as being their own, subjective, reflexive choice, which they nonetheless frame in terms of their perception of a lack of intercultural dialogue and understanding between their cultural group and the cultural norms and habits of the wider society in Australia. In a sense, they claim agency over their choice to remain relatively socio-culturally isolated but still justify their choice in light of their broader structural concerns, which suggests a level of disaffection from the broader milieu and indicates low social reflexivity for these individuals in the Australian context (Giddens, 1991). It is in light of these perceptions that the respondents tend not to engage with other cultural groups, particularly mainstream white Australians, as they are reticent to believe their intentions will be welcomed, understood or reciprocated.

As stated above, a majority of respondents referred at some point in the interviews to their perception of popular stereotypes and stigmas associated with various aspects of their identity, including their “refugee” or “asylum seeker” status, or their “Iraqi” or “Muslim” identity. According to two respondents, instances of direct discrimination have caused them to
significantly adapt their behaviours and pursue actions that they are culturally uncomfortable with. In other cases, a number of respondents pointed to a perception of discrimination against their refugee status in the housing and labour markets. All six respondents who perceived they were being discriminated against, on whatever grounds, immediately reacted by recoiling into their immediate socio-cultural group and pursuing social behaviours that were purposively directed away from engagement with non-Iraqis (some respondents conceded that this affect wore off with the passage of time). Such a subjective orientation to the social community in Australia may be characterised, to an extent, as one of alienation. These respondents perceived and in turn adopted “an attitude of separation or estrangement between” (Schwarz 2007) themselves and the national community at large. In addition, they felt themselves inefficacious to reduce this sense of disconnection and defected from further engagement with the socio-political system, so as to try and reduce this conflict.

Many of the respondents interpret their choice to socialise within their Iraqi community as their own purposive behaviour, a strategy of cultural maintenance and social ease. Others justified their tendency to self-isolate variously as a personal social preference, a result of language barriers, mental health issues and other factors that made respondents’ feel ill equipped to successfully navigate an unfamiliar and daunting social world. Despite this, they tend to contextualise their personal choice in light of broader societal factors and difficulties associated with interacting with unfamiliar non-Iraqis, and non-refugees. They tend to essentialise their own and others’ identities into an ‘us’ and ‘them’ binary, which in turn naturalises this behavioural dissociation and reifies a sense and experience of socio-cultural disconnection and isolation. And, yet, their considered attitudes reflect a desire for openness and social engagement outside of their community. In light of such a perception of structural relations in the Australian context, the respondents tend to choose not to engage beyond their communities too readily, so as to assuage potential feelings of alienation, ongoing struggle, subjection and marginality.
In the scope of this study, it is significant to find that issues around culture were central to many of the perceptions and interpretations of the respondents, and were seen as informing the central social challenges faced by the majority; their perception that they did not substantively belong in the Australian context. That is, the respondents do not readily identify with the mainstream social milieu in Australia, but perceive themselves as culturally distinct from the majority in the country. This distinction is felt keenly by the sample as a whole. Such a deeply perceived socio-cultural distinction is contingent to and constructive of low levels of meaningful intercultural dialogue, interaction and understanding, consistently low socio-economic status within the sample group, as well as their perception of populist stigmas and concomitant discrimination associated with the refugee, Iraqi and Islamic identities in the Australian milieu. In light of this dominant perception, and despite openness for wider socio-cultural network engagement, the respondents’ reflexively engage in culturally isolated social behaviors, which, while fostering in-group belonging and solidarity, also act to perpetuate their cultural distinction from the mainstream and their ongoing social isolation. That is, they tend to act reflexively so as to remain purposefully aloof from public discourses, or “shared self-referential narratives” (Giddens 1991; Bohman 2015) beyond their immediate socio-cultural networks, which they view as misrepresentative of or inimical to their own perceptions of selfhood, motives and consciousness, or their self-identities. That is, they are mostly disaffected or alienated by the broader social world in Australia and purposefully disengage from actively pursuing social relations outside their tight-knit communities.

Such a state of socio-political affairs should be reflected upon critically by all actors in Australia, particularly in light of the state’s latest political commitments to “engage Australian Muslims” as expounded in the government anti-terrorism strategy. It is telling, if lamentable, that politically symbolic efforts to “engage” Australian Muslims are made in the rubric of counter-terrorism, but nonetheless accords with social
psychological research into alienation and radicalisation. Such research suggests that “the most commonly cited precursor of radicalization and homegrown terrorism is the lack of socio-political integration particular Western Muslim communities have with their broader society, and, relatedly, their experiences of discrimination, victimization, and xenophobia” (Wilner & Dubuoloz, 2010, p. 38). The process of recruiting and radicalizing individuals by extremist causes is effective among disenfranchised individuals as “alienation is replaced by identification with the group, powerlessness is replaced by potency derived from being involved in group operations, while humiliation is mitigated by participation in actions” (Wright-Neville & Smith, 2009, p. 95). Indeed, some scholars contend the greatest threat to Western democracies is not terrorism from the outside, but the sustained marginalization of citizens and residents from within their political system (King & Taylor, 2011). As such, although it is theoretically in the nation state interest not just to facilitate inclusion in the legal framework of political membership, but to foster belonging and solidarity among pluralistic, and socio-economically variable populations through a more inclusive style of discourse and political rhetoric in the public sphere (Haberms; Benhabib). In light of the discussion above, which found the respondents struggling foremost with popular and systemic discrimination and socio-cultural marginality, such an effort may be orchestrated through intercultural and interfaith initiatives, discussions and learning across apparently disparate groups living in the national community, such that the dominant, essentialised, racialized and territorially linked political discourses in Australia are challenged and new political spaces may be developed that allow for the participation of new political subjectivities brought to the polity by actors like the respondents in this sample.

