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Abstract
In Australia, questions surrounding national identity often feature in public discussions on asylum seekers. Using qualitative interview data collected from 40 participants in an ongoing study of young people in Queensland, we explore the connections between young people's understandings of Australian national identity and their attitudes towards 'boat people'. We identify distinct points of interconnection and disjuncture between participants' notions of being 'Australian' and their thoughts on how Australia should respond to asylum seekers.

With respect to the asylum seeker debate, we find narratives of Australian nationhood are flexible in interpretation and can serve contrasting and competing functions.

Introduction

Public discussion continues in Australia over the treatment of asylum seekers who have attempted to enter the country by boat.[1] Some Australians consider deterrence crucial for the protection of Australia's borders and that exclusionary policies are important for the protection of life at sea (Kenny, 2013; LNP, 2013). For others, excluding these people punishes some of the world's most vulnerable individuals (Burnside, 2014; Fraser, 2009) Conflicting notions of Australian identity and belonging are also often employed in this debate. For instance, asylum seekers can be portrayed as a threat to Australian culture with incompatible views or ideologies. Alternatively we hear that openness to cultural diversity is a quintessential Australia characteristic, as is the extension of hospitality to those in need (Every and Augoustinos, 2008). When it comes to the rejection or acceptance of asylum seekers, being 'Australian' means different things to different people.

Using qualitative interviews collected from young people in Queensland, we explore how those from opposing sides of the asylum seeker debate apply various imaginings of being 'Australian' to justify their standpoint. We demonstrate how, in the talk of young Australians, the use of nationalist discourse on this topic is somewhat flexible and may serve disparate purposes.

Imagining Australia

A nation has been described by Anderson (2006: 6) as an 'imagined political community' whose members, while not known personally to one another, see themselves as belonging to a shared society with a common and distinctive character. This imagined community is derived from stories and symbols that reflect a collective experience specific to that group. However, while a national identity might be unique and distinctive, its characteristics are not static. With time and circumstance, new stories and meanings are added to old. These can contribute to (and at times transform) a nation's understanding of what it represents (Calhoun, 2008; Moran, 2011).

The language of nationhood, says Calhoun (1993: 211), 'remains the pre-eminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to "the people" of a country'. These meanings are reinforced via the narratives espoused by governments, educational institutions and mass media (Anderson, 2006; Calhoun, 1993; Smith, 2010). A nation's identity is also strengthened and legitimised through rituals and symbolism. Whether it is through a national holiday, a flag, a landmark or the celebration of an historical event, the symbolic meaning behind these 'distillations of nation' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 545) reinforces the solidarity of a nation and its people (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Fozdar et al., 2014). However, not everyone understands or appropriates symbolic representations of nation in the same fashion. The interpretation of

symbolic displays of national belonging is conditional upon social and political background, experiences, perspectives and interests. It therefore cannot be assumed that one interpretation is the most dominant, or that all members of a society will embrace a singular understanding of what it means to belong to a given nation (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008).

In the face of shared global experiences, people may also imagine themselves as belonging to a community that stretches beyond their national borders and into the global sphere (e.g. Appiah, 1997; Beck, 2011; Skrbiš and Woodward, 2013). As Beck and colleagues have argued, with the effects of globalisation, national identities can not only be 'reimagined' but also 'cosmopolitanised' to encompass all of humankind (e.g. Beck, 2002, 2011; Beck and Levy, 2013). Beck (2011: 1346) thus argues that the conceptual understanding of 'imagined communities' could be broadened to 'imagined cosmopolitan communities'.

This does not mean that the concept of nation must be ignored. As Beck (2011: 1352) describes, there is 'the special quality of "both one thing and the other"', whereby people can imagine themselves as belonging to both a national and global community and where cosmopolitan imaginings can complement national belonging (e.g. Beck, 2006; Brett and Moran, 2011; Lamont and Aksartova, 2002). An excellent example of how national identities can inform a more cosmopolitan outlook comes from research undertaken by Lamont and Aksartova (2002). In their study of how blue-collar workers in the United States and France dealt with cultural difference in the workplace, they describe how discursive strategies were applied by workers to emphasise aspects of similarity between themselves and co-workers from different ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, Lamont and Aksartova (2002) describe how those who supported an anti-racist and inclusive stance towards otherness, draw upon 'cultural repertoires' particular to the values of their own country to justify their readiness to work alongside ethnic diversity. In the United States, for example, cosmopolitan openness was framed as the right of all to achieve socio-economic success regardless of origin or social position. In France, the rhetoric of inclusion embraced the principles of socialism and egalitarianism (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002). In other words, acceptance of the 'other' was fixed within notions of national identity.

