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THE AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRATION BLACK HOLE: A RADICAL PROBLEM?

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Abstract

Australia has done what it can to secure its borders and to prevent terrorist attacks at home. The path to radicalisation is paved with the disenfranchised and the alienated. This paper assesses the conditions of radicalisation, and whether Australia's strict immigration and detention policy for asylum seekers arriving by boat is a breeding ground for radical behaviour. The processes of radicalisation are explored and compared to previous attacks seen in Britain. The narrative of recruitment offered by organisations such as Al Qaeda is appealing to those bereft of cultural identity, incarcerated in prisons and inside detention centres (Gunaratna, 2011; Hamm, 2007)—not just in Australia, but globally. Individuals become de-territorialised, and cast their new lost identity against the sufferings of the community and the perceived perpetrator, in this case, Australia. An act of terrorism therefore becomes an act of defining individual character for the potential new radical, based on the need for identity (Alonso et al., 2008). While this has not happened in Australia, the possibility does exist, albeit rare, in the detention centres for de-territorialised radicalisation.

Keywords

Radicalisation, asylum seeker, detention centre, terrorism, refugees, civilisation clash, recruitment

INTRODUCTION

Radicalisation is a complex process of individual, social and external motivators and influences (Alonso et al., 2008). This paper uses empirical and contemporary research to assess if Australia's detention centres create animosity against the nation—and potential for radicalisation, as discussed in literature exploring the broader recruitment capabilities of terrorist organisations in prisons and detention facilities around the world (Gerwehr & Daly, 2006; Gunaratna, 2011; Hamm, 2007). The paper argues that the resentment of injustice creates a fertile breeding ground for potential violent terrorism, cast against self-image (Roy, 2008). Australia's immigration black hole—the black hole defined as the length of indeterminate time spent in detention—is analysed to identify predisposing factors of radicalisation within that system. An argument is put forward that the detention centres foster an attitude of resentment and loss of identity; factors of radicalisation are present and awaiting a catalyst (Alonso et al, 2008). To remove cultural identity, to replace liberty with detention, creates an environment conducive to violent radicalisation against Australia (Jupp, 2002, 2006; Nickerson & Louis, 2006).

AUSTRALIA'S IMMIGRATION BLACK HOLE

There is hesitancy in the international community to readily define terrorism (Keeley, 2002; Roy, 2001). This contextual conundrum leads to a level of confusion amongst the general population and a conflicted perception—often dependent on location—that one man's terrorist can often be viewed as another man's freedom fighter (Boaz, 2002; Roy, 2001). Before the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11), Australia had no national law addressing terrorism, and instead relied upon criminal law to account for terrorism and all manner of politically-motivated violence (Lynch & Williams, 2006). Since that event, Australia has enacted a multitude of laws (Pearson & Busst, 2006).

With considerable aid from the media, the terrorist is viewed as the angry and disenfranchised Middle-Eastern Muslim radical (Altheide, 2007; Aly, 2007; Horin, 2010). Many Australians hold negative attitudes toward people from this cultural group, specifically because they are seen as outsiders—as men, women and children that do not fit with the 'Australian' way of life (Gelber, 2003; Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller, & Lalonde, 2007; Nickerson & Louis, 2008; Pedersen, Watt & Hansen, 2006). The assimilation of many immigrants, regardless of their cultural origin can be difficult as it is assumed that they are required to identify socially with Australia (Jupp, 2002; Richardson, 1961). During the initial period of immigration, the focus of assimilation has been abandoned for a higher level of acculturation within Australian society, allowing for a greater rate of social cohesion (Jupp, 2002, 2006; Taft, 1963). However, the argument to exclude many asylum seekers, and place them in detention centres, reaches beyond the standard border and national security issues (Gale, 2004). As discussed by Louis, et al. (2007), the individual threat perceptions and want for social dominance of the citizens leads to a string of insecure intergroup relationships between citizens and asylum seekers–thus leading toward the negative social attitudes and behaviours currently seen in Australian society. There is debate on both political and media plateaus, for and against, back and forth, as the detention centres begin to overflow, and the point is often made that Muslims are non-members of the Australian culture, unsuited to the principles and standards of the country (Aly, 2007).