Overall, the respondents’ official inclusion in the socio-political system does not appear to have leavened any particular sense of belonging and solidarity among the sample, as they look to their parochial cultural and family groups to assuage ongoing feelings of isolation and disconnection. The respondents are largely disengaged from democratic processes and discourses, and as such are
not represented in public deliberation and democratic reasoning, which suggests that, for this sample, the fundamental assumption of democratically grounded cosmopolitan theory remains unfulfilled.

6.4 Political Apathy

This section discusses the major theme to come from the respondents’ interactions and experiences in the political milieu in Australia. Whereas the section above was concerned with the respondents’ more social experiences and preferences, this section probes their political preferences and activities. It is worth briefly recapping the macro-level concerns in this particular site of analysis. Namely, that the tenets of a democratically grounded cosmopolitanism, as espoused by scholars like Seyla Benhabib, presume civic participation or individual engagement with democratic political processes, such that subjective interests are represented in political debate, and may be seen to contribute to the process of legitimate law making. That is, democracy ideally functions as a legitimate, representative form of government, and has the potential to “cosmopolitanise” under conditions where members of the demos are engaged with democratic discourse and political processes in order to facilitate democratic iterations that lead to learning, innovation and the juridification of the outcomes of normative contestations. Agents, such as those in the sample, who are a highly politicised group in the Australian context, subject to domestic law and contentious policy, as well as the daily scrutiny of the popular media, must theoretically identify with and be engaged with the democratic political system for a dialectic process that represents their viewpoints to even exist.

Overall, the major theme to come from this particular site of political interaction and experience is one of political apathy. The respondents, apart from two notable exceptions, exhibit no desire to be involved in political activism, political processes or debates, or even civic-oriented associations, activism and debate in any form. The meanings the
respondents’ ascribe to an overall sense of apathy are various. They are made up of a complex of positive attitudes towards certain elements of the political system in Australia, such as the existence of the rule of law and widespread respect for individual rights and personal freedoms and security. This is alongside more negative, cynical or alienated perspectives on other aspects of the system. Explicitly negative attitudes tended to crop up around certain aspects of immigration policy in Australia, such as detention and family reunification, as well as the existence of stigmas associated with Islamic and refugee identities. Furthermore, the respondents tended to have sceptical attitudes about human rights rhetoric as used by wealthy states such as Australia and the US. Their scepticism is informed in large part by their experiences in Iraq where they witnessed a stark difference between altruistic rhetoric about human rights, which apparently informed Western foreign policies such as military intervention and economic sanctions, and their experience of these policies on the ground, which were characterised by a lack of human rights, ongoing conflict and authoritarianism, and mass displacement in Iraq. Overall, the respondents have a deep dislike of politics and political discussions broadly, informed largely by their time living in Iraq and their overall mental and physical exhaustion from being displaced as a result of political violence and trying to resettle into an unfamiliar and daunting context.

As noted above, the respondents expressed respect for the political system in Australia, as it promotes individual rights and, perhaps most importantly for the respondents, it is governed by the rule of law. Many saw Australia’s political system as a functioning democracy in which political members are able to claim their rights. They perceived the system in Australia as facilitating a political culture that tolerates and even represents various political viewpoints. Most commonly, this perception that the system is worth “honouring” stems from the gratitude the respondents feel for having been granted refugee protection and spatial security rights in Australia. In line with the democratic theories of Habermas and Benhabib, most of the respondents tended to frame their attitudes of respect in terms of the availability of “actionable individual rights,” which is exemplified
by their own legal inclusion into the political community by way of the humanitarian immigration program. They perceived citizens in Australia as endowed with political rights, such as freedom of expression and freedom of association, which they viewed as core democratic principles. Such a positive attitudinal trend suggests that the respondents value the liberal democratic attributes of Australia’s political system, and not only agree to live lawfully within these arrangements but do so with respect, or even a sense of patriotism to the fundamental theoretical principles informing such arrangements. In other words, they tend to identify with the theoretically inclusive aspects of democracy that Habermas and Benhabib consistently highlight (Habermas, 1996; Benhabib, 2007).

Despite an overall positive perception of democracy as it functions in Australia, there were a number of respondents who expressed a level of scepticism about democracy and pointed to instances where democracy masks tyranny in the Australian context. Hassan, for example, felt that the immigration department in the Australian state functions outside the aegis of democratic mechanisms, saying, “now, don’t you think the immigration is like a mafia?” Relatively, however, it was clear in the data that the respondents held far more sceptical attitudes about human rights than democracy, which they viewed as granted by powerful states and bodies selectively and in line with their political interests, rather than being universal in application and political practice. They viewed human rights as a concept that does not exist per se, but is more of a pipe dream that is rhetorically exploited by politically powerful states. Much of this scepticism may be seen as borne of their own experiences living in Iraq, being put under UN sanctions and subject to various foreign policies waged in the name of human rights which they saw wreak destruction and, ultimately, led to their displacement and destitution. Their flight and application for protection, which unequivocally exhausted the respondents, represented a struggle to claim their human rights, and was by no means a straightforward feat. As such, while the respondents appeared to have a relatively optimistic if idealistic perspective of the Australian political system and how it functions to represent various interests – thinking in a
particularistic, national sense - few were optimistic, nor idealistic about the actual existence of universal rights in global political practice, nor the extension by countries like Australia of political goodwill beyond their own borders and national community.

Further to discussion of the respondents’ attitudes toward the political system in Australia, it is noteworthy that they tended to perceive it and talk about it from the vantage point of guests, outsiders or what may be characterised as non-members of the polity. That is, there is a clear sense that they do not feel as if they are entitled members of the democratic community in Australia, which suggests that they do not substantively identify with and therefore engage with said system or polity. Yasin conveyed this clear sense that he was an outsider looking on, and not an actual part of the Australian polity itself, saying “I feel that it is, that in Australia they have an administration and rights… yeah they are better than us, they have you know democracy” (Author interview with Yasin). Such comments suggest Yasin, and many others in the sample, identifies with the values exhibited by Australia’s political system and views it as positive, yet does not feel they belong, or that they are entitled to be included as active members within the Australian polity. Simply, it appears naturalised in the respondents’ minds that they are on one side of an “us” and “them” divide, that their Iraqi refugee identity prohibits their full inclusion into the Australian polity at this early stage in their settlement.