There is a wide body of literature that captures and describes various dimensions of Australian national identity. For example, Australian attachments might derive from understandings of indigenous culture (e.g. Finlayson and Anderson, 2002), early postcolonial Anglo-Australian experiences (e.g. Moran, 2011; Tranter and Donoghue, 2007, 2015) or more contemporary, multicultural understandings (e.g. Purdie and Wilss, 2007; Tranter and Donoghue, 2007). Anglo-Australian identities were initially informed by settler-colonial experiences. Such stories instilled in white Australians a distinctive sense of self – an identity that was anti-authoritarian and irreverent, yet also loyal and courageous. This 'traditional' (i.e. post-settlement, non-indigenous and Anglo) concept of Australian national identity has been cultivated through images like the Australian bushman, or 'Anzac digger' who represent the epitome of bravery, fairness and mateship (Purdie and Wilss, 2007; Tranter and Donoghue, 2007).

More recently, understandings of an open and multicultural identity have entered the Australian narrative, reflecting an appreciation that Australia comprises many ethnic and cultural groups – each of which has helped shape modern Australia (Brett and Moran, 2011; Moran, 2011; Purdie and Wilss, 2007). For example, Purdie and Wilss (2007: 78) noted that young people diverge from traditional notions of 'Australian-ness' to more 'expanded views' of Australian identity, which is more closely associated to themes relating to diversity and cohesion. However, others believe contemporary Australia should not be so culturally diverse and are concerned that some new migrants refuse to fit into the Australian way of life or respect Australian laws (e.g. Elder, 2007; Fozdar, 2014; Fozdar and Low, 2015; Moran 2011).

In the past, notions of what it means to be Australian have been used to justify the exclusion of 'outsiders' (Fozdar and Low, 2015). National narratives have also been used to justify exclusionary steps against asylum seekers (Every and Augoustinos, 2008; Lueck et al., 2015; O'Doherty and Augoustinos, 2008). An analysis of mainstream media reporting on the interception of asylum seeker boats by Lueck and colleagues (2015), for instance, identified the rhetoric of 'national interest' and the need to protect Australia. However, in an analysis of Australian parliamentary speeches debating asylum policy, Every and Augoustinos (2008), also noted a 'flexibility of nationalist discourse', whereby arguments relating to the Australian identity are applied by both anti *and* pro-asylum advocates (Every and Augoustinos 2008: 562). Of particular interest in their study was how concepts such as the 'fair go' were used to defend both exclusionary and inclusionary perspectives. Anti-asylum politicians said that asylum seekers were 'queue jumping' ahead of those entering via formal channels, whose legitimate refugee status had already been acknowledged. They contended that 'boat people' did not respect principles of fairness. Fairness, from this perspective, was a 'two-way street' (Every and Augoustinos 2008: 574) meaning only those prepared to *act* fairly should be *treated* fairly. On the other hand, pro-asylum politicians argued that all people should be extended a 'fair go' – irrespective of their origins. Thus, it was said, 'boat people' should be given an opportunity to have their refugee status recognised without fear of punitive treatment (Every and Augoustinos, 2008). In summarising their findings, Every and Augoustinos suggested that greater attention should be paid to how nationalist ideology in Australia 'is being used rhetorically and the various political and social functions to which these definitions are being put' (Every and Augoustinos, 2008: 577).