Given the political climate and media perceptions, it is not surprising that asylum seekers are treated with mistrust and, at times, outright hostility (Pedersen, Watt & Hansen, 2006). According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2011), current figures indicate that 1390, 25.5% of the total 5454 people currently being held have spent between 183 and 547 days in detention. Further statistics demonstrate an additional 1346 people, or 24.7% of the total have been within an Australian detention centre for between 366 and 547 days (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). In September, 2011, West Australian Foreign Correspondent Nick Butterly spoke to Aziz Mohammadi (Butterly, 2011), a 25 year-old university student, who had assessed the risk of travelling to Australia in a boat against driving down the road in Afghanistan, in the central province of Bamiyan. His argument stated that he lived with a fifty-fifty chance of being killed by the Taliban on any given drive in his province, versus a two percent risk of injury or death seeking asylum in Australia. The real risk for the oppressed and ethnic minorities is not drowning at sea or the unknown wrath of people smugglers, but living in their country of origin. A member of the Hazara minority, Aziz Mohammadi has an intention to make the journey to Australia before the end of 2011. He is not only aware of Australia's detention practices, but readily accepts the concept of spending a year in the Christmas Island detention facility, as there is no other avenue of access into Australia available to him '*The risk for me is to live in Afghanistan.'* (Butterly, 2011). However, in the current climate, inclusive of the war on terrorism, asylum seekers are more often construed as 'queue jumpers' or 'illegals', painting a picture of potential terrorists trying to enter the country (Pedersen et al., 2006).

This leads to the creation and fear of the 'Other', or an 'Us versus Them' mentality, intersecting both national identity and politics as portrayed in media discourse (Horin, 2010). Such a mentality can reach a tipping point given Australia's reception to fear and the continued use of detention centres (Gale, 2004), leading to a clash of civilisations (Huntington, 1993). The black hole created by the social fear now firmly imbedded within Australian culture (Louis, et al., 2007) has led to a person's nationality and method of entry into Australia as a matter of social and political concern, rather that the person's humanitarian needs (Nickerson & Louis, 2008). As commented by Beeson (2002, p. 230), large scale negativity from international and domestic sources is impacting our reputation on a global scale and could lead to further discourse from the Australian people towards the asylum seekers and vice versa. The social stigma and negativity about the current immigration black hole requires a social, political and cultural change from the Australian government and people (Gelber, 2003; Louis, et al., 2007).

THE CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS – EARLY VIETNAMESE IMMIGRATION

Presently, an ideological clash of the various culturally diverse civilisations, the social isolation of groups within detention and its negative effects is placing great strain on the efforts for asylum seekers to acculturate into Australian society (Sobhanian, Boyle, Bahr, & Fallo, 2006). As described by Huntington (1993), the cultural entity formulates a civilisations various key features—such as, villages, regions, ethnic groups and differing religious beliefs. It should be noted that various cultures would have differing or evolving levels of the cultural heterogeneity. These levels of cultural heterogeneity affect the way in which people perceive their life.

For example, if they are in a perceived negative situation, such as a country at war (Afghanistan, Iraq), then they would seek a better lifestyle in another country—a clash of civilisations and cultures.

As seen in various media reports (Butterly, 2011; Canna, 2011; Coote, 2011; "Asylum seekers clash with police in southern Italy", 2011; "Fears of more refugee riots," 2010) and academic articles (Gelber, 2003; Sobhanian, et al., 2006), due to the current geopolitical situation that Australia and other Western countries are in, many desperate people—men, women and children—from war torn or politically unstable nations will seek refuge or asylum within nations such as Australia, the United States or the United Kingdom (Miller, 2008). The integration and resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers into the Western world within the modern context of Australia is one that is met with many political, social and economical challenges (Gelber, 2003; Louis, et al., 2007). As expressed by Huntington (1993), there are two key types of conflicts that can occur between differing civilisations. When attempting to integrate or re-settle another group of people within a differing culture (Lang, 2002), the two key conflicts present a fault line and, on a higher level, a core conflict with the state.

A fault line conflict involves parties on local or adjacent states that belong to differing civilizations containing a mixture of civilisations. Core state conflict occurs on a global level between states and is an escalation of a fault line divergence (Huntington, 1993). As shown specifically within a multicultural nation such as Australia (Jayasuriya, 1990), small fault line conflicts or disagreements between cultures or civilisations can lead to an escalated event such as the Cronulla Riots in 2005 (Poynting, 2006). Though this event is only one example, it does demonstrate the clashing of the two civilisations and cultures involved.

Modernisation and multiculturalism are said to be the corner stone argument against Huntington's (1993) clash of civilisations. Although this may hold true as a national position, the current climate within the Australian political system has created an increase in the likelihood of Australian's feeling that their culture or civilisation is being threatened by these 'illegal immigrants' (Lang, 2002; Levy, 2000). The dissidence from the Australian public—a discourse founded in the media as depicting Muslims as terrorists (Horin, 2010)—has led to misdirected legislation being formulated that alienates the incoming civilisation (Black, 1991, p.292; Nickerson & Louis, 2008). This development is incongruent as Australia as a nation has been open to accepting asylum seekers and refugees since World War I, World War II and more notably the Vietnam War (Jupp, 1995; Miller, 1999). In 1965 the Australian Government committed troops in support of the war in Vietnam. During the Vietnam War over half the population were internally displaced and millions of locals and foreigners were killed. Many fled Vietnam post-war in fear of repercussions from the Vietnamese communist government (Barnes, 2001; Thi-Que, Rambo, & Murfin, 1976). Following the conclusion of the war in 1975, for six years Australia accepted refugees arriving by boat from the region (Phillips & Spinks, 2011).

