

AN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS OF INDISTINCTION: MAKING REFUGEES VISIBLE

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Abstract: In this article I examine how the competing positions and claims of Australian citizens, First Nations people and refugees are negotiated visually in the global public sphere. Australian perspectives on struggles over citizenship and semi-porous borders must be understood within a history of nation-building, regional relations and the ideology of Whiteness. How does visual culture constitute categories of inclusion and exclusion? Visual strategies that define and contest the place of Indigenous Australians, as well as refugees seeking to come to Australia have been criticised for depicting their subjects as abject victims who lack agency or history, or simply rendering them invisible. Some have been critical of the visual discourse of spectacular violence that has been created and promoted by the Australian government in its pursuit of policies of ‘deterrence’. Seeking to challenge this regime of erasure and de-humanisation, activists have adopted a range of innovative visual tactics, including self-representation by refugees themselves. Tactics of humanisation, such as depicting the love of a mother for her child, draw figures such as asylum seekers into the civil sphere. The extraordinary story of Iranian-Kurdish refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani traces the emergence of a new humanitarian icon, rising from the invisibility shield of Australia’s official border protection regime. I examine the extent to which these strategies shape debates around migration and refugees, and mediate between the historically powerful principles of Australian exclusion and the legitimate claims of refugees.

Keywords: visualising refugees, refugees, Australian citizenship, Australian visual culture, Behrouz Boochani, migration

1. Justice, Arts and Migration Network, <https://migrationandart.com>. I wish to thank John Erni and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, convenors of the JAM network formed between Lincoln and Hong Kong in 2018, for their support with this research.

2. Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press 1999. (Hereafter *Distant Suffering*); Lisa Malkki, ‘Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 11:3, 1996, pp377-

In this article, I present an Australian perspective on struggles over citizenship and national belonging. Like many other countries, our borders have become semi-porous, permitting neither total inclusion nor wholesale exclusion, in what we might term a ‘politics of indistinction’. How does visual culture constitute categories of inclusion and exclusion – and how might we create ‘horizontal’ modes of relationships and identity with those simultaneously included and excluded from the civil? I first trace Australia’s distinctive politics of exclusion and inclusion, which must be understood within its specific history of nation-building, regional relations and the ideology of Whiteness, linked to legal and political frameworks, as a means of explaining

the continuing logic of its interlocking systems of exclusion both within and without the national border. I start by exploring Australia's 'non-citizenship' tradition, and the increasingly powerful role that a globalised visual culture plays in shaping ideas about the civil. I review visual strategies that define and contest the place of Indigenous Australians, as well as refugees seeking to come to Australia. A central visual concern animating much recent work in this field is the tension between the abject and the agentic: the visual rhetoric of suffering that remains central to humanitarianism requires 'innocent' sufferers to be represented in the passivity of their suffering, not in the action they take to confront and escape it, rendering refugees, and Aboriginal people, as mute victims.²

AUSTRALIA'S 'NON-CITIZENSHIP' TRADITION

Since the 1990s the prevailing sense of a global 'migration crisis' has been invoked to justify draconian measures to protect national borders, even at the expense of obligations towards refugees. Like many Western countries since the end of the Cold War, Australia has worked to prevent refugees from seeking asylum by making its borders impenetrable.³ Just as in Europe, Australia has defined refugees as a threat to public security, social security and cultural cohesion. However, distinctive aspects of Australia's history have ensured that race provides a key marker of inclusion and exclusion that has characterised its history as a former settler colony. Australian citizenship confers status as a legally recognised subject of a state or commonwealth, and provides access to a range of civil, political and social rights. Yet in Australia, as historian David Dutton points out, there has historically been an 'absence of a coherent concept of Australian citizenship'.⁴ This problem is not one of confusion, but is a consequence of defining Australian identity by what it is *not*. John Chesterman and Brian Galligan argue that Australia has a 'non-citizenship tradition', that is founded on the 'deliberate eschewing of citizenship in favour of subjecthood' to Britain and the exclusion of 'non-white groups': that is, both absence and exclusion.⁵ In its final form, the Australian Constitution 1901 made no provision for Australian citizenship, although citizenship of a foreign power was made a disqualification for membership of the federal parliament in section 44(i). Until the Australian Citizenship Act 1948 came into effect on January 1949, Australian national status was that of 'British subject', a status shared, of course, with almost all Commonwealth countries.

This distinctive history originates from Britain's ambitions to conquer, exploit and re-create British culture across the globe. Early in its colonial history, administrators and politicians determined that Australia would become an offshoot of the 'Mother Country' and therefore from the 1830s, a tumultuous decade of imperial re-organisation, emigration was formally restricted to those of the 'British race'.⁶ Ideas about race were shaped by views of environmental acclimatisation that assigned European workers to

404. (Hereafter *Speechless Emmissaries*); Lilie Chouliarakis, 'The Theatricality of Humanitarianism: A Critique of Celebrity Advocacy', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 9:1, 2012, pp1-21.

3. K. Neumann, *Refuge Australia: Australia's Humanitarian Record*, University of NSW Press 2004; J. Lydon, 'Fantasy Islands: Photography, Empathy and Australia's Detention Archipelago', in *Photography and Migration*, T. Sheehan (ed.), Routledge 2018, pp100-114. (Hereafter *Fantasy Islands*).

4. David Dutton, *One of Us? A Century of Australian Citizenship*, UNSW Press 2002.

5. John Chesterman and Brian Galligan (eds), *Defining Australian Citizenship: Selected Documents*, Melbourne University Press, 1999, p73.

6. Tony Ohlsson, 'The Origins of a White Australia: The Coolie Question 1837-43', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 97:2, 2011, pp203-219; Rose Cullen, 'Empire, Indian Indentured Labour and the Colony: The Debate Over "Coolie" Labour in New South Wales, 1836-1838', *History Australia*, 9:1, 2012, pp84-109.

7. Alan Lester, Kate Boehme and Peter Mitchell, *Ruling the World: Freedom, Civilisation and Liberalism in the Nineteenth-Century British Empire*, Cambridge University Press 2020; Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920*, Oxford University Press 1993 [1974]; R.B. Allen, 'Slaves, Convicts, Abolitionism and the Global Origins of the Post-Emancipation Indentured Labor System', *Slavery and Abolition*, 35:2, 2014, pp328-48.

8. Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Pluto Press 2003. (Hereafter *Against Paranoid Nationalism*); Catriona Elder, 'Invaders, Illegals and Aliens: Imagining Exclusion in a "White Australia"', *Law Text Culture*, 7, 2003 (Hereafter *Invaders, Illegals and Aliens*).

9. Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, Royal Anthropological Institute and Yale University Press 1992; Patricia Hayes, Wolfram Hartmann and Jeremy Silvester, *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History*, Ohio University Press 1999.

10. Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of US Immigration Policy*, University of California Press 2009; J. Torpey, *The Invention of the*

temperate zones, as well as debates about racial 'mixing' that intensified around the time of the abolition of British slavery in 1833. Post-emancipation labour schemes consolidated a spatialised racial imperial hierarchy.⁷ From the 1870s onwards, as notions of social evolutionism were popularised and became scientific orthodoxy, hardening attitudes toward non-white populations became established, grounded in supposed biological essences. This long genealogy has produced raced and gendered popular discourses of exclusion focused on unauthorised immigration, popularly termed the 'White Australia Policy'.⁸

Visual culture has played an important role in the long history of defining and advancing ideas of Australian identity, citizenship and rights, and the many practices, discourses and emotional attachments that constitute forms of political community. Processes of exclusion were defined and regulated through visual technologies such as the passport photograph, which began to emerge around 1888 through the implementation of laws to restrict Chinese immigration. These practices were consolidated by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, which was amongst the first pieces of legislation introduced to the newly formed federal parliament, generally considered to mark the formal establishment of the 'White Australia policy', which was designed to limit non-British migration to Australia and allowed for the deportation of 'undesirable' people who had settled in any Australian colony prior to federation. The medium of photography was strongly implicated within the emerging discourse of anthropology and human difference, providing a framework for linking identity and photographic record.⁹ Like other nation states around the globe, the implementation of these processes of exclusion relied upon systems regulating movement, in turn reliant upon photography, with its aura of objectivity. The United States provided an important precedent by introducing identity photographs as a form of documentation to regulate Chinese exclusion in 1882, drawing on practices of police rogue galleries.¹⁰

Sophie Couchman has examined the photographic series used as proof of the identity of resident Chinese Australians who wished to leave and re-enter Victoria as part of the practical administration of the 1890 Chinese Act in Victoria.¹¹ This appears to represent the first systematic use of photography for immigration identification purposes in Australia, which established many aspects of the later twentieth-century immigration system. While Australian prison portraits were already becoming highly standardised head and shoulder 'mugshots' during the 1890s, these Chinese Australian portraits were taken in photographic studios under the direction of the subject and were highly individualised. Together with associated documents, they reveal aspects of the subjects' lives – such as their mobility, far-flung places of residence and the many ways they chose to present themselves to the camera. Couchman's analysis has unraveled a number of individual life stories from this assemblage, and, as she notes, despite assumptions that 'race' could be discerned from

outward, physical, appearance, by this time administrators understood that the difference between Chinese immigrants and those residents who were legally exempt could not be visually read from their bodies as they crossed the border.¹²

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Such a perspective highlights the distinctive historical contours of official Australian policies of citizenship, with its twin mechanisms of inclusion within an ‘imperial commons’ (or shared cultural and historical imagination united by values, myths and emotional narratives) and the simultaneous exclusion of racial difference.¹³ The Australian state, founded on the denied sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, was from its inception constituted through ‘interlocking inscriptions of alterity and sameness, by the hierarchies of colonial raciology and its performed differentiations and discriminations’.¹⁴ Scholars of critical whiteness have long recognised the connection between these regulatory systems and what Aileen Moreton-Robinson terms ‘the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty’.

But as a First Nations scholar, Moreton-Robinson argues that:

In postcolonising settler societies, Indigenous people cannot forget the nature of migrancy, and we position all non-Indigenous people as migrants and diasporic. Our ontological relationship to land, the ways that country is constitutive of us, and therefore the inalienable nature of our relation to land, marks a radical, indeed incommensurable, difference between us and the non-Indigenous.¹⁵

These complex and shifting relations must be acknowledged in any analysis of the politics of Indigenous recognition and policies of border protection in former settler societies, like Australia and Canada. While they are often separated in public and academic discourses, some immigration scholars in former settler colonies have taken up philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s notion of ‘the parallax view’ – that is, the representation ‘of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible’ – to challenge the division of immigrant and Indigenous experiences.¹⁶ The political parallax suggests a social antagonism that allows for no common ground, but Canadian scholar Harald Bauder has argued that immigrant and Indigenous justice projects share much through their fraught relationship with the state.¹⁷ Yet, as Moreton-Robinson argues, there are real difficulties in attempting to reconcile these positions. One key contradiction emerges from Indigenous arguments that recognition by the nation state does not produce Indigenous self-determination, while conversely, migrants seek permanent status as a means to end their unjust exploitation, foregrounding immigrants’ complicity with the dominant order.¹⁸ By developing a more nuanced understanding of

Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State, Cambridge University Press 2000.

11. Sophie Couchman, ‘Not So Mug Mughshots: Behind the Portraits of Series B6443’, *Crossings* 9:3, 2004. This series of government photographs is held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA), series B6443, ‘Photographs and negatives of Chinese entering Australia’, and was created by the Collector of Customs, Melbourne, Victoria between late 1899 and early 1901. The series contains 269 photographs of Chinese Australians.

12. Sophie Couchman, ‘In and Out of Focus: Chinese and Photography in Australia, 1870s-1940s’, PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 2009, p124. Couchman also suggests that these 1890s photos were re-used from as early as 1884, on exemption certificates, p125.

13. Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr, ‘Introduction’, in Antoinette Burton and Isabel Hofmeyr (eds), *Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons*, Duke University Press 2014, pp1-34. A cognate conceptualisation of the circulation of images and ideas around the world, is anthropologist Deborah Poole’s ‘global visual economy’.

14. Suvendrini Perera, *Survival Media: The Politics and Poetics of Mobility and the War in Sri Lanka*, Palgrave Macmillan 2016, p64. See also Suvendrini Perera, *Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats and Bodies*, Palgrave Macmillan 2009, p152.

15. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press 2015, p11. (Hereafter *The White Possessive*).

16. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, MIT Press 2006, p17.

17. Harald Bauder, 'Closing the Immigration-Aboriginal Parallax Gap', *Geoforum* 42, 2011, pp517-519.

18. Soma Chatterjee, 'Immigration, Anti-racism, and Indigenous Self-determination: Towards a Comprehensive Analysis of the Contemporary Settler Colonial', *Social Identities*, 25:5, 2019, pp644-661; E. Tuck and W. Yang, 'Decolonisation Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonisation, Indigeneity, Education and Society*, 1:1, 2012, pp1-40.