We explore the relationship between young Australians' understandings of what it means to be 'Australian' and their attitudes towards 'boat people'. Our research participants offer an interesting perspective on this issue. Under the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005), they were schooled in the importance of values such as care and compassion, understanding, tolerance and inclusion, and a 'fair go', yet at the same time witnessed the very public denigration of 'boat people' by Australian politicians (Klocker and Dunn, 2003; Poynting and Perry, 2007). They were, therefore, exposed to conflicting notions of acceptance and rejection while growing up. How then, do these young Australians use nationalist discourse when discussing the issue of 'boat people', and for what purpose are their definitions being used?

Methods

Our data come from participants involved in the 'Social Futures and Life Pathways of Young People in Queensland' study – also known as the 'Our Lives' project. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, this longitudinal study has tracked the attitudes and behaviours of a single age cohort of young people from Queensland, Australia since 2006. Since the study commenced, five waves of survey data have been collected and extensive qualitative interviews have been undertaken with select members of the cohort (for more details regarding data collection see Our Lives, 2017).

Given the salience of the asylum seeker issue in Australia, the attitudes of study participants on this issue were explored using mixed methods. From 2010, we measured responses to the survey item: 'All boats carrying asylum seekers should be turned back', an item that also appears in the Australian Election Study (Cameron and McAllister, 2016). While in 2010 and 2013 there was a fairly even distribution of views, a sharp rise in accepting views became apparent in 2015 (Figure 1).
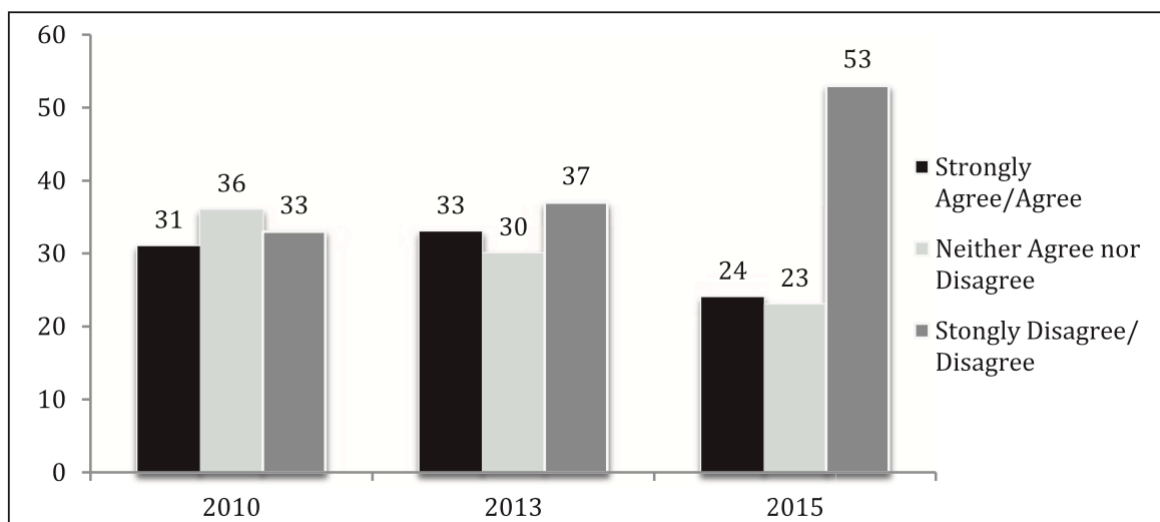

Figure 1: Participant responses to the item 'All boats carrying asylum seekers should be turned back' (%). Sources: Our Lives surveys 2010–2015.

Analyses undertaken on survey data collected in 2010 suggests that our studied cohort was generally more accepting of 'boat people' than the Australian adult population. Those most likely to hold accepting views were: women, Catholic or independent school students, those intending to go to university, and supporters of the Australian Greens. Belief in the importance of belonging to the global community was also a strong predictor of acceptance, whereas scoring highly on a measure of xenophobia, and identifying strongly as 'being Australian' increased the likelihood of rejecting 'boat people' (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). Additionally, earlier interview data from members of the cohort with strong opinions on this issue show that while some are very specific in their use of narratives to advocate an anti-asylum stance, others employ discursive strategies based on principles of cosmopolitan responsibility, openness and compassion to actively challenge the exclusionary position (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2016).