The respondents tend not to ascribe any one discernible “causative” factor to their feelings of not belonging in the Australian polity. Instead their perspectives pointed to a range of factors; from living under an oppressive, authoritarian regime and being persecuted due to their identity in Iraq, to the majority suffering protracted, oppressive, displacement and asylum journeys, which included detention and mental anguish. The vast majority of respondents were simply exhausted by the conditions of their lives, which in large part stem from unjust political structures to which they are bound. That is, the respondents, for most of their lives have been denied basic freedoms and lived in conditions of low social reflexivity, unable to
change their positions and fortunes within socio-political systems they have experienced thus far in their lives. This, in turn, has corrupted their ability to trust and identify with macro political structures, whether in Iraq or Australia, to which they feel subject and powerless to affect.

This observation that the vast majority of respondents have a history of negative and traumatic experiences with political systems to which they are subject, and are therefore wholly disinclined to engage with such systems, is borne out in the contrast between the respondents’ positive social aspirations and their total lack of political aspirations. That is, while the respondents are open to and even desire wider social engagement and activity in the future, the sample exhibited no desire or aspiration to become involved politically in Australia, at any stage in their lives. That is, almost across the board, the respondents had no interest in involving themselves in public political discourse, debate or activism, then or ever. As noted above, for some, this tendency stemmed from their experience of politics in Iraq. For others, their decision to remain aloof from political issues seems to stem from a broader disillusionment with and cynicism about global political issues, such as human rights. And for a number, their apathy and disengagement stems from their mental health issues, and overall exhaustion they continue to feel as a result of their protracted displacement and ongoing struggles related to family reunification and other challenges for settling down in Australia. Indeed, there was a deep sense of mental exhaustion pervasive throughout the interview sample, as many were clearly overwhelmed with ongoing challenges that they face and feel ill-equipped to deal with successfully.

Such mental exhaustion, in concert with sceptical and apathetic attitudes suggests a measure of alienation among the sample. The overall tenor of the respondents qualitative experience of political membership in Australia is in line with Geyer’s (2011, p. 389) contention that

“in much of the Western world, the average person is increasingly confronted, on a daily basis, with an often bewildering and overly complex environment, which
promotes attitudes of political apathy, often politically dangerous oversimplification of complex political issues, and equally dysfunctional withdrawal from wider social involvements.”

Many of the respondents are significantly overwhelmed with stress and anxiety, but do not have any one cause for their discontents, and in any case feel substantively incapable and unwilling to try and affect the system to which they are subject. As such, most remain disaffected by political discourses and processes and apathetic, ultimately choosing not to even follow, let alone engage with political processes in Australia.

Despite an apparent political apathy and a clear lack of will or aspiration to engage politically, the respondents exhibited considered and reflective political opinions, particularly in certain areas of asylum, refugee and immigration policy to which they were subject. There is a tendency among the group to note that the popular depiction of refugees and refugee issues in Australia is negative and that issues pertaining to forced migration are wilfully ignored, over-simplified, and generally poorly understood both in the political and social milieu in Australia. The responses show that they view many of the Australian government’s policy approaches and decisions as over-simplistic, and as having chronic or unwanted effects that the government chooses to ignore.

Although the interview respondents articulated carefully considered political opinions and intimate knowledge of the key factors driving policy choices, they overwhelmingly translated this knowledge into political inactivity or passivity. Indeed, as outlined above, most feel wholly consumed by more immediate and visceral challenges of their day-to-day lives. When pressed on their perceptions of their own potential to be affective political agents, especially in the area of refugee and family reunification policies, none of the respondents felt they had the necessary entitlements and capabilities to affect change in this area. Each felt themselves as relative outsiders, conceding that they prefer to remain passive, avoiding voicing their opinions in the public sphere. Four
respondents expressed doubt about the meaningfulness of their voice in the Australian context, two laughing as they did so, as if the potential for political activism was a ridiculous joke. This is best summed up in the statement of Yusuf who said, ‘What difference will my opinion make? It will not make any difference’ (Author interview with Yusuf). This respondent, like most of the other interview respondents who are on a path to full Australian citizenship, seems to have internalised his popularly constructed role as the ‘other’ in Australian political discourse, accepted a political stance at the margins of the system, and in doing so may be seen as politically alienated and apathetic, only included as a nominal member.

Overall, the respondents exhibit low socio-political reflexivity in an outward sense, in that they are subject to what they see as the norm and rule handed down by the Australian state, yet feel incapable and powerless to reposition themselves in the public sphere so as to have their voices heard and their interests represented. This perception of their personal inefficacy in the political, practical sphere compounds rather than assuages their attitudes of disaffection, alienation and discontent, which they suffer privately.