19. I. Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialisation and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism*, Duke University Press 2016.

20. Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of*

the contemporary settler colonial as an interlinked structure of immigration, labour exploitation and Indigenous dispossession we can see how immigrants' 'racialised vulnerability and disposability supports a settler colonial project'.

Looking beyond legal and policy categories to the wider cultural processes through which concepts of citizenship are consolidated, reveals how the political imagination is given form by visual culture. Photo theorist Ariella Azoulay, for example, defines the civil as the 'interest that citizens display in themselves, in others and in their shared forms of coexistence, as well as the world that they create and nurture'.²⁰ Azoulay is prominent within a theoretical shift from an emphasis on the image's meaning and aesthetics, towards examining its public impact and performativity. For Azoulay, viewing photographs is a 'civil act' within a space of political relations; viewing brings responsibilities toward what one sees, and facilitates the photographed subject's assertion of her rights. Considering the plight of Israeli citizens and Palestinians living in occupied territories, she emphasises their mutual engagement in this visual civil space, which creates a 'civil contract'.²¹ This shared space arises from the knowledge that others are also seeing, thinking and responding to public affairs and thereby participating in political relationships. Photography is therefore a form of spectatorship that connects individuals to the public sphere in an 'extended social relationship' that may engage First Nations, settler and immigrant populations in their shared relations.

Recent work on 'visual citizenship' and civic spectatorship emphasises how images may both create imagined communities, but may also exclude certain groups from citizenship and its rights.²² Images are critical in defining and policing the boundaries of categories of citizenship and in justifying who may be considered as deserving of citizenship's entitlements. Despite the seemingly parallax view of Indigenous Australians and migrants, key points of intersection can be identified, grounded in their shared historical relationship to the white settler state. As well as calling for surveillance and governance, imperial visual culture supported notions of both Aboriginal and non-white migrant otherness, that threatened the cultural values of British tradition. While the specific visual cultural and biological markers of Aboriginality may differ from those of the illegal immigrant, in their representation by the state, shared visual strategies have racialised both as non-white, associated with primitivism, savagery and alien values. Both are shown as *either* assimilated to 'Australian' values, or as threateningly alien; alternatively, the visual rhetoric of suffering positions both as helpless, voiceless, and in need of recuperation by the white humanitarian.

In struggles over self-determination and sovereignty, the state has depicted Aboriginal communities as lawless and abject, in a kind of Indigenous pathology. While such images are not the prime focus of this essay, it is clear that such representations give the state the moral authority to silence Indigenous advocacy for sovereignty. Images of primitiveness and incapacity

sanction measures such as the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response, or ‘Intervention’ – a raft of punitive and intrusive social regulations imposed on remote communities by former Prime Minister John Howard’s government – which is still in place.²³ Aboriginal people continue to be managed as welfare objects, in trialling the cashless welfare card, or implementing disciplinary labour regimes such as the Community Development Program (a form of welfare labour).

Conversely, in order to be understood as sympathetic and attached – to be *recognised* – both First Nations peoples and migrants have been rendered as objects of pity or compassion and therefore as abject and suffering, voiceless and requiring to be helped by the benevolent white humanitarian. This rhetorical dilemma is well-understood by visual theorists of both discourses: in Australia, we have seen an increasingly sophisticated debate regarding the representation of Aboriginal people in which the former Indigenous subjects have asserted their agency and control over how they are depicted. Aboriginal people have drawn on their rich visual traditions to contest such imagery, and assert their strength and culture; starting during the early twentieth century, a new history of Aboriginal photography and self-representation is starting to emerge.²⁴

Similarly, if in distinct ways, depictions of migrants to Australia have provided a means of legitimating the state’s possessive investment in patriarchal white sovereignty: this is effected both through the ‘good’ migrant’s presence and subscription to national core values, as well as by contrast with the countervailing image of the ‘illegal immigrant’, which positions the Muslim as the invading ‘other’.²⁵ A substantial body of scholarship has focused upon the ethical relationship between viewer and viewed, emphasising photography’s capacity to diminish and humiliate the suffering person, rendered as passive victim. This rhetorical visual strategy has historically characterised many ‘humanitarian’ campaigns, constructing a notion of the human that is partial, limited and exclusive. This language of compassion echoes the limits of the human rights framework, as many have noted – in practice, rights are *not* given to all but belong only to citizens, as a series of exclusions are required to constitute the ‘universal’.²⁶ Anxieties regarding the limits of representation, and especially the shortcomings of the medium of photography, have emphasised the incapacity of the image to change minds. However, as many have noted, the complete suppression of images by the state also acts to erase the social experience of suffering.²⁷ In this way, the absent image may be as powerful, and terrifying in its effects, as images of suffering.²⁸ Similarly, as anthropologist Lisa Malkki argues, the visual rhetoric of humanitarianism continues to require ‘innocent’ sufferers to be represented passively, rather than in the action they take to escape their situations. Refugees must remain as mute victims (*Distant Suffering; Speechless Emissaries*). These forms of invisibility, or silence, have played into official Australian policies of border protection and refugee detention.

Photography, Verso 2012, p5.

21. Ariella Azoulay, *The Civic Contract of Photography*, (trans.) Relá Mazali and Ruvik Danieli, Zone Books 2008, pp95-97.

22. See, for example, J. Telesca, ‘Preface: What is Visual Citizenship’, *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4:3, 2013, pp339-343; Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *The Public Image: Photography and Civic Spectatorship*, University of Chicago Press 2016.

23. Jon Altman and Melinda Hinkson (eds), *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia*, Arena 2007; Jane Lydon, *The Flash of Recognition: Photography and Indigenous Rights*, New South Books 2012.

24. See, for example, Lawrence Bablett, ‘Picture Who We Are: Representations of Identity and the Appropriation of Photographs into a Wiradjuri Oral History Tradition’, in *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies*, J. Lydon (ed.), Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014, pp 76-100; Karen Hughes and Ellen Trevorrow, ‘“The Nation is Coming to Life”: Law, Sovereignty, and Belonging in Ngarrindjeri Photography of the Mid-Twentieth

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Century', *History of Photography*, 42:3, 2018, pp249-268; Lucy Van, 'Just Gold: The Mavis Walley Collection', *History of Photography*, 43:1, 2019, pp2-26.

25. Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, 'Racism, Foreigner Communities, and the Onto-Pathology of White Australian Subjectivity', in Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed.), *Whitening Race*, Aboriginal Studies Press 2004, 45; *The White Possessive*, 147.

26. For 'inclusive exclusion', see G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (trans.) Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press 1998, pp28-29. (Hereafter *Homo Sacer*).

27. Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, 'The Appeal of Experience; the Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in our Times', *Daedalus* 125, 1996, pp1-23.

28. For further discussion see Jane Lydon, *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire*, Bloomsbury 2016.

29. Jayne Persian, *Beautiful Balts: From Displaced Persons to New Australians*, NewSouth Publishing, 2017, Chapter 2. (Hereafter *Beautiful Balts*).

30. Arthur Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, Lloyd O'Neill/Rigby 1972, p103.

The development of Australian citizenship has been intertwined with immigration since Federation – evident, for example, in the relationship between immigration policies and citizenship outcomes for migrants. After World War Two, Australia's rapidly developing industrialised economy addressed its labour shortage through immigration, launching a mass migration program in 1945. Soon afterwards, the Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948 came into effect, defining the legal category of citizen for the first time, but continuing to overlap with British subject status. Hopes for British immigrants were thwarted and the first shipload of 'Displaced Persons' (DPs) arrived in Australia in 1947 from the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, sponsored by the International Refugee Organisation. This group had been carefully chosen: they were all young and single and quickly became known as the 'beautiful Balts'.²⁹ As Minister for Immigration and architect of the postwar immigration scheme, Arthur Calwell, later admitted,

There had been some doubt about the quality of these DPs who had the blood of a number of races in their veins. Many were red-headed and blue-eyed. There was also a number of natural platinum blondes of both sexes. The men were handsome and the women beautiful. It was not hard to sell immigration to the Australian people once the press published photographs of that group.³⁰

Seventy years after these events, Calwell's comments seem unpleasantly salacious, almost as if he were hosting a giant orgy. The term 'platinum blond' had only recently entered common usage, coined around 1931 to refer to Hollywood star Jean Harlow and her image of sexual permissiveness. The element of titillation in Calwell's remarks brought the underlying ideas of racial 'mixing', 'miscegenation', or 'intermarriage' into sharp focus.³¹ As Jayne Persian explains, Calwell's policy was to dramatically increase Australia's population, summed up in his phrase, 'populate or perish', but the selection of migrants was narrowly focused on specifically 'desirable' races – excluding Jews, for example (*Beautiful Balts*, Chapter 2).

One widely-circulated photograph featured Konstancija Brundzaite (1921-2005) in traditional Lithuanian dress, presenting a gift to Calwell aboard HMAS Kanimbla in 1947 (Image 1). Brundzaite was one of the first Lithuanian women to arrive, among the first shipload of non-British, European displaced persons to be resettled through the Australian government's post-war migration program. The image was widely circulated, including its later reproduction in the official pamphlet, 'Twenty Million Australians In Our Time!'. Press reports emphasised how grateful these migrants were and their desire to 'build [Australia] into a great nation'.³² Journalists offered admiring observations on the new arrivals' physical appearance, for example



*Image 1.
Konstancija
Brundzaite
presents a gift to
Arthur Calwell,
Minister for
Immigration,
1947. Australian
National
Maritime
Museum
Collection
Gift from the
Australian
Lithuanian
Community
00003844.*

noting that, '[h]ealthy, handsome, with surprisingly good complexions and figures, the girls created a splendid impression'. Again, 'these attractive Balts displayed an eagerness to learn about Australian geography, and when they smiled thanks they exhibited sets of splendidly-formed white teeth'. Smiling faces were to the fore in this staged photographic encounter of arrival and formal greeting. After they disembarked in December 1947 they were taken to the Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre in New South Wales, before being sent out to work for two years at a range of labouring and domestic jobs around the country. In these public accounts, migrants' previous ill-treatment by Russian forces was contrasted with mainstream white Australia's benevolent and kindly role, supplying plentiful food, security and opportunities for improvement through hard work.

Their warm reception may be understood not only through a long genealogy of British racial thought as old as settler colonisation, but also most immediately in terms of the 'body culture' discourse which had developed during the interwar period. Comprising pseudo-scientific theories of eugenics and ideas about the revitalisation of the body, this complex set of arguments, images and practices aimed to regulate and develop the body as a means of building individual health as well as regenerating community. Body culture was intimately linked to Australian nationalism, and within an international discourse of hygiene, Australia became a test case on race-discrimination and national sovereignty.³³ Body culture was visualised most famously by Max Dupain's photography, which as Isobel Crombie has explored, created racialised Australian archetypes such as the lifesaver and the surfer.³⁴ Dupain's 1937 *Sunbaker* became an icon of Australian beach culture and is today perhaps the most recognisable Australian photograph ever produced, symbolising vitality, connection to the elements and a love of

31. Stuart Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s*, NewSouth Publishing 2015; Gwenda Tavan, 'Leadership, Arthur Calwell and the Postwar Immigration Program', *Australian Journal of History and Politics*, 58:2, 2012, p210; Andrew Markus and Margaret Taft, 'Postwar Immigration and Assimilation: A Reconceptualisation', *Australian Historical Studies*, 46:2, 2015, pp234-251.

32. 'Balts like their new country', *Border Morning Mail*, 9 December 1947, p2.

33. Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health*, Brill 2003.

34. Isobel Crombie, *Body Culture: Max Dupain, Photography and Australian Culture, 1919-1939*, Peleus Press 2004.

Image 2.
Max Dupain
(Australia,
b.1911,
d.1992),
Sunbaker 1937,
printed 1970s,
gelatin silver
photograph,
37.9 x 42.8
cm. Art Gallery
of New South
Wales, Purchased
1976. Image ©
NSW 115.1976.



a healthy physical life (Image 2). Showing a young man lying face down on the beach, the image defines a racial archetype of the muscled, tanned Anzac. Mirroring his subject, Dupain shot this photo from ground level, immersing the viewer, evoking the intensity of hot sun on a wet body and pleasurable surrender to these elemental, regenerating forces. Together, these images track the logic of nation-building across this period of civic transformation and new citizenship. The ‘attractive Balts’ represented the feminised new migrant who was eager to please and would work hard to fit into Australian society, a welcome counterpart to Dupain’s lords of summer.