This acceptance and integration of Vietnamese immigrants post-war demonstrated that Australia is capable of accepting another civilisation into its own. In the first wave of asylum seekers by boat, 1975-1981, Australia accepted 2069 people—primarily from South East Asia (Barnes, 2001). Following waves, comprised of boats carrying an average of 300 people a year soon followed in 1989 (Phillips & Spinks, 2011). Acceptance was emphasised as shown by Australia's agreement to various international agreements and conventions, such as the United Nations 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol (Phillips & Spinks, 2011). Yet this acceptance has changed in contemporary Australia—in the face of a fresh wave of asylum seekers predominantly from Middle Eastern origins, arriving since 1999 (Phillips & Spinks, 2011). The consequences for the great black hole of dissidence created by the current Australian immigration system and the treatment of those wishing to acculturate into a more peaceful nation may be severe.

THE PROCESS OF RADICALISATION

The process of radicalisation and of young individuals becoming radicalised poses a significant threat—to Australia and other nations—even when it does not lead to any terrorist action (Hamm, 2009; Roy, 2008; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Silber, 2008). Damage to society and the multicultural diversity within that society can become an insidious process, undoing social solidity and creating breaches of basic human rights (Alonso et al., 2008). Radicalisation is a complex phenomenon, and there is no single explanation. However, factors at external, social and individual levels can be identified as contributing to radicalisation.

Primarily, the following points obtained from Roy (2008):

- Broken or estranged family environments
- A sense of alienation
- Individualisation – a tendency to act outside and as a self-appointed guard of the community

These three points are at an individual level. Yet factors differ at other levels, such as external or social levels, and are needed for the individual to become radicalised (Alonso et al., 2008). However, the treatment and process of detention does create an enabling environment—another common characteristic of radicalisation—that serves to motivate the individual level toward a catalyst (Coffey, Kaplan, Sampson, & Tucci, 2010; Richards, 1978; Wormith, 1984). This has been seen in prison systems where prisoners (detainees)—particularly those in gangs—recruit other inmates to act as collaborators upon release into the wider community (Hamm, 2009). Having adopted extreme views in prison, violent radicals also believe that only through violent means can they affect political change (Hamm, 2007; Hamm, 2009; Neumann, 2010) Radicalisation is the process by which one becomes violently radical (Pazoles, 2010). Discussed within Silber & Bhatt (2007) are the four steps within the radicalisation process. The first being pre-radicalisation—a point of origin before potential radicals are exposed to ideology. Within this stage the majority of people live unremarkable lives. The second process is self-identification, where individuals become influenced by internal and external factors and begin to explore different ideologies, while exhibiting desires to disengage from their old identity (Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Stemmann, 2006). The next phase of radicalisation is indoctrination. This focuses on the complete adoption of the new ideology, concluding without question that circumstances exist where violent attitude and actions are required to further the cause (Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Stemmann, 2006). The final stage of the process is recruitment. Through a gradual process of manipulation and monitoring, the recruit is encouraged to fight against a perceived wrong—all for a greater cause (Stemmann, 2006).

DE-TERRITORIALISED RADICALISATION

Current political atmosphere has trended towards understanding and dealing with terrorism from the Muslim world, and the two distinct branches of terror-related violence emerge in this context (Roy, 2008; Roy, 2009; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Silber, 2008). The first is territorialised terrorism—examples of which include the conflicts in Palestine and Chechnya—in which there is a clear fight being waged between aggressors, and one or more parties are using politically motivated violence as a tool to free the given region from perceived foreign occupation (Roy, 2008; Alonso et al., 2008). The second branch of identifiable terrorism is of particular use to the argument presented in this paper:

De-territorialised violence—an example of which includes the Al Qaeda organisation (Roy, 2008, 2009).

Perpetrators of this form of terrorism do not commit attacks in their country of origin, and are often pulled between three clear cultural barriers: the country where their family comes from; the country where they reside and commit radicalised acts; and the country of the initial conflict (Roy, 2008; Alonso, et al., 2008). Ignoring the idea that radicalization within Australia will not happen is reckless. For example, since 2001, Britain has seen more than a dozen terrorists come from within their own population due, in part, to an ineffective stance taken toward asylum seekers in the 1990s (Pazoles, 2010). Conversely, as Gill (2009) stated, any seriously minded terrorist is unlikely to choose refugee status as a way to access a country if there are alternative routes available. However, the process of radicalisation need not start overseas.