The vast majority of respondents may be seen as disaffected or alienated from politics and political debate. For the majority, this stems from their experiences of persecution within militant, authoritarian political systems as existed in Iraq at the time of their flight. Indeed authoritarianism as a form of government is premised on a logic of non-participation of political members. That is, state power is centralised and citizens and residents are subject to this centralised government, regardless of their personal political interests. Overall, given that the respondents were socialised and grew up in Iraq, they framed their ideas in light of their experiences in Iraq, and spoke of the Australian political system as something honourable yet unknown and foreign to them; a polity they respect, but to which they do not personally belong.
6.5 Compliant Subjects not Active Citizens/Political Members

This section discusses the respondents’ attitudes and behaviours in light of their status as political members in Australia - either as citizens or soon to be citizens. It is worth starting by reiterating the study’s theoretical concern with political membership. As has been stated a number of times, this study follows Habermas in positing that democracy is procedural and discursive, grounded in an inter-subjective structure of communication that ideally is to exhibit reflective and reciprocal communication, or discourse. Within democratic political systems, such as in Australia, members of the public deliberate, test claims to validity and thereby facilitate practical cooperation with one another. Democratic institutions and processes, then, are to provide a forum for citizens to deliberate as free and equal persons, for whom the legitimacy of the decision is related to the achievement of a “rational consensus” (Habermas 1996; Bohman 2015; Gutman and Thompson 2004). That is, this study approaches legitimate democracy as a bottom-up political process in which active members of a demos are to cooperate with one another to represent their interests and ensure democratic legitimacy, not a top-down formulation of the “political class” that eschews and/or corrupts effective public deliberation and potentially gives rise to anti-democratic or authoritarian tendencies.

This inclusive and dynamic conception of democratic political systems is contingent on the ideal, active and substantive role of members, or citizens, within such systems. For scholars like Habermas and Benhabib, citizens are to be motivated to participate by virtue of their political membership within cooperative, democratic political systems, in which the public is sovereign. Citizenship, then, according to Habermas and Benhabib, is a politico-legal document about solidarity and belonging. They tend to argue that the public’s sense of belonging and solidarity will result from their inclusion and participation in a socio-legal framework in which they have access to actionable individual rights through democratic forums. A number of sociologists, such as Calhoun, argue that such a suggestion is overly “rationalist” and places too much emphasis on a bare inclusion into
the legal-political framework afforded by the constitution, and fails to recognize substantive issues of belonging that tend to stem from issues of culture, power and marginality. Calhoun argues, for example, that ‘Citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law’ (Calhoun 2002, p. 153). In response to such claims Habermas admits that in the case of cultural values, for example, we need not expect agreement among all citizens, and he introduces compromise as a possible discursive outcome of democratic procedures. Bohman notes, “a law then would be legitimate only if it could be agreed to in a fair and open deliberative process in which all citizens may freely continue to participate whatever the outcome” (Bohman 1996, p. 89). The democratic principle in this form expresses an ideal of citizenship and highlights the importance of the qualitative experience of socio-political membership for individuals within a polity. In other words, such a democratic principle emphasizes the importance of the qualitative experience of citizenship or political membership, such that members of the national polity feel included or entitled to be involved in public discourse and reasoning, and cooperate with fellow members of the demos in an ongoing fashion. In this way, what is crucial is not the agreement of citizens as such, but how citizens reason together within a common public sphere (Bohman, 2015).

Both Habermas and Benhabib advocate an understanding of democratic political communities and political agents as reflexive, in that agents and structures are to inform each other’s ongoing development. Such claims presume a priori that political members relate to and identify with the democratic pathways available to them, and beyond that feel comfortable and capable to actively involve themselves in these processes such that their interests are represented. However, identification and engagement are not the only attitudinal and behavioural options or predilections available to individual, subjective actors that make up national communities, such as those in the sample. Indeed, an individual’s choice to engage or withdraw cannot be reduced to adherence to a norm or rule – such as the democratic norms posited by the likes of Habermas - nor to the mechanistic execution of a pre-existing structural code (Bourdieu 1977 and 1990; Taylor 1995),
but must be seen as both structured and structuring. Both political scientific and sociological literatures suggest that in plural societies such as Australia, individual agents must identify themselves as valued members of society and, to an extent, feel entitled and able to communicate in meaningful terms with the broader community to which they are supposed to be in positive relations with. Indeed, the self-identities of political members are more than personal narrative scripts for social or political action, they are channels through which individuals attempt to find emotional gratifications in everyday routines (Giddens 1991; Bourdieu 1977). It is worth, then, finishing the discussion by reflecting on whether the attitudes and behaviours of the sample group may be seen to express this ideal form of political membership, in which citizens understand and act to fulfil certain socio-political roles and civic responsibilities to society in Australia. In other words it explores the participants’ experiences of socio-political membership in the country, and gauges their subjective orientation to the socio-political system as members.

In light of the data analysis, as well as the three major themes discussed above, it may be seen that, generally, the individuals in the sample perceive themselves and behave not as active citizens or entitled democratic members, but as passive, compliant subjects. That is, the majority of respondents may be seen to exhibit a subjective orientation to the liberal democratic political system in Australia that does not see them identifying with and engaging with the demos, either socially or politically. Instead, a majority of respondents are somewhat socio-culturally disaffected or alienated in light of their experiences in Australia, which sees them withdraw from pursuing wider social activities, such as engaging in intercultural social networks or even attending English classes. Instead, they purposefully engage in culturally isolated social activities (this is despite their apparent desire for wider social networks and intercultural contact). Furthermore, the vast majority are politically disaffected or apathetic - in large part due to their experiences prior to arriving Australia – and steer clear of political activism or advocacy. This is despite the existence of carefully articulated political opinions,
particularly in the area of forced migration policies, as well as serious discontents among the group, particularly with the Australian government’s family reunification and asylum policies.

In addition to feelings of being unwelcome, socio-cultural isolation and political apathy, factors that were well covered above, it is worth reiterating here that the respondents exhibit poor socio-economic status. The sample exhibited extremely high unemployment rates or underemployment, which is in conflict with their relatively high educational status (though their education qualifications are not recognised in the Australian context) and lends to a sense among respondents of their low social status and socio-political mobility or efficacy in their new context. This then translates to very low income levels relative to Australian society more broadly, drives their ongoing reliance on welfare and, overall, may be seen to contribute to high dissatisfaction levels among the sample. This is further compounded by poor mental and, for some, poor physical health.

