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**Boats, Bodies and Borders:  
The Geospatial Significance of a Fence-line**

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*A serious incident occurred in early 2014 in Papua New Guinea (PNG). An uprising resulted in clashes between culturally diverse ethnic groups. A fence-line became what Walsh refers to as a geospatial border of jurisdiction between a perceived threat of an out-group and safety within an in-group. This article profiles the tragic outcome of a socio-political protest when collective action was fuelled by a reaction to dehumanisation. PNG nationals clashed with a culturally diverse group of asylum seekers in a geospatial zone of exclusion. This article documents the media's attempt to explain what occurred and insights gained from a Cornell (2014) report. It highlights the significance of a border fence at an off-shore processing centre as a geospatial demarcation restricting hospitality and positive intergroup communication occurring. The absence of positive intergroup communication is shown to have contributed to hostility, identity threat and dehumanizing actions.*

**Introduction**

A serious incident occurred in February of 2013 on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG). It involved asylum seekers, referred to as 'transferees', held at an offshore processing centre. Boat arrivals seeking asylum in Australia had been relocated to PNG. This contributed to the initial tension. Australia became the nation responsible for managing and processing the asylum seekers. PNG became the host nation to accommodate them during the processing of their asylum claims. The transferees took collective action and protested over a lack of a positive pathway of settlement. The security personnel and the transferees clashed and the uprising escalated when a security fence was broken down.

This paper focuses on the broader social structures that led to the social uprising. It reflects upon the notions of in-groups, out-groups and

dehumanization. It will also review the types of media responses that occurred and what contributed to this incident. The lack of opportunity for meaningful interpersonal interaction to take place between the PNG locals and the asylum seekers contributed to the flashpoint of violence that transpired. The names of those impacted by the tragedy are not mentioned, for the intention of this article is to focus on the broader socio-cultural structures that led to the riot and subsequent violent reactions.

Internationally, nations have turned their focus to policies of national security, more than humanitarian concern. The uprising that occurred on Manus Island was linked in part to the increased hostility towards asylum seekers in Australia. Globalized nation-protection policies are being put in place as a reaction to large mobile refugee populations. Fence building in parts of Europe to cope with a Syrian refugee crisis or Donald Trump's reinforcement of fence lines to the Mexican border are illustrative of the regional concern about 'illegals'. The media coverage of such easily gains traction by media outlets. The context of this analysis sits within this broader global concern.

Former humanitarian responses to displaced people have been minimised in favour of bureaucratic procedures of border controls, containment and incarceration as it relates to boat arrivals. This effort is to deter mass migration and repatriate unwanted 'boat people' (Babacan & Babacan 2008, pp. 138-139). Australia's effort to deter unauthorized boat arrivals has shaped its policy of processing their asylum claims offshore. Australia has secured a bi-lateral agreement with Papua New Guinea to host asylum seekers while they are being processed. This has been favoured by the Australian government as the strongest deterrent to discourage future asylum seekers from making a sea journey to claim asylum at the shores of Australia.

Refugee claimants who seek entry into Australia are often viewed with suspicion and hostility. They easily become an out-group, despite Australia's stated commitment to the protection of refugees. Their unauthorized nature of entry is used to emphasise the difference between asylum seekers as law-breaking and residents as law-abiding. This sets in motion what Slattery (2003, p. 104) refers to as a 'narrative of exclusion'.

The 'social identity approach' suggests that individuals will be negative toward asylum seekers when they are viewed as a salient foreign out-group (Nickerson & Louis 2008, p. 798) and hostility is likely to occur. Leyens et al. (2000, p. 187) assert that these groups are seen as 'others' as they are different from 'us', whether it be on the basis of biological, national, religious or some other essential feature. The perception of a lesser degree of humanity in out-groups could be conceived as a form of dehumanization (Viki & Calitri 2008) or what Johnson, Terry & Winnifred (2005) refer to as out-group derogation. Refugee claimants are not being completely accepted as a human in-group within host nations, especially when they are being processed

offshore. This contributes to their vulnerability and easily leads to flashpoints of social unrest. This is what occurred during the protests on Manus Island, at the Australian offshore processing centre in PNG, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2013. What adds complexity to this context is the multitude of configurations of various groups that influence perceptions of in-groups and out-groups including transferees, PNG and expatriate staff of the service provider for the processing centre, the PNG police and the PNG local residents.

Political sensitivities surrounding the offshore processing of asylum seekers have shaped polarized Australian or PNG national media narratives. This article explores these geopolitical influences as they relate to frames presented through the print media. McKay, Thomas & Blood (2011) bring attention to a 'news framing theory' recognizing the role of frames in directing attention to and influencing how audiences respond to issues (p. 612). Lakoff (2004) and Luntz (2007) relate framing theory to the political sphere. Luntz (2007) emphasizes the way words and phrases can be used strategically to achieve political goals through guiding the way people think. Words, phrases or metaphors are used as triggers to signal or evoke the embedded frames (Lakoff 2004) and help the reader identify the frames present. Lakoff defines frames as mental 'structures in our brains that we cannot consciously access' but 'shape the way we see the world' (p. xv). Frames enable certain information to be noticed more readily (Weaver 2007) and set up a desired or preferred way of viewing an issue. They guide a reader to process text to support a particular political slant. In this article frames of media narratives are contrasted against the Cornall (2014) report, an independent report commissioned by the Australian government.