The bombings in London on 7 July 2005 are well known: four bombs; 56 people killed; approximately 700 injured; an attempted repetition two weeks later (Bulley, 2008). The London bombings were a domestic matter, carried out by Britons, in Britain and primarily on Britons (Bulley, 2008). The emergence of a home-grown threat raised concerns not just about the threat of future attacks, but also played on deeper anxieties about Britain's growing diversity and apparent loss of a cohesive identity (Briggs & Birdwell, 2009). A trait echoed in Australia, due to what the Australian public perceive as an increase in a radically different culture from their own (Aly, 2007; Dunn, Clocker & Solabay, 2007; Neumann, 2010).

THE CLASH OF IDENTITY

Loss of identity, as experienced by asylum seekers in Australian detention centres—no longer a part of the country they fled, yet not accepted by Australia—is another pillar of radicalisation, a fertile ground based on

perceived marginalisation (Alonso et al, 2008; Gunaratna, 2011; Jupp 2002, 2006; Nickerson & Louis, 2008). Dependent on the background, situation and personal beliefs, an individual detained in the detention centres is poorly integrated into a limbo-society—neither here nor there.

As seen in London, 2005, even second-generation Britons of Middle-Eastern origins, holding to poor integration within society, can become violently radical—to devastating effect (Bulley, 2008; Pazoles, 2010). Silber & Bhatt (2007) state that it often only takes a social, economical, personal or political trigger to start the radicalisation process. The risk exists, albeit rare, that these triggers rest in the alienation of asylum seekers due to their indefinite incarceration—pushed away from previous identities and having to adapt to an Australian culture that does not welcome them (Louis, et al., 2007). From this, it can be suggested that the potential building blocks for radicalisation are present in the conditions created by Australian detention centres.

An asylum seeker's personal experiences in Australian detention centres can create resentment, even a rationality to despair, against the host nation (Jupp, 2002, 2006; Nickerson & Louis, 2006)—as seen recently at the Darwin detention centre, where detainees angry about their rights set fire to the facility (Canna, 2011). At social levels, loss of identity and a relative lack of liberty serve to incubate that resentment (Alonso et al, 2008). External factors, such as the cultural and political rhetoric directed at asylum seekers by Australia's media and government (Aly, 2007; Horin, 2010), present a cause for the perceived injustice to the detainees in detention centres. According to the process of radicalisation, all that is missing is a catalyst—such as recruitment and the embracing of radical ideals that lead to violent acts of terrorism (Roy, 2008; Alonso, et al., 2008).

CONCLUSION

The immigration black hole is clearly a complex problem that requires a solution. This paper has explored the perception toward the current use of immigration detention, looking back as far as the 1970's and the clash of civilisations that has since arisen. From this, a process of radicalisation was discussed—with several of the current contextual and environmental factors present in Australian detention centres argued as conducive to this process—and extended into de-territorialised radicalisation. The loss of identity becomes of paramount importance.

Asylum seekers arriving on Australian shores have forfeited their country of origin in hope of seeking a better life. The men, women and children on the boats exist in a state of culturally deprived limbo—neither a part of Australia's diverse culture nor submersed in the one they left behind. The forced de-territorialisation of these people, the majority of which have spent between 183 and 547 days in detention, robs them not only of hope but also of identity. Considering the processes of radicalisation discussed above, this loss of identity—alienation experienced in detention—make the narrative of recruitment offered by organisations such as Al Qaeda alluring. The individual casts their new identity against the sufferings of their community and the perceived perpetrator—Australia. The act of terrorism becomes an act of defining individual character for the radical.

To mitigate such an outcome, the negative perception of asylum seekers on the Australian public, political and cultural level must change. Although civilisations may clash, there is opportunity for harmonious integration—as seen in the past—in order to overcome the atmosphere of mistrust detention and political rhetoric has created. Within the contemporary world, the threat from terrorism from the unknown is something that has the Australian masses concerned. Australia's immigration black hole, the detention centres, foster an attitude of resentment and loss of identity; factors of radicalisation are present and awaiting a catalyst The current influx and media portrayal of 'boat people' from Middle Eastern backgrounds has lead to the desired process of assimilation or acculturation of asylum seekers into the community being put into full reverse. If this aspect of Australian culture is to continue, it must be accepted by the Government that dissidence will be created and, as discussed earlier, will lead to increased disharmony from those who originally sought to call Australia home.

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