CLOSING THE BORDERS

I move now to the turn of the twentieth century and the ways that visual culture has intervened within debates about mobility and migration. Since the 1990s, the prevailing sense of a global ‘migration crisis’ has been invoked to justify draconian measures to protect Australia’s national borders, even at the expense of its obligations towards refugees. Like many Western countries since the end of the Cold War, Australia has worked to make our borders impenetrable. By contrast with a rich and diverse historical tradition of representing migrants, today the Australian government seeks to suppress all photographs of asylum seekers, seemingly from fear that such images will undermine border security policy (*Fantasy Islands*). Border policy has been

militarised and, just as in Europe, Australian officialdom has defined refugees as a threat to public security, social security and an imagined Western – or more specifically Anglo-Australian – way of life.

One landmark event in this dialectic occurred in August 2001, when the Norwegian vessel MV Tampa rescued 438 mostly Afghan asylum seekers from their sinking boat, around four hours' journey from the Australian territory of Christmas Island. Many asylum seekers have attempted to cross to Australia across this sea territory, from Indonesia in the north-west. In contravention of maritime law, the Australian government blocked the Tampa from landing on Christmas Island. Given the remoteness and scale of these maritime places, Australian citizens' understanding of these events has necessarily been highly mediated.³⁵ Those opposed to admitting asylum seekers have used this distance to advantage: for example, one 2013 study found that leading national newspapers in Australia visually portrayed asylum seekers in political and highly dehumanising ways. There was a striking lack of images showing individual asylum seekers with clearly recognisable facial features (only 2 per cent), with the effect of framing the refugee 'problem' as a potential threat that demanded mechanisms of security and border control.³⁶ A widely circulated aerial view of the Tampa showed the rescued refugees sitting on the deck in rows, in a space defined by shipping containers – a distant view that showed the refugees as a huddled mass, rather than as individuals. Following the Tampa incident, a new border protection initiative titled Operation Relex implemented a restrictive public affairs plan that tightly regulated the collection and circulation of information and images (*Fantasy Islands*).

The Australian government has defined the 'logic of humanitarianism' through a binary opposition between innocence and vulnerability, that simultaneously criminalises the 'guilty': humanitarianism's obverse is repression, expressed through practices of policing and hierarchies of humanity. Seemingly, defending the rights of the citizen entails the invention of the camp for the undesirable (*Homo Sacer*). This dynamic was reanimated in October 2001, in the lead-up to a federal election, when a boat carrying 223 asylum seekers sank north of Christmas Island. Conservative government leaders claimed that passengers had threatened to throw children overboard as a means of forcing the Australian navy to rescue them, and produced photographs taken by the Australian Navy to 'prove' this despicable tactic (Image 3). The claim that refugees would sacrifice their own children as a cunning publicity ploy sought to show that this group was dishonest, manipulative and, especially, lacked the family values underpinning a shared humanity. This narrative threatened the essential human link between parent and child. Visually, these 'overboard' images are distant and impersonal, constituting views of the asylum seekers in the water, with faces blurred, accompanied by Navy personnel. These 'unhumanised' views were easily enfolded into the official narrative of refugee manipulation and alien values.

However, a later Senate inquiry found, on the basis of evidence provided

35. P. Gale, 'The Refugee Crisis and Fear: Populist Politics and Media Discourse', *Journal of Sociology*, 38, 2004, pp321-40; E.H. McKay, S.L. Thomas and S. Kneebone, "'It Would Be Okay If They Came Through the Proper Channels': Community Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers in Australia', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25, 2012, p113-33.

36. Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison and Xzarina Nicholson, 'The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 48:4, 2013, pp398-416. (Hereafter *Visual Dehumanisation*).

37. The Australian Navy gunner who jumped into the water to help the refugees was identified as Laura Whittle: 'Navy Gunner Breaks Silence on SIEV 4', Australian Broadcasting Commission, 18 August 2004, www.abc.net.au/news/2004-08-18/navy-gunner-breaks-silence-on-siev-iv/2027964.

38. Project SafeCom: www.safecom.org.au/kids-overboard.htm; Victoria Laurie, 'Censored Smiles of Kids "overboard"', *Weekend Australian*, 26-27 July 2003, p6.

Image 3.
'Laura the Hero.' *Children Overboard,* October 2001. Courtesy of Project SafeCom. <http://www.safecom.org.au/kids-overboard.htm>



by senior Navy personnel, that the photos were taken the day *after* these events were claimed to have occurred – and actually showed people abandoning the vessel while it was sinking beneath them (*Fantasy Islands*, pp100-114).³⁷ Later, in July 2003, an anonymous source provided photographs of the rescue and the asylum seekers taken aboard HMS Adelaide during these events. These low-resolution images, labelled by someone who knew the navy personnel, were sent on CD disk to the community-based Project SafeCom in Western Australia; they are now publicly accessible on its website.³⁸ They document both the rescue itself, as sailors jumped into the water to assist the refugees, many of them women and children – but also their subsequent happiness and relief to be safe aboard the HMS Adelaide. Contrasting with the distant 'overboard' shots, those produced aboard the ship reveal the good health and happiness of the children and care from their parents. While I have chosen not to reproduce any that would identify the subjects, these could almost be considered family portraits. One medium-distance view shows a smiling mother, wearing navy clothing, peacefully arranging her small daughter's hair (Image 4). This immediately familiar context humanises the refugees by focusing on the powerful identification evoked by the maternal bond. The universality of the 'family of man' is a visual and emotional narrative that has long been deployed to powerful effect. Photographs supposedly demonstrating the shared, yet diverse, experience of humankind were assembled to argue for the new postwar apparatus of human rights, embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, for example, centred upon the theme of family, especially the link between mother and child. While the meaning and effects of such imagery continue to be debated, especially in their false equivalence across culture and class, their enduring power within narratives of civilisation and political inclusion is undeniable.³⁹ Today, viewers might well wonder what the impact on the Australian public of these scenes of harmony would have been if they had been released and circulated in 2001, alongside or in place of the fictitious 'children overboard' images.

Information about Australian offshore detention centres has continued to be restricted. Medical staff have repeatedly testified to the trauma for inmates of these places, especially children. The Australian government has continued to invest heavily in media programmes to discourage refugees. The more troubling aspects of these policies – such as effects upon asylum seekers and particularly children and families under indefinite detention – remain difficult to see. Since 2012, Australia has maintained its policy of sending people to Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea for



*Image 4. 'Hair:'
Families aboard
after rescue.
Mother tidying
girl's hair.
Courtesy of
Project SafeCom.*

offshore processing. Since July 2013 its policy has been that none will be resettled in Australia, even if recognised as refugees.