This study explores how representations of being 'Australian' intersect with both anti- and pro-asylum positions. Our data are obtained from interviews conducted with 40 Our Lives participants (20 female, 20 male) in 2012 and 2013. Interviews focused at length on issues relating to Australian politics and asylum seekers. All interviewees expressed firm beliefs on the 'boat people' issue (15 'anti-asylum', 25 'pro-asylum'). Participants were located within the south-east corner of Queensland.[2] All were aged 19–21 and born in Australia, although some had parents who were born overseas. The sample was diverse in terms of socio-economic background and educational achievement. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted at either the participant's place of residence, a university campus, or café. The interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes, were audio recorded and later transcribed.

Analysis
Being Australian
We use an abductive research strategy in our analysis of data (Blaikie, 2007). While we were familiar with the relevant literature, existing theoretical frameworks merely served as a guide for our analysis. Categories primarily emerged from the participants' own accounts, and their understandings of 'being Australian' were classified according to three considerations. First, was the extent to which respondents expressed attachment to an Australian identity. Second, we identified similarities and differences in interviewee descriptions of what 'being Australian' means. Third, following the literature on cosmopolitanism, in particular cosmopolitan openness (Skrbiš and Woodward, 2013), we queried the extent that these identity attachments were 'open' or 'closed' to the idea of Australia as a culturally diverse nation.

During the analysis we identified three main groups. The first we refer to as 'strong/closed'. The participants in this category expressed a strong attachment to 'being Australian' and also strongly believed Australia does not benefit from cultural diversity. While most of the 'strong/closed' individuals agreed there were some pragmatic reasons why Australia should accept immigrants, the consensus was that anyone living in Australia should be willing and able to make a contribution to the country. Importantly, these interviewees also felt new migrants should adopt 'Australian' practices of living.

Participants in the second group are referred to as 'strong/open'. These young people also spoke of having strong attachments to an Australian identity, but their interpretation of 'being Australian' included themes of openness and acceptance. As such, they were very receptive to cultural diversity. Categorised to the third group, a small number of pro-asylum interviewees exhibited a 'weak/open' position. While advocating the value of living among cultural diversity, attachment to Australian identity among these young people was considerably weaker than for the other two groups.

Attitudes towards asylum seekers among these three categories were then examined. Anti-asylum participants broadly fell into the 'strong/closed' category, while pro-asylum participants fell within the other two categories (Figure 2).
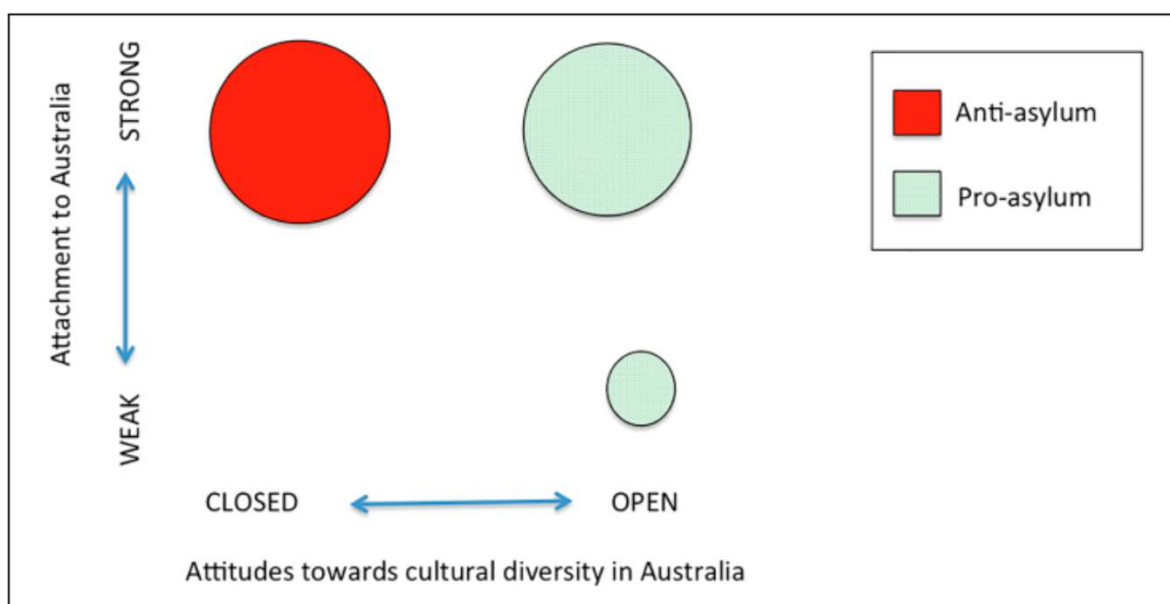
Figure 2: Illustration of relationship anti-asylum and pro-asylum participants' level of attachment to Australia (weak–strong) and their attitudes towards cultural diversity in Australia (closed–open).

