

The Borderscapes of Australia's Offshore Asylum Policy

Examining the Impact of Operation Sovereign Borders on Pacific Borderscapes

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CINETs Conference, October 2014



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Regional Processing Centres (RPCs)

- Offshore detention of immigrants arriving by boat
- Nauru & Papua New Guinea (PNG)
- **Pacific Solution:** 2001-2007 and 2012-2013



Regional Processing Centres (RPCs)

- Offshore detention of immigrants arriving by boat
- Nauru & Papua New Guinea (PNG)
- **Pacific Solution:** 2001-2007 and 2012-2013
- “Crimmigration” development towards expanding intrusive mechanisms of border control, distinguishing between those who belong (insiders) and those who do not belong (outsiders)
(e.g. Afeef, 2006; Flynn, 2012; Rajaram, 2003; Welch, 2012; Wood, 2002)

Pacific Solution as Crimmigration Instrument

- “[...] Australia has witnessed a tighter **coupling of claims connecting illegal immigrants and terrorists**, especially in view of boat arrivals with refugees from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Ministers of the Australian Government announced there was ‘an undeniable link’ between unauthorized migration and terrorism, commenting that the asylum seekers were from Afghanistan or were people with ‘strange identities’ [...] Not surprisingly, those negative emotions lend themselves to **punitive measures of crimmigration control** aimed at those portrayed as being bogus refugees, diseased migrants and shifty queue-jumpers. [...] Human rights advocates and academic researchers contend that the Australian Government has deliberately stoked **public fear and anxiety** over asylum seekers as part of a wider strategy of **crimmigration policy**” (Welch, 2012)
- Detention as unpleasant as possible: **jail-like situations** (McNeill, 2003; Philpott, 2002) and **concentration camps** (Barlow, 2013; Tomlinson, 2005)

2013: Introduction OSB

- **Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB):** 2013-present
- Military-led operation headed by a senior military commander of 3-star ranking (Grewcock, 2014; Liberal Party of Australia, 2013; McAdam, 2013, White, 2014)



2013: Introduction OSB

- **Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB):** 2013-present
- Military-led operation headed by a senior military commander of 3-star ranking (Grewcock, 2014; Liberal Party of Australia, 2013; McAdam, 2013, White, 2014)
- To what extent does OSB have similar crimmigration-inspired rationales and effects?
- Interested in both Australian and Nauruan perspective

Initial research plan

- Inquiry into the Nauruan rationales for accepting OSB from a “commodigration”-hypothesis
- Visa initially granted, later revoked by political leadership less than 3 weeks before arrival


REPUBLIC OF NAURU
OFFICE of the
PRINCIPAL IMMIGRATION OFFICER

CERTIFICATION OF TRAVEL AND ENTRY INTO NAURU

26th February, 2014 Ref No. [REDACTED]

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that approval has been granted to:
Patrick VAN BERLO
Holder of a Netherlands national passport No: [REDACTED] to travel and enter Nauru to undertake official business with the University of the South Pacific (USP Nauru Campus).

This letter is issued to the above named person to facilitate travel and entry into Nauru and the same must be presented to the Immigration Authority, on arrival at Nauru's airport or port of entry.

After scrutiny and confirmation the passport with this letter or the copy will then be taken by Border Control Officer (Immigration), for its immediate dispatch to the visa section office at the airport or port, for the issuance and endorsement of the appropriate visa.

Take note that you must present this certificate to all concerned authority and border control agencies, including airline/shipping agents so as to enable your onward travel to Nauru on the respective flight or ship.


Margaretta Dongobir
A/PRINCIPAL IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Visa Section Notice:
Visa Type: Business. *Validity:* One (1) year. *Journey/s:* Single Entry. *Duration of Stay:* One (3) month from each date of arrival.

NOTE: THIS CERTIFICATE IS VALID FOR SIX (6) MONTHS FROM DATE OF ISSUE.

Research Questions

- **Main research question**
 - Offshore processing arrangements under OSB: crimmigration, and how do they impact on Australian-Pacific borderscapes?
- **Sub-research questions**
 - 1: OSB: Strengthening borders vis-à-vis “crimmigrant others”?
 - 2. OSB: Weakening borderscapes?
 - 3. OSB: Strengthening borderscapes?

