

### III. Mainly a focus on the Asylum Seeker Question in Australia.

Well, with the above ‘broad sweep commentary’ in mind (which I feel is very poorly expressed but am not able to explain such potential political manipulation in a much better, nuanced intelligent way) In regards to what I am trying to say I draw the reader’s attention to the following informative book *ASYLUM BY BOAT. Origins of Australia’s Refugee Policy* by Claire Higgins (UNSW Press. September 2017) which looks at Australian refugee policy. It points out there was once a far more compassionate approach towards refugees in the 1970s compared to the demonizing that would come at the turn of the century especially after the Tampa saga. (In August 2001. Below is one article amongst many that can be discovered by way of a preliminary internet web search).

*The Tampa affair, 20 years on: the ship that capsized Australia’s refugee policy.* Ben Doherty. The Guardian. (August 2021).

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/22/the-tampa-affair-20-years-on-the-ship-that-capsized-australias-refugee-policy>

Although not about the Tampa this article maybe of interest which I found and deals with the way language in regards to refugees started to turn politically towards the pejorative

*‘Queue jumpers’ and ‘boat people’: the way we talk about refugees began in 1977.’* Klaus Neumann. The Guardian. (2014).

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/05/queue-jumpers-and-boat-people-the-way-we-talk-about-refugees-began-in-1977>

Nevertheless, overall in the 1970s it was federal policy to present a sympathetic view of refugees who at the time were mainly coming from Indochina after the end of the Vietnam War so as to have them socially accepted to a wary Australian population. In the 2000s federal policy was to be distinctly unsympathetic towards boat refugees with the development of a hard line approach. e.g. indefinite offshore detention playing on an underlying ever lurking xenophobia in the colonial mindset of White Australia and all for the political opportunity to stay in power. It is a moral darkness on apparently Australia’s enlightened democracy that innocent lives were lost and many other innocent lives were devastated – and still are - by such a coercive policy and all made much worse with so called liberal democracies in Europe keenly looking towards the harsh ‘Australian solution’ to ‘resolve’ the unwanted movement of refugees over land and sea from Africa, the Middle East and Asia towards their countries. (e.g. in the U.K. there is the atrocious ‘Rwanda policy’ reminiscent of Australia’s Nauru and Manus Island gulag approach which was about illegitimately shifting boat refugees away from the Australian mainland to cut off their legal opportunity to claim asylum and safely reside in Australia - as they are legitimately entitled to under international law; such criminal mistreatment of human beings becomes far more ‘politically acceptable’ when they are dehumanized).

*What Happened Here Should Have Been A Warning, Not An Inspiration.* Emilie McDonnell. Human Rights Watch. (Dec. 2023) web link:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/20/what-happened-here-should-have-been-warning-not-inspiration>

*ASYLUM BY BOAT. Origins of Australia’s Refugee Policy* web link:

<https://www.newsouthbooks.com.au/books/asylum-seeker-policy/>

As a teacher I have worked in what are called Intensive English Centres where for a few terms students of non-English speaking backgrounds – usually migrants and refugees - can learn English before going to a high school.\* Exclusively learning the host language first and by way of most of the subjects that they would be taught in a high school gives them a far better chance to academically achieve. These centres were established in the 1970s and I only mention them as they are seen as a progressive element of the public education system (although one feels and this is only my personal subjective opinion which others may disagree with that these days they also have to deal with funding issues and have even become financially corrupted from their original mission by also taking in fee paying international students) yet one sincerely cannot imagine that such centres would be established in the early 2000s with today's political and social mood seemingly being far less sympathetic. It is a peculiar situation that while Australia to its credit will take in refugees annually (although the intake should be greater) that it also maintains a zero tolerance policy towards refugees who have the same legitimate international right to seek asylum but because they have ventured to try to come to Australia by boat they are treated inhumanely and as criminals. Yet, it is overlooked that official channels for adequate refugee movement have been seen to be inadequate thus the desperate compulsion to take the life-or-death risk to go to sea to finally reach a country of sanctuary where it will be possible to resume a fully dignified life. It is often overlooked that in Indonesia where refugees have no work or education rights many thousands still languish waiting for the official opportunity to be properly resettled.

*Refugees live in destitution in Indonesia: Years of limbo and suffering leads refugees to protests for many weeks now for resettlement.* Refugee Council of Australia. (2022).

<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/refugees-live-in-destitution-in-indonesia/#>

*\*Going from memory originally it was four terms then cut back to three terms although a student can have their time extended if need be and in some cases even up to five terms. However, I personally think it would be best to go back to a mandatory four term time period.*

It is argued that Malcolm Fraser also had a 'stop the boats' attitude and yes that may well be true but in the 1970s there was the implementation of an adequate resettlement program that alleviated the probability of the need to risk one's life of going onto a rickety boat. An equally effective resettlement program needs to be established this day. As a first step Australia could fully restore its international reputation of being a responsible actor by immediately resettling the last cohort of refugees that still remain victims of a morally discredited offshore detention policy and as well look at the feasibility of increasing its official intake of refugees and which could also include some of the many still living in limbo in Indonesia.

Another article by Klaus Newmann that I came across may also be of interest. *Oblivious to the obvious? Australian asylum-seeker policies and the use of the past.* Klaus Newmann. (2007).

<https://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/file/a0957fb8-d0ad-4621-9d1c-82d70099a856/1/PDF%20%28Published%20version%29.pdf>