Strong attachment to Australia/closed to diversity: the 'Australian way'

The 'strong/closed' group described what they believed to be distinctive characteristics of being Australian, and the need to preserve and protect those unique attributes. While some were prepared to accept some new migrants, they felt that Australians should be highly selective as to who should be allowed to enter the country. Essentially, the view of interviewees in this category ran along assimilationist lines. They were less willing to accept diversity, arguing that anyone who settles in Australia should learn to do things the 'Australian way'.

Traditional understandings of Australian identity characteristics were also evident among this group. When asked to describe what 'being Australian' meant, the descriptions of these interviewees fitted squarely within the 'repertoire of Australian themes' previously described by Phillips and Smith (2000: 215), who discussed the tendency of some Australians to cite 'traditional or old versions of Australia'. For example, Toby's[3] enthusiasm for the country was strongly apparent in his description of an array of 'typically' Australian and highly masculine images. These ranged from pies and beer (Wedgewood, 1997) to sport (Phillips and Smith, 2000) and values such as 'mateship' and a 'fair go' (Tranter and Donoghue, 2007):

> Four 'N Twenty, Jackie Howe, XXXX Gold – I don't know.... Basically Anzac really, mateship.... What does mateship mean? Just getting along with everyone, taking everything as a joke, being very light hearted about it all and, at the end of the day, just turning a new page and tomorrow's a new day.... I think it's just about having a fair go and giving everyone a chance.

Craig believed the characteristics of a 'good' Australian were of 'somebody who's born here', and can 'speak fluent English and sing our national anthem'. Although he did not

approve of migrants coming to Australia, he thought that those who came to live in the country should, at the very least, speak English and possess skills that would benefit Australia. He felt that to allow people into the country without those skills would 'bring Australia down'. For Ryan, a 'good' Australian was a person who contributed to Australian society. Moreover, they must be self-sufficient and not expect to be cared for by the state:

> Yeah, probably someone who contributes – like if you don't do anything, like a lot of people don't work and whatnot and sort of chew up resources for whatever reason. Some are reasons they can't really control but a lot of people just don't work and live off the pension and whatnot. I don't think that probably helps. I think good citizens make a living for themselves.

The 'strong/closed' interviewees were also inclined to support exclusionary measures against 'boat people'. Consistent with Elder (2007: 28), who speaks of how in Australia 'stories of commonality are ... frequently premised on exclusion' creating an 'us and them dualism', Australian identity, was used by the 'strong/closed' interviewees to reinforce symbolic boundaries and further demarcate the differences between Australians and asylum seekers. After describing what they believed to be distinctive Australian characteristics, most in this category argued 'boat people' were neither capable of, nor willing, to behave in a manner consistent with these understandings.

One concern expressed by the anti-asylum interviewees related to fears that 'boat people' posed an economic threat to Australia. They believed the economic costs related to supporting asylum seekers would be better spent providing for Australians in need, and that it was unfair for Australians to experience financial disadvantage due to the resettlement of asylum seekers. When Craig was asked how he felt about asylum seekers, he said it was unfair they were 'taking our jobs' and 'taking our houses'. He also commented on the number of 'Africans and Samoans and everything' he had seen at a recent visit to Centrelink (welfare office), suggesting that Australia was already supporting too many migrants.