[NB Borderscapes: borders as processes rather than mere geographical/physical delineations]

Methodology (I)

- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough 1992; 1995)
- Relation between language, ideology and power in political discourse
- Every political language is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language (Horváth, 2009)
- A given text cannot be studied or analysed in full isolation from its wider social context
- Three-dimensional analytical model: **micro** (textual), **meso** (discursive practices) and **macro** (sociocultural context) level

Methodology (II)

CDA

- Analysis of:
 - 1) Goals of offshore processing
 - 2) Targeted migrants
 - 3) Regional cooperation and respective responsibilities
- Documents:
 - The Coalition's pre-election OSB policy brief (July 2013)
 - All 16 transcripts of press conferences concerning OSB

Methodology (III)

Semi-structured interviews (as leads and illustrations)

- **Mr. Gregory Lake**
(Former Head of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship delegation in Nauru)
- **Dr. Graham Thom**
(International Refugee Expert at Amnesty International Australia)
- **Mr. Mark Isaacs**
(Former Salvation Army staff member deployed in the Regional Processing Centre in Nauru)
- **Dr. Joyce Chia**
(Senior Research Associate at the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW, Sydney)
- **Dr. Michael Grewcock**
(Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Law of UNSW, Sydney and Deputy Director of the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW, Sydney)

Results (I)

(1) Textual analysis

- **Goals of OSB/offshore processing:**
 - Deterrence of migrants who arrive “illegally” (i.e. by boat)
 - Combat people smuggling (crime)
 - Protect borders and sovereignty against transnational crime
 - Respond to a “large-scale national emergency”
 - Restore faith in the immigration system
 - Make migrants return voluntarily
 - **Save lives at sea**
 - Save tax payers’ money
 - Fix the “flawed” approach of the previous Labour government
- Assumptions about achievability
- Push and pull-factors?

Results (II)

(1) Textual analysis

- **Targeted migrants**
 - Boat migrants (no distinction)
 - Smuggled persons (crime)
 - Illegal migrants
 - **Customers/rational passengers “with money in their pocket”**
 - **Queue-jumpers taking the place of “genuine” refugees**
 - Coming to Australia in mass numbers
 - **Simultaneously: vulnerable, unsuspecting victims of smugglers** (crime)
 - Boat migrants are distinguished from (i) Australian citizens and (ii) other migrants
- Dehumanising & objectifying effects

Results (III)

(1) Textual analysis

- **Regional cooperation and responsibilities**
 - **Regionalism at the heart of the operation**
 - **Australia as leading authority and policy driver**
 - Minister for Immigration and Border Protection is responsible
 - Joint Agency Taskforce (JATF) with various operational task groups
 - **Inter-governmental responsibilities remain vague**
 - Nauru/PNG are discourses to be **sovereign partner nations** who “run the processing arrangements”, whilst simultaneously, the Australian Government provide significant amounts of support and the centres are in almost every aspect **de facto Australian in nature**

Results (IV)

(1) Textual analysis

- “[T]he RPCs are discourses to be Australian in a plethora of aspects except for their location: they are **built** by Australia, they are **paid for** by Australia, they are **maintained** by Australia, Australia determines **who comes to the centres** and who is subsequently **transferred** to the Australian mainland, Australia has a leading role in determining **capacity issues**, Australia **contracts** the service providers involved in welfare and safety through tender processes, Australia holds service providers **contractually responsible**, Australia is responsible for “**making things work on the ground**”, as well as for **welfare, health provisions** and the **dignity** of asylum seekers, the Australian Minister is the **legal guardian** of unaccompanied minors detained in RPCs and Australia **commissions investigations** into incidents occurring at the RPCs, although the centres are located in Nauru and processing formally occurs under Nauruan law, albeit with the support of Australian **assessors** [...]”

Thesis, page 51

Results (V)

(2) Discursive practice analysis

- **Policy brief:** geared towards electoral gain; structure provides opportunities to contrast with Labour's policies
- **Press conferences:** two discursive strands: military and political discursivity. Limited interdiscursivity at the beginning, hardly any interdiscursivity at the end
- “Ideological square” (Van Dijk, 1995; 1998) in relation to other migrants and Australian citizens

		We/Us	
		Good	Bad
They/Them	Good		
	Bad	X	

Results (V)

(3) Socio-cultural contextual analysis

- Continuous public anxiety: “invasions”, “floodings”, “yellow perils” (Viviani, 1984; Phillips & Spinks, 2013)
- Dominates the political realm: policies to deter boat migration



Betts (2001): *“there was no sudden desire to close the door on boatpeople [...]. This has been a slow and growing trend over the last quarter of a century.”*