The media reports vacillate between a focus on the asylum seekers' unruly behaviour and the inappropriate conduct of a minority of PNG nationals. These are shaped in part by particular political frames that each individual newspaper or online news service supports. What adds complexity to the media frames is identifying out-groups, the perpetrators of the conflict and who was responsible for what occurred within the geospatial borders? The concept of 'geospatial' use in this article relates to the spatial implications or influences of geographic borders and boundaries as they relate to nation states. In the context of Manus Island, it also relates more specifically to the separated spaces of an offshore processing centre and the broader PNG community spaces. The concept of 'geopolitical' relates to the political realm that is influenced geographically or has geographic implications.

There is evidence (Esses et al. 2008) that dehumanization perpetuated by a minority of contractors within the processing centre, led to catastrophic consequences for the out-group of transferees. Dehumanization was enacted as an outcome of a loss of hospitality and responsibility to the 'other'. A level of dehumanization was also enacted by a group of transferees toward the PNG nationals. This exasperated the conflict and contributed to a sense of identity threat for the PNG

nationals. This possible 'identity threat' (Crocker et al. 1987, p. 915) also fuelled the flashpoints of violence with each group potentially being seen by another as an out-group. The term 'dehumanization' used in this article refers to the mental attitudes, emotional responses and physical actions that influence people to treat others as being less than human.

This article explores these complex intergroup relations in more detail using the following questions of inquiry:

- (1) How are out-groups conceived in an offshore processing context?
- (2) What is the nature of the intercultural contact between asylum seekers, PNG nationals and expatriate service-provider staff?
- (3) What political frames are used by the various newspapers to describe the protest?
- (4) What influence did geopolitical or geospatial factors have regarding the uprising?
- (5) Was dehumanization a major contributor to the conflict?
- (6) In what way do geospatial boundaries of a fence-line hinder positive intergroup contact and contribute to dehumanization or out-group derogation?

### **Method of Research**

This paper draws upon the findings of the Cornall Report, commissioned by the Australian Government to review the events of 16-18 February 2014 at the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre (Cornall 2014). A content analysis of the Report is conducted, coupled with a review of the way the media framed the issue. A sampling of news articles from two major online PNG newspapers (*Papua New Guinea Today* and *The Post Courier*) and three prominent Australian newspapers (*The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*) are reviewed using a Critical Discourse Analysis. I reflect upon the events that occurred and the way various groups have been portrayed in relation to in-groups, out-groups and dehumanization.

A Critical Discourse Analysis is utilized to explore the way power structures are used through discourse within media sources to reinforce inequality (Kress 1990; Leeuwen 2009). The Critical Discourse Analysis approach focuses on language in relation to power and ideology (Fairclough 1995). It emphasises the social/cultural processes and structures of discourse more than the details of language (Wodak 1996). A frame analysis is used as a more technical analytical method within Critical Discourse Analysis as a means of interrogating deeper framing devices used within texts. A frame is a persuasive invitation to

read an article in a certain way (Van Gorp 2007). Frames affect citizens' judgments (Simon & Jerit 2007) through utilizing what Gamson & Modigliani (1987) refer to as a 'central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning' (p. 143). Framing can be done by the media or through the media by frame sponsors such as politicians (Van Gorp 2007). The types of frames selected become significant to journalists, media corporations and other parties such as politicians external to news organisations. These frames and the political influences that shape them are explored through this study.

For the purpose of this paper, people seeking asylum are referred to both as asylum seekers and 'transferees'. Prior to being transferred to Manus Island they are referred to as asylum seekers, as their intention is to apply for protection under the 1955 Refugee Convention. 'Transferees' is a term used within the Cornall (2014) report relating to those who have been transferred to Manus Island for the processing of their asylum claims. The term 'expatriate' is used in this article to describe Australian employees who worked on Manus Island. The expatriates were flown in to PNG on a fixed term contract to oversee the system of containment of transferees held there who were seeking asylum in Australia.

### **In-groups, Out-groups and Jurisdiction**

There were clear difficulties when Australia re-established its policy of offshore processing of unauthorized boat arrivals outside of its geopolitical jurisdiction. The former Labor government announced on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 2012 its decision to reopen the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre years after it had closed, with a signed memorandum of understanding with PNG. The first transfers of asylum seekers occurred on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2012. The transferees, who were citizens of other countries, were kept in a regional processing centre in a country of a different territorial jurisdiction to Australia. A service-provider was contracted by the Australian government to manage the transferees. The contractual requirement of the service-provider was to employ local Manus Islanders, comprising of at least 50 per cent of the security staff and 75 per cent for other garrison services (Cornall 2014, p. 18).