Another concern was that 'boat people' presented a cultural threat to the country and that their way of living is incompatible with that of Australians. It was considered unfair for Australians to be asked to change their way of living in order to accommodate the lifestyles of new migrants, that if people from other countries wanted to make Australia their home they should both contribute and learn to 'fit in'. This was a view expressed by Alexis. If 'boat people' were not prepared to integrate into Australian society, she saw no reason why they should be made welcome, arguing that it is unfair that Australians should be expected to accommodate other cultural practices. Perceptions of how differences in the culture and religion of asylum seekers might jeopardise the make-up of Australian society have been noted in several studies (e.g. Louis et al., 2010). Like Alexis, Christy was also worried that asylum seekers would ultimately 'change' Australia. She claimed that Australian cultural practices ought to be carefully protected, instead of accommodating the practices of others:

> Christy: Like, you get these ones coming in and they're trying to change our country. That's not fair on us.

Interviewer: So how are they trying to change the country?
Christy: Like, you know, with the whole turban and all that stuff. They should come in, I reckon – they should come in and follow our rules really.

Strong attachment to Australia/open to diversity: 'Australians are accepting'

Like the 'strong/closed' participants, 'strong/open' interviewees also maintained that to be Australian meant to possess and demonstrate certain unique qualities and characteristics. The point of difference, however, was that for the latter group an intrinsic part of being Australian is valuing multiculturalism and openness to diversity. When asked why they valued being an Australian there was a tendency to intertwine core Australian ideals with 'extended' conceptions of Australian identity (Purdie and Wilss, 2007). Whereas the 'strong/closed' participants referred to the distinctiveness of the Australian character to create a symbolic barrier of exclusion, participants who subscribed to a 'strong/open' perspective, applied views of 'Australian-ness' that informed an inclusionary disposition.

Participants open to cultural diversity commonly used the terms 'open' and 'accepting' in their descriptions of Australian identity. Anna acknowledged the diversity of understandings of Australian identity, but pointed out that there had been a shift away from traditional views to a contemporary identity that embraces the principles of multiculturalism. She believed that for 'younger generations' 'being Australian' meant being 'laid back, multicultural to a degree, relaxed, open, and welcoming'. Similarly, others suggested the Australian identity had morphed from its more stereotypical meanings due to Australia's newer multicultural make-up. As Aysha put it:

> Australia has changed in the last couple of years, or in the last couple of decades, really, becoming more multicultural. Our values are slowly changing. We're becoming more accepting and open.

For Troy, 'being Australian' was a difficult concept to describe. He was, however, careful to point out that Australian identity was not about superficial behaviours, but more about practising the principles of acceptance, fairness and equality:

> Troy: It depends what you mean by Australian. Like I think it's really hard to define what being Australian is. A lot of people think it's about a beer on the barbie in the afternoon, but it's not really about that – is it?
> Interviewer: What would you want it to be?
> Troy: Just a cohesive society, that isn't racist or sexist. I don't know, everyone is equal basically.

Cosmopolitanism is often considered to be the theoretical antithesis of nationalism, and that in order to embrace cosmopolitan ideals, one must abandon an allegiance to nation. Yet imaginings need not be 'all or nothing' and a sense of connectedness to a national identity should not be overlooked for the purpose of embracing broader, cosmopolitan principles. As Lamont and Aksartova (2002) have contended, people draw upon cultural repertoires consistent with the cultural ideology of their home countries and associated cultural milieus

in order to reinforce inclusionary views towards the ethnically different. When interrogating our interview data, a similar process appeared to be at work. Interestingly, the 'strong/closed' and 'strong/open' interviewees were applying repertoires related to common understandings and imaginings of what it means to be Australian in order to substantiate their quite contrasting views. These included characteristics such as 'mateship', being 'laid back', and respect for the principle of a 'fair go'. Where they diverged was that the strongly attached but culturally accepting group included the qualities of openness and acceptance to their definition of Australian identity. For example, Anna described, 'being Australian' as, 'just a real mateship, a real genuine friendliness', and an 'openness to everything'. 'Mateship' was also a term Jake used to describe the Australian character. Similar to Toby from the anti-asylum group, Jake spoke with pride of 'Australian' camaraderie, but instead referred to this attribute in the context of helping others. Claiming she had 'a lot of interactions with lots of different cultures', Aysha also drew upon the concept of 'mateship' to support her argument that Australians had an inherently open and friendly disposition.