In effect, each of the respondents tended to be dealing with a suite of socio-economic problems and personal difficulties, as is exemplified in Hakeem’s quip, “We’re all at home drowning in our problems… we really don’t want to get into the politics on top of what we have because these things have really exhausted us” (Author interview with Hakeem). Such socio-economic disadvantage, in concert with low socio-political reflexivity on behalf of the respondents, tends to pattern the distribution of wealth to reinforce such existing inequalities, and to reconstitute the respondents’ largely marginalised and/or alienated social relations (Young 1990; Sen 1992). In turn, such relations tend to invert what appears to be the continuous expansion of “liberty” – or the “cosmopolitanisation” of the socio-legal framework, as per Benhabib’s theory - and reifies the respondents’ position as socio-politically marginalised, unrepresented actors in the Australian socio-political system.
Moving on from these points, which were discussed comprehensively above, it is worth focussing on the respondents’ attitudes and behaviours as political members in the Australian context. Overall, and as has already been stated, the empirical data shows that the respondents exhibit attitudes and behaviours that may be characterised as those of compliant subjects or supplicants, not engaged, active citizens. The respondents tend to perceive themselves as embodying particular socio-political identities and traits that are largely poorly understood, stereotyped and somewhat maligned in the Australian context. They perceive a societal expectation that the bearers of such traits - particularly their “refugee”, “Muslim” and in some cases “Iraqi” aspects of their identity - are to remain compliant and passive, unentitled to act as full political members in the Australian context, yet necessarily expected to be grateful for the protection and nominal membership granted them by the Australian state.

It is impossible to attribute causative factors for the respondents’ tendency to feel disaffected and somewhat alienated, and remain disengaged from democratic processes, rather than seek out active engagements. By and large the factors that contribute to these attitudinal and behavioural tendencies are complex and interrelated. This is in line with this study’s conception of political agency, which is based on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, who seek to navigate the middle ground between structural determinism and voluntaristic subjectivism (Bourdieu 1977; 1990, Giddens 1984; 1993). Indeed, the micro-level theoretical premise for this research is that socio-political agency is shaped to an extent by the structural context of agents. Individual selfhood, motives, and consciousness are linked to shared self-referential narratives that together constitute ‘self-identity’ (Giddens 1991). In other words, self-identities are more than personal narrative scripts for social or political action; they are channels through which individuals attempt to find emotional gratifications in everyday routines (Giddens 1991; Bourdieu 1977).
In light of the major themes of the data analysis, it may be seen that, to a significant extent, the respondents’ perceptions of themselves as relatively culturally illiterate, unentitled guests of the Australian nation state, and their attendant behavioural passivity in the common public sphere, appear to be learned attitudes and habits, rather than inherent, voluntaristic preferences. Indeed, many of the respondents’ social and economic aspirations for engagement have been challenged and largely thwarted since arriving, and their public passivity has to an extent been informed by such experiences. In saying that, there are instances where personal preferences and choices, rather than perceived Australian societal expectations, tend to more clearly inform the respondents’ attitudes and behaviours. These instances are discussed below, before moving onto the more structurally determined aspects that contribute to their overall subjective orientation of disaffection and compliance to the democratic political system in Australia.

As was posited in the theoretical approach chapter, any approach to exploring how refugees encounter and navigate their experiences within the liberal democratic political system in Australia must be based on the understanding that individuals are never empty vessels. Every human makes social and political choices according to instilled paradigms of morality, felt sentiment, and principal understandings about the structure of society - origin, host and anywhere in between. In other words, it is based on the notion that political attitudes and behaviors, like all attitudes and behaviors, are connected and contextualized by surrounding factors and environments. The way individuals reflectively observe and constitute their personal realities is in part sui generis.

All of the respondents had a complex, traumatic relationship with their self-identities prior to arriving in Australia. That is, according to the interview responses, their backgrounds and initial displacement were intimately linked to their personal identities, and the suffering and persecution they endured due to their perceived social identities. As such, the respondents were already highly sensitised about their social identity
prior to arrival in Australia and, for many of them, their search for refuge was part of an effort to protect their personal identities, or at least find a context in which aspects of their identity – such as their nationality, religion, ethnicity, political preferences or profession - would be respected and tolerated. That is, their desire to seek refuge was in part seen as a strategy of personal identity maintenance, as each of the respondents placed great importance on their socio-cultural identities and associated behavioural preferences, deriving meaning, social connections and support from this particular aspect of their lives. This is typified by Hakeem’s comment: “I decided to come here because in that country, in Iran, they used to tell us ‘you are Iraqis.’ In Iraq they used to tell us ‘you are Iranians’… So I could not stay. I didn’t have a country, I didn’t have the documents, so I decided to come to Australia just to become, to belong to some country to have proper document to have a proper identity” (Author interview with Hakeem). At the time of flight, none of the respondents could continue to abide the oppressive system of militant identity politics to which they were subject. Each maintained that physically removing themselves from their context at that time, and applying for refuge and political membership elsewhere (no matter the means of achieving such a goal) was their only option for ongoing survival. Most of the respondents expressed a clear desire to maintain their personal, cultural identities in the Australian context, particularly as their flight from Iraq, to an extent, represented the climax of their chronic political persecution justified, to a large extent, in terms of identity.

Given that all of the respondents were persecuted in Iraq due to some aspect of their identities, and, to an extent, sought respect for their identities by applying for refuge in Australia, they may seen to be highly aware of and sensitive to others’ perceptions of their identities. Furthermore, they appeared interested to interpret how their identities are perceived and treated in their new socio-political context, and many were quick to draw conclusions in light of their previous, traumatic experiences, which have left them erring on the side of caution and self-preservation. Furthermore the Australian socio-political context was unknown to most of
the respondents before arriving, which means that, to an extent, their initial experiences were particularly influential in informing their fledgling, evolving self-identities, as they developed in their new socio-political context.