MAKING VISIBLE

In response to these official campaigns, those seeking to counter aspects of the Australian government's policies have also turned to photography, as witness to the migrant experience, and as self-representation. In 2014, Hazara refugee Barat Ali Batoor's photo on board an asylum seeker boat between Indonesia and Australia won the inaugural Photo of the Year, in the Nikon-Walkley Award for Excellence in Photojournalism. His prize-winning documentation of his journey for the first time showed refugees and the hardship they endured as lives to be narrated. Social media has also provided a means for refugees to intervene in official and mainstream visual economies, or transcend them (*Speechless Emissaries; Visual Dehumanisation*). Social media interventions in Australian debates reveal the power of self-representations when refugees take control of the public circulation of their own images.

As Mary Tomsic argues, such work may become an act of protest and political solidarity with others around the globe. Through Instagram selfies, a novel self-representation of displacement creates a sense of shared humanness that is fundamental to contemporary understandings of human rights, countering the media emphasis on picturing refugees as a 'sea of humanity'. Tomsic shows how these personal Instagram photos contest images that construct displaced people as different and 'other', countering typical visual tropes that dominate the depictions of refugees in the public sphere. Where such stereotypes move between 'voiceless, helpless victims' or 'uncontrollable threats to state security', these family photographs enact a modern ritual of public self-representation to convey a shared humanity.⁴⁰ However, such narratives are not straightforward in their circulation and

39. *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire*; Shamooun Zamir and Gerd Hurm, 'Introduction: The Family of Man Revisited', in Gerd Hurm, Anke Reitz and Shamooun Zamir (eds), *The Family of Man Revisited: Photography in a Global Age*, IB Tauris 2018, pp1-22.

40. Mary Tomsic, 'Sharing a Personal Past: #iwasarefugee #iamarefugee on Instagram', in Jane Lydon (ed.), *Visualising Human Rights*, UWA Publishing 2018, pp63-84; see also Lilie Chouliaraki, 'Symbolic bordering: The Self-Representation of Migrants and Refugees in Digital News', *Popular Communication*, 15:2, 2017, pp78-94.

impact, given the widespread opposition to refugees: some argue that the unofficial circulation of information on social media can exacerbate difference. The circulation of photographs along ‘the axis of relationships’ among friends on platforms such as Facebook produces closed affective communities, and certain images within these ‘algorithms of affect’ intensify the emotional response of specific networks of viewers without ever reaching beyond closed ‘bubbles’.⁴¹ In order to orchestrate a coherent news and information strategy *for* and *with* refugees, some researchers advocate collaboration between states and news organisations to work together with tech companies, NGOs and other stakeholders.⁴²

BEHROUZ BOOCHANI

Perhaps the most extraordinary rupture of official invisibility has surrounded the work of Iranian-Kurdish refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani, imprisoned in the Manus Island detention centre between early 2013 and late 2019, after fleeing Iran. In April 2016, Papua New Guinea’s Supreme Court ruled the detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island illegal, but the Australian government simply dismantled its prison and forcibly ‘integrated’ detainees into the island’s local settlements. Boochani was able to secure a temporary visa to travel to New Zealand to attend a writer’s festival, and was granted refugee status in July 2020.⁴³ He now lives in New Zealand, where he has taken up the role of Senior Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch. Boochani draws on Agamben’s notion of the ‘state of exception’, to explain the way the Australian government has justified an increase in its powers by framing asylum-seeking in the language of national security and war.⁴⁴

During his time on Manus Island, Boochani facilitated an extraordinary series of public accounts of the detention regime, using social media and an international network of allies to communicate the experience of detainees to a global public. Boochani has become a humanitarian icon: his immediately recognisable image circulates across a range of media to symbolise the plight of refugees under Australia’s harsh policies; his portrait evokes powerful feelings of empathy and outrage. Visual icons, frequently photographs, play a key role within global public culture, circulating across media as immediately understood representations of historical events and, as Hariman and Lucaites argue, their shifting meanings work in performative mode to mediate conflicting views. Photography is especially capable of staging the constitutive tensions of political community.⁴⁵ Citizenship must be expressed or articulated in a way that encourages identification with other participants, translating personal experience into identification with a larger abstract political entity.

Boochani himself has been critical of the visual regime of spectacular violence that has been created and promoted by the Australian government in its pursuit of policies of ‘deterrence’, suggesting that well-meaning ‘journalists,

41. Marta Zarzycka, ‘Feelings, Facebook, Forced Migration: Photographs of Refugees and Affective Spaces Online’, in Tanya Sheehan (ed.) *Photography and Migration*, Routledge 2018, pp150-161.

42. Marie Gillespie, Lawrence Ampofo, Margaret Cheesman, Becky Faith, Evgenia Iliadou, Ali Issa, Souad Osseiran and Dimitris Skleparis, ‘Mapping Refugee Media Journeys: Smartphones and Social Networks’, Open University 2016.

43. Australian Story, ‘The Great Escape’, 3 September 2020, www.abc.net.au/austory/the-great-escape/12626448.

44. Behrouz Boochani, ‘Australia, Exceptional in its Brutality’, *Overland*, 25 April 2016, <https://overland.org.au/2016/04/australia-exceptional-in-its-brutality/>. (Hereafter, *Australia, Exceptional*).

45. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*, University of Chicago Press 2007, p27.

human rights defenders and politicians against offshore detention' have unintentionally furthered this policy by advertising the violence of deterrence, and 'exporting it to the globe'. In this way, the government learns what type of violence to export, building on the eye-catching headlines about children and women who have been raped, 'their bodies the objects of debate in political dialogues in the Australian parliament' (*Australia, Exceptional*). In his prison memoir, *No Friend But the Mountains*, he contrasts his own experience as refugee with his former work as a journalist, when the news of a disaster sent him 'scrambling' for 'fodder', 'like a vulture', so as to feed the 'appetite of the people'.⁴⁶ In sending images of the miserable refugees *en route* to Manus, 'the deal is that we have to be a warning, a lesson for people who want to seek protection in Australia'. He details his return to Indonesia after a failed attempt to travel to Australia by boat: when released by the police on to the street, weary and traumatised, someone who had 'nearly drowned and could hardly walk', the refugees were 'swarmed' by journalists in their search for sensational images. He felt the humiliation of becoming simply an 'example', stripped of dignity before the camera, 'I despised the fact that people would end up feeling sorry for me and cry' (*No Friend But the Mountains*, pp91-92). Through his experience on both sides of the camera, Behrouz articulates a long-standing problematic of humanitarian representation: in the depiction of suffering, the subject is abjected and stripped of dignity.⁴⁷ This has led many to call for 'new affective and political grammars in response to suffering, injustice and death'.⁴⁸ For example, Gillian Whitlock argues with respect to literary narratives, that postcolonial life writing – with its focus on contemporary subaltern lives such as asylum seekers and refugees – provides a powerful means to provide testimony and breach official invisibility (*Postcolonial Life Narratives*, pp179-197). Again, Miriam Ticktin argues that we need another form of political care, one that reaches beyond care as welfare in nation-states, and beyond the benevolence of humanitarianism.⁴⁹