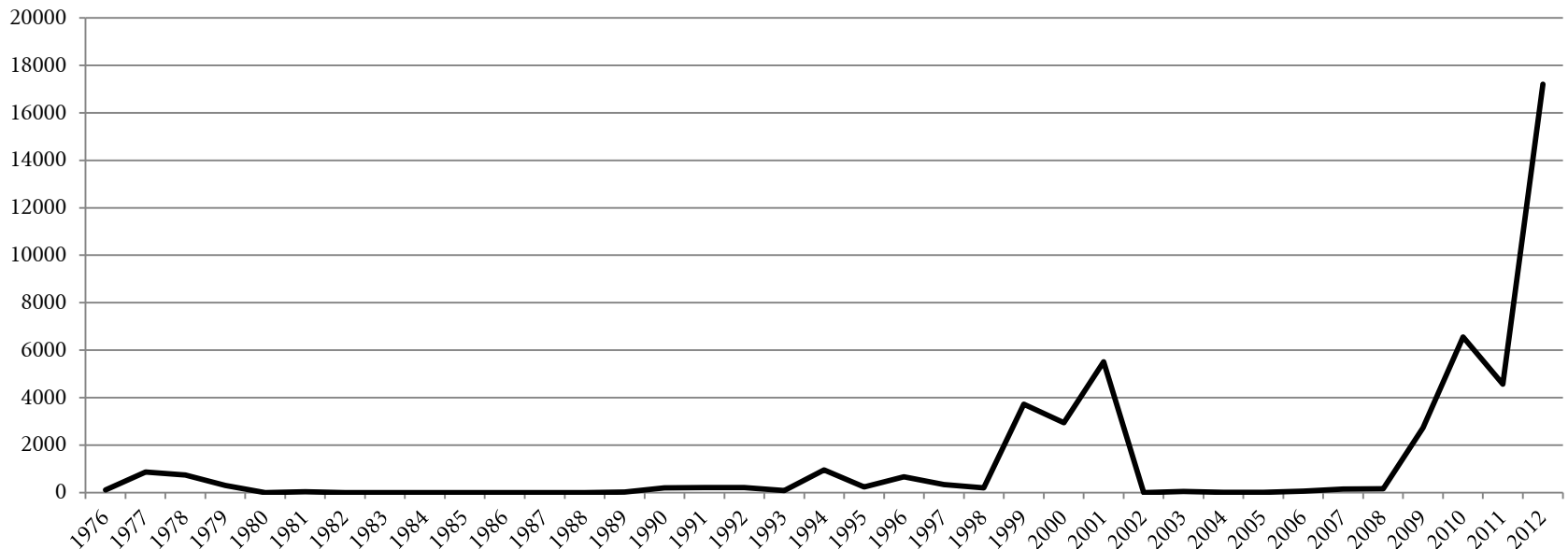
Pickering & Lambert (2002): *“[d]eterrence has come to be the raison d’être of Australian refugee policy.”*

Results (V)

(3) Socio-cultural contextual analysis

- Continuous public anxiety: “invasions”, “floodings”, “yellow perils” (Viviani, 1984; Phillips & Spinks, 2013)
- Dominates the political realm: policies to deter boat migration
- Do they work?

Number of irregular boat migrants (excl. crew)



Results (VI)

Anxiety and Discourse

The **textual discourse** (level 1) continuously operates from the perspective that boat migrants are to be feared and to be deterred, in line with the **socio-cultural context** (level 3).

At the same time, it ought to be acknowledged that the use of this discourse simultaneously *reinforces* such socio-cultural practices, as it continuously plays into and adds to these fears, on the **discursive practice level** (level 2)

OSB's Impact on Pacific Borderscapes (I)

(i) Strengthening Borderscapes vis-à-vis “crimmigrant others”

- Crimmigration-inspired framework (goals, targeted migrants, implementation)
- OSB also more directly links immigrants with crime (e.g. sexual assault; piracy)
- “Crimmigrant” imago is persuasive: boat migrants have no opportunity to counterbalance their representations
- Australia's borders become impermeable for these “crimmigrant” others, distinguishing them as “outsiders” from “insiders” (Aas, 2013)

OSB's Impact on Pacific Borderscapes (II)

(ii) Diminishing borderscapes

- RPCs *implicitly* discourses to be Australian processing centres
- Genuinely incorporated governance aspects of the Australian security-based deterrence process
- Processually-conceived borderscapes
- **Novel trans-border governance structure** in which various sovereign countries and private contractors play key roles in *one* hybrid system
- Crossing sovereignty and territory
- Grewcock (2014): neo-colonial relationship

OSB's Impact on Pacific Borderscapes (III)

(iii) Strengthening borderscapes

- Responsibility obscured (de jure/de facto); accountability obscured:
 - **Nauruan** government has to issue a visa, but:
 - UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
 - Amnesty International
 - Myself
 - Also: Visa fees for journalists (8000 AUD); suspension of Chief Justice, magistrate and MPs
 - **Australian** government has to grant access to visit the centre, which results from the fact that the centres are implicitly Australian, but:
 - Media (mental health reasons)
 - Australian Human Rights Commission (jurisdictional reasons)
 - Frequent dismissal of employees
- The novel assemblage has simultaneously erected **new accountability borderscapes with a high level of impermeability**
- Black hole for scrutiny

Contact details



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