Overall, it may be seen that the respondents’ socio-political experiences have informed a dominant perception that an “us and “them” dichotomy exists in the Australian context. In this dichotomy, the respondents are constructed as the unwanted or insurmountably different “other”. In other words, it may be seen that nearly all the respondents, at some stage since arriving, have internalised the social role of “other” to the dominant Australian mainstream, typically due to their “refugee,” “asylum seeker” and or Muslim identities (or a combination of aspects of these identity markers), as this is how they perceive these identities are represented and treated in Australian public discourse and government rhetoric. Many of the respondents’ attitudes and behaviours in the Australian context flow, to some extent, from this central perception or interpretation. As Ali said of media and government representations of forced migrants: “they are definitely not giving a good picture of refugees” (Author interview with Ali). And as Yasin said, more personally of the governments forced migration policies: “I feel like Canberra is waging an emotional war on us.” Or as Said remarked of Australians’ understandings of Islam and Muslims: “One of the main misunderstandings is against Muslims. They think all Muslims are fanatics and terrorists.” This perception of themselves as the poorly understood, unwanted “other,” not substantively belonging to nor in solidarity with the national community, particularly cropped up around issues of punitive immigration detention, perceptions of insurmountable cultural difference, perceptions of populist stereotypes of refugees and Muslims, discrimination in a range of settings, and the Australian state’s lack of recognition of the respondents education and skills - their human capital - and a lack of opportunities to utilise and develop such skills in the longer term.
This phenomenon among the sample lends credence to Benhabib’s argument that the underlying political issues in debates surrounding forced migration are concerned with defining the boundaries of belonging and determining the extent to which constructions of “us” and “them” continue to be naturalized. Benhabib views such controversies as reenacting in practice the theoretical “dilemma” of discursive scope: Universalist norms are mediated with the self-understanding of local communities. In this case, given that the respondents’ perceptions of themselves as the unwanted “them” tended to exist upon arrival – as was discussed above, the respondents have been protractedly displaced and therefore chronically alienated form socio-political structures for many years of their lives – it is interesting to note that their subsequent inclusion into the Australian polity as new members and their socio-political experiences as members have tended to further naturalize this interpretation of their place in Australian society, not assuage it. In turn, this informs many of the respondents’ interpretations of themselves as unentitled to act as full members of the democratic polity, instead acquiescing to a perceived expectation that they remain grateful and passive, even in the face of socio-economic marginalization and ongoing political discontents. As such, the respondents as political members in Australia tend not to readily identify with the socio-political system, but are largely disaffected or alienated by it and do not involve themselves in public discourse or pursue democratic attachments beyond those necessary for their material needs and survival.

Overall, the sample do not readily identify with the Australian social milieu, and those that do feel it is more of a one way process – more akin to assimilation than multiculturalism or any cosmopolitan atmosphere. They view their social experiences and acculturation as non-reciprocal, lacking trust between social actors, and in fact, they do not feel they are valued within the broader milieu, as they carry identity tags of Muslim and refugee that all are aware are stigmatised and present real world challenges when trying to orchestrate a life in the country. That is, all the respondents are acutely aware of the discourse surrounding their socio-cultural identity in the Australian context, which tends to construct them as unwanted
outsiders. As Yuval Davis points out, the politics of forced migration employs narratives and discourses of autochthony – “us and them” – to naturalize the extent to which discourses of belonging become naturalized. The Iraqis in this study, apart from the notable exception of the former ADF interpreters, are acutely aware of their depiction in the Australian polity as the alien other, and have very much internalised this narrative into their self-identity in the Australian context. A remark from Yusuf exemplifies this point, “I have nothing to do with it… In terms of politics and things like that, why would I discuss it? I am nobody. It is their jobs… I will not make any difference. This is a country with its own flag and government; it provides therefore it determines. I am just an asylum seeker.” (Author interview with Yusuf). In fact, Yusuf was a citizen at the time of the interview, but clearly perceived himself as “just an asylum seeker” – a person still looking for rights.

This phenomenon among the sample resonates with Hein de Haas’s claim that “‘harsh’ political discourse on immigration… can be a catalyst for the very xenophobia and apocalyptic representations of a massive influx of migrants to which they claim to be a politico-electoral response” (de Haas 2007, p. 826). Xenophobic and apocalyptic representations of forced migrants in the Australian context has tended to corrupt belonging for the respondents in the sample, who are not only aware of their politically stigmatized and exploited identity in the Australian context, but internalize this identity in their approach to the political milieu and the public sphere in Australia. Namely, many in the sample feel alienated by the public sphere and rhetoric emanating from it, and so disengage and remain aloof from any form of political participation or activism, as they perceive themselves as largely inefficacious to reduce the perceived value conflict. Indeed, political inefficacy is a key psychological variable for political alienation; people who perceive themselves to be relatively inefficacious in politics – that is, who perceive themselves to be unable, by their own behaviour, to influence or control desired political outcomes – are more likely than others to withdraw their self-identification, interest, attention and participation from politics. As has been stated elsewhere in this study,
harsh rhetoric from political elites toward forced migrants should be seen as both a self-serving and self-perpetuating discourse, failing to appreciate the entrenched social process of migration, feigning its impermanence and thereby dehumanizing forced migrants themselves. Such a state of affairs propagates a vicious cycle that stagnates legitimate democratic reproduction and denies or corrupts substantive political membership and democratic representation to individuals, such as those in the sample, who legitimately sought protection under international law.

The respondents’ qualitative experience of political membership in Australia has seen them internalise a social identity that is passive, and publicly uncritical. This is at odds with the at times highly critical perspectives and interpretations of the respondents. Such a disjuncture acts to foster feelings of disaffection and alienation. That is, the respondents’ basic politicised values and self-identities were consistently at odds with the Australia socio-political system’s dominant public narrative about them, but few felt entitled, linguistically and culturally capable, or mentally well enough to redress such discontents. And those that did act to redress their discontents – whether they did so while in detention or after arrival in the community – had only limited or no success in achieving their desired outcomes, and their efforts to engage tended to, in the long run, inform further feelings of inefficacy and estrangement form the socio-political system in Australia (Schwarz, 1973). In light of all of this, and this study’s overall concern with the respondents’ qualitative experiences and understandings of political membership in Australia, the respondents, by and large, may be seen as compliant subjects and not active citizens. They are not involved in, nor represented in political discourse and the decisions borne of such discourse. Instead, they are subject to decisions of the state, qua political fairness of the political elite and mainstream Australia, and feel a heavy societal expectation that they act as passive supplicants.