Boochani himself has sought to counter such rhetoric through his work across several genres and discourses, from reportage, academic articles, memoir and testimony, to collaborative visual film and art. He went to great lengths to shoot a film, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, sending the files one piece at a time on slow mobile phone internet to his co-director, Arash Kamali Sarvestani, in the Netherlands. The film's name stems from the bird Chauka, sacred to Manus Island culture, and also the name of the high-security prison. Arnold Zable characterises the film's slow-paced, haunting documentary aesthetic, which documents 'a specific time and place ... whilst remaining true to the paradoxical beauty of their art-form, and their deeply humanistic vision of life'.⁵⁰

Iranian Australian Hoda Afshar's exhibition of photographs, *Remain*, which opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in late 2018, marks a significant intervention in this domain. *Remain* comprises a series of portraits and a 24-minute moving image work, filmed in collaboration

46. Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend But the Mountains*, (trans.) Omid Tofighian, Picador/Pan Macmillan 2018. (Hereafter *No Friend But the Mountains*).

47. See also *Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire*.

48. Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives*, Oxford University Press 2015, p168. (Hereafter *Postcolonial Life Narratives*).

49. Miriam Ticktin, 'Thinking Beyond Humanitarian Borders', *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 83:2, 2016, pp255-271. See also, V. Mackie, 'Putting a Face to a Name: Visualising Human Rights', *Cultural Studies Review*, 20:1, 2014, p225.

50. Arnold Zable, 'Across the Void: Behrouz Boochani', *Subversion*, 1312, www.subversion.org/2016/11/07/across-the-void-behrouz-boochani.

51. <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/multimedia/hoda-afshar-remain/>

52. Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore, 'From Manus Island to Sanctions on Iran: The Art and Opinions of Hoda Afshar', *The Guardian*, 13 November 2018; Anonymous, 'Isle of Torment', *The Saturday Paper*, 10 November 2018.

Image 5. Portrait of Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island, 2018. Hoda Afshar. From the series Remain. (Courtesy of the artist.) <https://art-museum.uq.edu.au/hoda-afshar-remain>

with the refugees on Manus at sites across a small island in the Manus group. Afshar explains that she chose not to make a documentary so as to avoid the representation of refugees as 'poor helpless victims', and instead drew upon the language of art, music and poetry to show their 'quiet heroic resistance and their dignity'.⁵¹ Boochani also argues of this series that, while the public has 'become immune to the language of journalism', art is 'impossible to ignore'.⁵² One central image shows Boochani, wearing only shorts, held by a fellow detainee in the stance of the pietà (pity) or the lamentation of Jesus Christ, reenacting Christ's mother Mary cradling his body in her arms (Image 5). This Christian icon is most well known through Michelangelo Buonarroti's sculpture, the Pietà (c.1498-99), housed in St Peter's Basilica, Vatican City, Rome. This work has become central to Western art and exegesis, symbolising mourning for Christ's sacrifice, embodied in the relationship between mother and child. This link is enhanced by Boochani's resemblance to Western stereotypes of Christ: defined by long lashes and heavy brows, his eyes confront the viewer, his thin, ascetic face framed by long hair and usually a beard. Further, while not always acknowledged, Boochani's physical beauty is surely a key element of his growing celebrity status: as well as his intellectual achievements, his combination of Christlike asceticism and remarkable good looks single him out from the other detainees. As Whitlock argues, the powerful Pietà image 'mobilises the erotic, spiritual and mythic connotations that drive the celebrification of Behrouz and distinguish his iconic presence', showing him as martyr.⁵³

Yet Boochani's lean, bearded, semi-naked body is held not by his mother, but by his friend, standing in the crystalline shallows of a tropical island. The image evokes the care and fellowship shown by the refugees toward one



another – expressing ‘the principles of love, friendship and brotherhood’ described by Boochani in explaining how the detainees survived and resisted: ‘[t]here was nothing greater for us than respect. There was nothing greater for us than equality and camaraderie’.⁵⁴ These are values recognisable to most people, of any or no religious belief – and, ironically, have recently been enshrined in Australia’s citizenship test, updated in late 2020 to focus explicitly on ‘values’. Among the ‘democratic beliefs, rights and liberties’ specified under the testable guide to citizenship, alongside parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, living peacefully, respect for all individuals regardless of background, is listed ‘mateship’, or ‘compassion for those in need’. This is explained further as, ‘[i]n Australia, there is a spirit of “mateship”. This means we help and receive help from each other in times of need. A mate is often a friend, but can also be a total stranger. A mate might take a meal to an elderly neighbour, drive a friend to a medical appointment or visit someone who is lonely’.⁵⁵

Afshar’s photograph is not an icon in Hariman and Lucaites’ sense, but recreates the religious sign of the Pietà to show Boochani as innocent, martyred to unjust Australian immigration policies, his plight mourned by his fellow detainee in a relationship of mutual care. Where the ‘ideal’ humanitarian victim is often argued to be a woman or child, especially as the focus of ‘sexual humanitarianism’, the *absence* of women and children invokes post 9/11 discourse and casts the male Arab as potential terrorist. Boochani’s immediately recognisable persona challenges this view and counters the refugee’s voicelessness and lack of historical and social context.⁵⁶ As an icon of pity, some might see this image as playing into the hierarchical, humanitarian viewing relationship, but Boochani’s fame inescapably frames its reception. We are all civic spectators, part of a community constituted by public debate and political relationships, and like an icon, this image mediates between the individual, with his well-known life story, and the larger circumstances within which he is enmeshed.