Anti-asylum participants saw asylum seekers and Australian citizens as players in a zero sum game, where providing resources to boat people was unfair because it diverted resources from underprivileged Australians. Alternatively, the pro-asylum interviewees who were strongly attached to their 'Australianness', yet open to cultural diversity referred to fairness as recognising that Australia is a wealthy country and that sharing resources with those who are less fortunate is a clear example of the 'fair go'. Also associated with fairness, the latter claimed that, as part of the global community, Australia must accept its fair share of the world's displaced peoples.

These proudly Australian, yet open and accepting young people, argued it was hypocritical to profess Australian principles such as 'mateship' and 'fairness', then support policies to exclude asylum seekers. Turning asylum seekers away was seen as inconsistent with Australian values. As Emma said, this was so at odds with the Australian identity that those rejecting asylum seekers should take their 'national identity a little more seriously' by revisiting what their core values really were. After all, as Jennifer pointed out:

> I think Australia can be a lot more compassionate and tolerant. It's in our national anthem.

Weak attachment to Australia/open to diversity: 'Australia's just the country we live in'
The remaining pro-asylum young people described their discomfort with the concept of Australian identity. They explained this was because understandings of 'being Australian' had all too often been used to exclude and marginalise. Some Australians believe that to have a strong attachment to Australian identity is at odds with the openness required to live in a cohesive and culturally diverse country (e.g. Hage, 2000; Moran, 2011; Pakulski and Tranter, 2000). In this instance, the few interviewees in the 'weak/open' category tried to distance themselves from national attachment. Instead, they were inclined to describe themselves as 'living in Australia' rather than 'being Australian'. Just as Pakulski and Tranter (2000: 208) write of those with a 'weak sense of macro-attachment' who 'consider themselves to be mere

inhabitants of a given land', Gabrielle was inclined to detach herself from national identity. As she explained:

> When I think of myself, I'm not first and foremost in Australia – I feel like I'm probably a global citizen – that's so cliché ... Australia's just the country we live in.

Gabrielle also spoke of how national identity is often used as a justification for intolerance of diversity and sparks prejudicial views. Unlike the 'strong/open' pro-asylum interviewees, for whom attitudes of openness and acceptance were consistent with their Australian identity, the 'weak/open' group did not see such qualities as associated with Australian identity. This point is consistent with Lentini and associates (2009), who studied Australians' attitudes towards multiculturalism. Their participants claimed that qualities such as 'the fair go, mateship, treating others fairly, freedom, respect, hard work, and a robust sense of humour' (Lentini et al., 2009: 5) were values that all people, regardless of country of origin, should respect and adhere to. Yet, as Nicholas explained, although he supported sentiments which informed some Australian values, he also believed those principles should be universal:

> I don't really align with an idea of a national identity very well either which is why [...] I kind of refer to the cliché of a 'fair go' rather than the concept of equality, which I feel would transcend the idea of a national identity.

Discussion and conclusion

This research further advances knowledge of the views of young Australians towards 'boat people'. We signalled that our participants offer a unique insight into this issue. First, they are the children of a multicultural Australia and the recipients of an educational curriculum intended to foster 'ethical judgement and social responsibility' in Australian school children (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005: 1). Yet during their lifetime they have witnessed successive Australian governments implement increasingly harsh laws designed to discourage asylum seekers from attempting to reach Australia by boat. Given that these young Australians have been raised under very particular social and political circumstances, it is important to document their responses and acknowledge the tapestry of views they offer on this issue. Second, the interviewees in this study are participants in an ongoing longitudinal study. This offers us an opportunity to explore their views on such topics across time. As noted elsewhere, the cohort from which the interviewees were sampled are generally more accepting of 'boat people' than the broader Australian population (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). Our ongoing research will determine whether or not they remain this way over time.