Overall, then, it may be seen that for the Iraqi respondents in this study, the Australian polity’s imagination remains beholden to the “unitary model of
citizenship”, and its attendant normative forces and rhetorical devices of national, territorial politics, which expound racially, culturally and religiously parochial notions of the political community in Australia. Such rhetoric conceptualises the demos in a racialized form, which necessarily operates both socially and politically to silence those narratives within the polity that highlight the growing inapplicability of such conceptions. The findings of this study highlight, too, the increasingly untenable ethical restraints that such notions of the national polity place on the national community’s social arrangements, which condones the sustained marginalization of particular individuals and groups based on heavily essentialized and misrepresentative social identity markers. Not only do such dominant rhetorical characterisations of the political community as ethnos, not demos, corrupt positive political membership for the respondents in this study, but it promotes and entrenches the marginalization of their particular social identities; reifies the politico-legal category of refugee and asylum seekers as persons expected by the national polity to be supplicant recipients of state beneficence. As well as reinforcing the socio-cultural marginality that comes with popular level characterisations and populist disdain for Islam and Muslims.

Such a state of affairs undermines democratic principles and legitimacy in the country; devalues the demos as the ultimate arbiters of sovereign power and thereby elevates the role of state actors - the corporate and political classes – from that of facilitators of democracy to a social group/class – indeed, a social identity in itself – uncritically trusted with the distribution of rights and resources. In turn, this undermines the value that political members place on the importance of democratic representation and deliberation as the remit of all citizens and those that stand under the law, and privileges the notion of political largess payed out to citizens, generally according to the interests of the wealthy, who are given de facto powers to dictate, even if unconsciously, what are considered desirable and undesirable socio-cultural attributes of political members in Australian society.
Such a socio-political system affects the style of discourse in the country - how citizens reason with one another in the public sphere, as per Habermas’s contention - to such an extent that certain political members actively avoid participation as they do not see such discourse, and its most vocal participants, as welcoming of their voice. In terms of this study’s central theoretical concerns, the socio-political conditions that Iraqi refugees find themselves are not obviously amenable to the progression of a democratically grounded cosmopolitan project. Rather, the Iraqi refugees in this study are largely disaffected or alienated in their current context. Disengaged from any democratic discursive mechanisms that may allow them to air and discuss their grievances in a constructive way, such that, even if their interests are not readily progressed, they feel included in the conversation, valued in the society and involved in an ongoing manner. The disaffected and alienated detach from democratic mechanisms and broader society, thereby stagnating legitimate democratic representation and reproduction in the country. Under such conditions, the democratic system does not “cosmopolitise” but instead acts to further entrench this anti-democratic trend.

Overall, the finding that the Australian socio-political milieu does not foster the conditions for a democratically grounded cosmopolitan project for the sample under exploration speaks to Amartya’s Sen’s assertion about the primary, not secondary importance that the empirical fact of pervasive human diversity brings to bear upon any project aimed at equality among humans. Democratic cosmopolitan theories, such as expounded by Benhabib, tend to “Proceed with the assumption of antecedent uniformity (including the assumption that ‘all men are created equal’) thus miss out on a major aspect of the problem. Human diversity is no secondary complication (to be ignored, or to be introduced ‘later on’; it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality” (Sen, 1992, xi).

Indeed, Benhabib and Habermas recognize diversity but tend to downplay the inequity between variously, socially and culturally situated subjects of law, and emphasize the theoretical potential for democracy and law to operate inclusively, to “cosmopolitanise”, as the most critical factor. However, this
study suggests that this is insufficient to address, or deflects substantive attention to the diverse stratifications of power and culture along which societies are arranged, and which inform the marked difference between equitable rights (informed by a belief in the inherent rights of man) and legal rights (the rights one has not just by virtue of their membership in a group, but also their position with that group). In other words, Habermas and Benhabib’s theories, while instructive of how democracy should ideally function, tend to assume that political members are uniformly “free and equal persons”, yet the capability of any individual socio-political actor to act effectively within said systems, is for these respondents, marked with stratifications and inequity. Such stratifications, which exist at sub-national and trans-national levels, are vital in determining whether an individual or a social group have the socio-political understandings and self-perceptions required to become involved in a particular national, democratic discourse, as well as the capability and the desire to engage democratically. Until the challenges put forward by issues pertaining to diversity, and particularly political and symbolic violence in the name of various qualifications around social identity, are adequately considered and accounted for, the extension of political space and the redistribution of political power, seen through a lens of cosmopolitanism, remain abstract and idealistic for most marginalised groups and individuals. “Opportunities for innovative, distributive, and multi-perspectival forms of publicity and democracy,” (Bohman in Turner et al, 2007, p. 732) may only be harnessed alongside a project that recognises vast power inequities between social groups, and the ubiquitous use of identity politics and violence to sustain such inequities.

In the case of the sample in this study, the vast majority feels ill equipped, incapable, unwelcome or unentitled to seek redress for their considerable discontents, which they see as emanating from a paternalistic state structure and a dominant national social group to which they feel instrumentally and substantively subject. As such they feel disaffected, and at times alienated, which leads them to purposely isolate themselves from the broader community as a coping strategy, thereby defecting from or acquiescing to the dominant discourses of the liberal democratic political system in Australia, and reifying
a position at the margins of the national community, rather than in a newly innovated socio-political space.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This study explored the socio-political attitudes and behaviours of a sample group of Iraqi refugees who were given protection in Australia after 2003. In doing so, it explored whether the respondents’ subjective orientation to the Australian socio-political system saw them identify with the socio-political system and its public discourses, policies and law, or whether they had an attitude of disaffection or alienation to the system, and did not engage with democratic processes. It did so in order to gauge whether the socio-political conditions amenable to a democratically grounded cosmopolitan project exist for this group.