Visually this image forms a strange contrast with Dupain’s hard white bodies, at ease at the beach. As has often been pointed out, the Australian beach has historically been racialised as white, excluding Aboriginal people, and leading, for example, to the violent clash termed Cronulla Beach’s ‘race riot’ of December 2005.⁵⁷ In one powerful response, Nyungar photo-media artist Dianne Jones has literally re-inserted herself into Australian visual icons such as Dupain’s *Sunbaker*, inhabiting these archetypal scenes and insisting on Indigenous historical and cultural presence.⁵⁸

In another more recent intervention, that draws attention to the beach as a site of racial contestation and popular racism, and its conflation with official policies of border protection, E.L.K. (artist Luke Cornish) created a mural at Bondi Beach (Image 6). At this iconic site of Australian hedonism, E.L.K painted a line of twenty four Australian Border Force officers across Bondi’s central seawall, symbolising the twenty four suicides in Australian

53. Gillian Whitlock, ‘Behrouz’, in ‘Finding the Individual in Human Rights’ symposium, University of Queensland, 30 November 2018.

54. *The Saturday Paper*, 9 December 2017, p1.

55. ‘Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond’, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2018, Part 2, p17.

56. For a discussion of this form of visual stereotype see Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma*, Cambridge University Press 2016, especially pp190-210; R. Andrijasevic and N. Mai, ‘Trafficking (in) Representations: Understanding the Recurring Appeal of Victimhood and Slavery in Neoliberal Times’, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 7, 2016; Jasbir K. Puar, ‘Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times’, *Duke University Quarterly*, 2007; *Speechless Emissaries*.

57. *The White Possessive*; Suvedrini Perera, ‘Race Terror’, Sydney, December 2005’, *Borderlands* 5:1, 2006.

58. Odette Kelada and Madeleine Clark, ‘Bodies on the Line: Repossession and “Talkin Up” in Aboriginal Women’s Art’, *Artlink*, 33:3, 2013, pp39-43.



Figure 6. '(Not) Welcome to Bondi.' August 2019. E.L.K./ Luke Cornish. (Courtesy of the artist.)

59. 'Artist behind controversial Bondi mural defends statement on treatment of asylum seekers', SBS News, 31 July 2019: www.sbs.com.au/news/artist-behind-controversial-bondi-mural-defends-statement-on-treatment-of-asylum-seekers.

detention facilities since 2010. The controversial '(Not) Welcome to Bondi' menaced passers-by and was quickly defaced – but is now accessible through an app that reanimates the work in real time and space.⁵⁹ Insisting upon Azoulay's 'civil contract', these two works both speak from the littoral, but have adopted opposing strategies to demand migrant inclusion. From the imaginative Australian heartland of Bondi, E.L.K. seeks to challenge and remind the complacent that the beach is a site of exclusion, both pleasure-ground and a border that defines the limits of belonging and citizenship. Afshar's lyrical work and her refugee subjects make a similar claim – pictured in the distant shallows of an offshore detention camp, by showing the human bonds across cultures she creates a visual civil space that demands viewers' mutual engagement.

CONCLUSION

The competing positions and claims of Australian citizens, First Nations people and refugees are negotiated visually in the global public sphere. In the postwar period, British subjecthood was legally replaced by the new category of Australian citizenship, imagined as vital, modern and emphatically white. The inclusion of non-British European migrants was framed by a racialised conception of a desirable, grateful, often feminised migrant, enhanced by the rhetoric of suffering which positioned these 'displaced persons' as in need of recuperation by the kind white citizen. In Australia, the legacies of the White Australia Policy remain in the 'paranoid nationalism' that continues to seek the exclusion of 'unauthorised' immigrants (*Against Paranoid Nationalism; Invaders, Illegals and Aliens*). In public debates about immigration and refugee policy, official representations of Australian citizenship status do not facilitate an inclusive notion of national belonging, but construct a universalising concept of Australian citizenship in opposition to the

foreigner, whether internal or external, epitomised by the Muslim Other. Within visual discourse, such attitudes are expressed through imagery in which both migrants and Indigenous people continue to be shown as *either* assimilated to ‘Australian’ values, or as threateningly alien. The tightening of Australia’s harsh border policies around the turn of the twentieth century was accompanied by official policies of invisibility, seeking to conceal the human face of offshore detention. Such erasure has been challenged by a range of strategies, including self-representation by refugees themselves. Methods of humanisation, such as depicting the love of a mother for her child, constitute the ‘horizontal’ relationships that prompt identification with figures such as asylum seekers, drawing them within the civil sphere. *Without* contestatory visual strategies such as I have reviewed here, offered by artists, activists and everyday Australians – such as the unknown navy photographer aboard the HMS Adelaide – citizenship is reduced to a mechanism sustaining a White national imaginary.

Boochani has begun a new life in New Zealand where he was granted refugee status in 2020. In a documentary about his journey, ironically in the *Australian Story* series produced by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Boochani concluded by emphasising the simplicity of freedom – walking in the street, hiking, biking, having ‘privacy’ – as he said, ‘simple things not big things ... that is freedom for me’. A poignant scene shows him leaving his home, locking it behind him and riding a bicycle to his new workplace – the freedom of movement that he was denied for so long. As research fellow at the University of Canterbury’s Ngāi Tahu Research Centre, Boochani stated that, ‘I cannot fully enjoy this or celebrate while the Australian Government is still unfairly detaining people ... Being here will enable me to keep standing up and campaigning for better treatment of those who are still being illegally detained by Australia.’⁶⁰ His extraordinary story traces the emergence of a new humanitarian icon, rising from the invisibility shield of Australia’s official border protection regime. However, for those whose lives are less extraordinary, captivity in the service of Australia’s border regime continues. In late 2021, there were 105 people still in PNG and 114 on Nauru.⁶¹ At 30 September 2021, there were 1459 people in immigration detention facilities.⁶² An Australian ‘politics of indistinction’ continues to mediate between the historically powerful principles of Australian exclusion and the legitimate claims of refugees.

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60. The University of Canterbury, www.canterbury.ac.nz/news/2020/behrouz-boochani-to-become-research-fellow-at-uc.html.

61. Refugee Council of Australia, 9 February 2022: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/operation-sovereign-borders-offshore-detention-statistics/2/.

62. Refugee Council of Australia, 8 January 2022: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/operation-sovereign-borders-offshore-detention-statistics/; Department of Home Affairs Monthly Detention Statistics: www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/visa-statistics/live/immigration-detention.