We have explored the role of national identity in the context of discussing whether 'boat people' should be granted entry into Australia. Returning to the argument made by Every and Augoustinos (2008), that researchers must remain alert to the way that nationalist rhetoric shapes the views of Australians towards asylum seekers, we have demonstrated how the language of Australian nationhood not only features in the discursive tactics of politicians

and journalists to justify a particular stance on this issue, but also in the repertoires of young Australians who hold strong views on this issue.

While it was perhaps unsurprising that the anti-asylum interviewees showed a strong attachment to traditional notions of 'being Australian', we also found the majority of pro-asylum participants expressed strong Australian identity attachments. However, rather than using the more conventional and often exclusionary descriptors of belonging, young Australians who accept cultural diversity instead (re)imagined their national identity as open and compassionate – arguing that 'being Australian' implies accepting asylum seekers. This finding therefore offers another practical example of how notions of cosmopolitan acceptance can be fused with notions of national identity (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002).

Phillips and Smith (2000: 204) have argued that in Australia, 'hotly contested issues ... are often framed and thought about in terms of the overarching symbolic logics of the "Australian"'. Evident in this study was that certain values commonly associated with the Australian identity had been conscripted by participants on both sides of the debate. One 'symbolic logic' expressed by both groups was that of the 'fair go'. However, differences of opinion existed over *who* should be the beneficiaries of such fairness. Consistent with the findings of Every and Augoustinos (2008), who noted the flexibility with which the term has been applied by Australian politicians in the asylum seeker debate, there appeared to be some degree of plasticity as to how fairness was used by participants in this study.

While many participants identified the 'fair go' as a quintessential element of the Australian psyche, there were differing interpretations of who was being treated fairly and who was not. Anti-asylum interviewees argued that, by allowing asylum seekers into Australia, other Australians were being unfairly disadvantaged. For these young people, it was unfair for funding to be directed towards asylum seekers to the detriment of Australians already in need, and unjust that competition for jobs and housing could increase as more people unable to support themselves were allowed into the country. Pro-asylum interviewees also pointed to the need for Australians to act fairly. Yet fairness for these participants involved recognising one's own wealth relative to others and taking steps to share that good fortune. Young people open to cultural diversity also claimed that, as part of the global community, Australia needed to accept its fair share of the world's displaced peoples. For these accepting young people, countries less economically privileged than Australia were 'punching above their weight' by taking on a greater proportion of asylum seekers, despite their own hardships. Pro-asylum participants argued that the Australia, as one of the most economically robust nations in the world, is much better positioned than many other nations to absorb people who require asylum. For these young people, the 'fair go' requires a more open and cosmopolitan interpretation – one where 'fairness' means fairness for all.

When it comes to discussing the pros and cons of allowing 'boat people' entry into Australia, what comprises 'being Australian' is open to interpretation and can thus be used to justify either position on the asylum seekers issue. Interestingly, just as Moran (2011: 2153) calls 'for supporters of multiculturalism to engage in ongoing debates about their respective

national identities, rather than to vacate the field of national identity to others', the majority of pro-asylum interviewees used Australian identity narratives to support their accepting stance and challenge common discourses of rejection. Instead of 'vacating the field' to the anti-asylum contingent and distancing themselves from their national identity, they defended the notion of 'being Australian' as an open and necessarily malleable concept, one that adapts over time as the nation changes. If Australia is an 'imagined community' with unique and distinctive characteristics, perhaps the responses of these pro-asylum young people identify an opportunity for a more open discussion of what those characteristics truly represent – not just in terms of belonging to Australian society, but also in the context of belonging to the global community.

Notes

1. The issue has proved so problematic for successive Australian federal governments that both the current government and opposition have committed to process the asylum claims of 'boat people' offshore (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2016). For a history of immigration and asylum seeker policy in Australia see Jayasuriya (2012) and Phillips and Spinks (2011).

2. An area accounting for approximately two-thirds of the state's population, containing a mix of metropolitan, semi-rural and rural areas. Data collected by the Australian Election Study on the attitudes of Australian adults towards 'boat people' confirm that Queensland residents are slightly less accepting than those in other states. See: http://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/electoral-surveys/australian-election-study/aes-2013

3. All participants are referred to using pseudonyms.

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