The study was conceived in light of the contentious public discourses and policies that surround forced migrants, and particularly Muslim asylum seekers, in the Australian socio-political milieu. It was concerned to study the particular context of Iraqi forced migrants living in the Australian community, as they face a political and practical paradox; they are at once victims of circumstances in which the Australian state played an active role, while being subject to, indeed the target of, the country’s deterrent, militarised, punitive and racialised forced migration policy and rhetoric (McNevin 2007; Marfleet 2007; Dunn et al 2007; Crock 2010). Such conditions inevitably affect the settlement and socialization of protected refugees living in the Australian community (Kateb, 2006).

It was found that the respondents identify with the socio-political system in so far as it provided them protection, safety and official inclusion in the politico-legal framework in Australia. Most respondents also identified with many liberal democratic values, such as the rule of law, personal freedoms and liberties safeguarded by the law and effectively enforced, and democracy as a system of governance. Furthermore, the respondents were profoundly grateful for the welfare provided them by the Australian state. Despite these positive
identifications with the socio-political system, for most of the respondents in this study their qualitative experiences in the Australian milieu, have informed perceptions of the political community as strange, unwelcoming and therefore substantively off-limits to them. Their testimonies, which cast them not as entitled and active political members, but as compliant and passive subjects, tended to suggest that the socio-political system in Australia does not foster the conditions for a democratically grounded cosmopolitan project in their case. In other words, the system does not act reflexively, incorporating the voices of new political subjectivities and developing in line with the new and changing needs of the populous, such as those in the sample. Rather, by and large the respondents did not identify with many aspects of the dominant discourses extant in Australia, nor did they relate to many quotidian aspects of life in Australia, such as the social and ethical norms they have perceived through their experiences in the community. Indeed, the respondents were mostly disaffected and dissatisfied with their current situation, as many struggle with mentally illness, are chronically unemployed and caught in a rut of socio-economic marginalization. Further, they are frustrated with their dealings with the immigration department, and, overall, perceive themselves as socially immobile in the Australian milieu. Many of the respondents in the sample are struggling to reconcile a pride in heritage with the forlorn realities of a life of compliance, and at times, assimilation or subjection. As such, they purposely isolate themselves, and refrain from participating in Australia’s liberal democratic, socio-political system.

Such findings suggest that macro-level democratically grounded cosmopolitan theories, as expounded by Habermas and Benhabib, are not applicable to the sample group of Iraq refugees in this study. In saying that, however, the individuals in the sample, did express aspirations to be able to act as full democratic members – “free and equal” not just before the law but also in public discourses and social and cultural life. Furthermore, as stated, the respondents did identify with the liberal democratic system on a theoretical level, mostly in light of their official protection and politico-legal inclusion, but also in light of their experiences of authoritarian systems of governance in Iraq and other asylum countries.
The behavioral and attitudinal trends exhibited by the sample highlight that this group are disconnected and at times alienated by the socio-political sphere in the country. The tone of discourse is not representative but relies on outdated rhetorical tools of territorial national, racialised politics, which is out of date and restricts the ability for meaningful conversations that move forward. Thereby retarding political and social integration and reifying anti-democratic trends, which see this groups largely marginalized and unrepresented. This is instructive of wider patterns of social exclusion and racialization of certain groups in Australia, and should not be treated as a parochial issue, but rather as an indication that the political community and system in Australia lacks the reflexivity necessary to recognise new forms of political agency and subjectivity that anticipate and innovate new modalities of political citizenship. Indeed, many of the respondents’ ongoing grievances may be related to the symbolic power and potential violence of social identity constructs when used in the public sphere to pursue particular, identity-framed political agendas. The respondents’ particular social identity markers, such as refugee, asylum seekers, Iraqi and Muslim, are by and large constructed in Australia’s public discourse in harsh or negative terms that paint the holders of such identity markers as inimical to abstract “Australian values” or its socio-cultural preferences and “way of life.” This indelibly affects their ability to fit in to the broader community. Indeed, collectively, all polities and groups have differential power and hegemonic projects. It is important to remember that people’s membership status is then affected by where they are located within a polity and how they are constructed, in often unstable and contested ways, by manifold social divisions. The meaning and power of one’s membership status in a political community depends on one’s social location, but also the location of one’s collective in a global system of stratification of various collectives, communities and states (Lukes 2005).

This is particularly interesting in light of the multicultural ethos that underpins a socially diverse and purportedly inclusive society in Australia. Indeed, some scholars contend that the greatest threat within Western democracies is not terrorism, as has been argued by nation states of the global North particularly
after September 11, but the sustained marginalization of citizens from their political system. In this way, violent extremism is understood as a manifestation of the same outlook that informs individuals who choose to withdraw from the public sphere, rather than attack it. In other words, both the disconnected and the destructive defect from the political system and hinder its capacity to facilitate change. Neither of these political behaviors reproduces the democratic political system or contributes to the process of responsive claims making which is championed as the guiding principle and foundational strength of manifestations of Western political systems (Gest, 2010; Benhabib 2004; 2007). In an era of universal rights norms and increased human mobility, new forms of political agency, such as are represented by the respondents in this study, will continue to emerge, unseating entrenched political narratives, and countries like Australia will be further challenged in their prerogative to define the boundaries of the national community and articulate democratic closure. The certain perspicacity that those on the margins of a given system or community have for pointing out that system’s inherent contradictions should be harnessed so as to genuinely explore possible avenues through which the tensions between global and national norms and practice may be ameliorated.

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