Problems occurred when some of the PNG nationals' local cultural allegiances conflicted with their duty of care within the Manus Island processing centre. This occurred in particular when some transferees made derogatory comments regarding PNG residents and started a riot. A small minority of PNG national staff then showed neglect to the service-provider's code of conduct and resorted to violence (Cornall 2014). There was evidence that a group of transferees had dehumanized the PNG nationals. Cornall documents that the transferees looked down on the PNG Nationals employed at the centre as less educated and skilled than they were. Some of the transferees had a racist attitude toward them, using expressions such as 'swinging from trees', 'cannibals' and that PNG was a 'barbaric country' (2014,

pp. 28, 29). This stemmed in part from their anger toward Australian policy, that if they were found to be refugees, they would be resettled in PNG, not Australia. There was already a likelihood of the transferees feeling dehumanised in the way they were transferred to Manus Island rather than being processed within Australia's territorial boundaries. Griffiths (2013) highlights that the way asylum seekers are transferred is dehumanising, treating people as being transitory, undeserving, unimportant and expendable (see also Gill, 2009).

The restrictions of the geospatial boundary of Manus Island fuelled their frustration and had clear social repercussions. Of particular geospatial significance was the fence-line surrounding the regional processing centre. It represented a separation from the PNG broader community. This border of exclusion was seen as crucial by both Australia and PNG for the management of the transferees. The fence was also a geopolitical demarcation between Australia's jurisdiction of management and the limits of PNG's political responsibility. For many, the fence became a border of jurisdiction between threat of an out-group (the asylum seekers) and safety within an in-group (the PNG community). Within the borders of the fence-line there was, however, a more complex demarcation of intersecting in-groups and out-groups. In many ways there was a fluidity in the configuration of possible in-groups and out-groups. Any attempt to identify or define them becomes very complex.

In terms of nation-state migration zones, the asylum seekers being sent to Manus Island reflected their status as an out-group to Australia. The transferees arriving to the shores of Manus Island were also an out-group to some of the PNG residents. To the PNG local residents, the expatriate service-providers for different reasons were also out-groups to them. For the service-provider, the asylum seekers and the PNG nationals to some measure were viewed as out-groups. To the asylum seekers, the PNG nationals and the service-providers, or at least those who were of PNG origin, were out-groups. The PNG elite style police-unit may have been seen as an out-group to the service-provider security staff and vice versa. This related to the jurisdiction of security operations at the offshore processing centre. The matrix of possible configurations of in-groups and out-groups raises major complexity. What adds complexity to the situation is the geo-political aspect of service provision to the transferees.

The service-provider sought to maintain its sphere of legitimacy through their contract with the Australian Government and employment of a portion of Manus Island residents. The PNG nationals who worked for the service-provider operated within their own political jurisdiction. However, their terms of employment were with a service-provider whose jurisdiction of contracted services was under the Australian Government. What added to the complexity was the PNG staff of the processing centre simultaneously belonged to the in-group of PNG government officials, the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (police), the police riot-squad and the local community. It was likely that

these groups banded together to maintain a unified in-group of PNG nationals.

The fluidity of alliances within in-groups and out-groups demonstrates just how problematic such categories can be. People simultaneously had alliances to both in-groups and out-groups depending on the perspective taken within a geopolitical jurisdiction. At times they were able to switch between the two depending on what was believed to be most advantageous to them. PNG nationals who had worked for the service-provider had been able to switch their alliances. At times they were seen as part of an in-group of the service-provider, while also retaining an equally strong in-group status with the broader PNG community. These dual alliances had not presented a problem until some of the PNG nationals crossed a professional boundary through dehumanising the transferees. Their alliance to the service provider was tested as to their professional duty of care to the transferees, when PNG decided to take strong decisive action against the transferees to deal with the uprising. An expatriate staff (and possibly a second) of the service-provider also participated in dehumanizing actions against the transferees. This was highlighted through investigations conducted. However, they were treated as isolated individual cases who acted in breach of their terms of employment and contrary to any instruction given by their employer (Cornall 2014).

This incident presented complexity both for the PNG and Australian media in choosing a suitable frame or narrative to adequately explain what occurred. Both major mainstream PNG and Australian print media outlets made a decision to take a different slant on the account of the tragic incident. This was due to the influence of political frames. The next section will explore the frames represented through the news corporations in more detail during the uprising and outbreaks of violence. This captures the time frame of the tragic events of 16th-18th of February and the proceeding days of the 19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> after the unrest.

### **A Review of the Media Coverage of the Incident**

The PNG and Australian media tried to make sense of how the hostility between the PNG nationals and the transferees resulted in the level of violence that occurred and who could be held responsible for such. Geopolitical jurisdictions became a major determining factor as to who was to be held responsible. Of significance was whether the events occurred within, or external to, the fence-line of the processing centre.

The narrative presented through a number of articles by *The Post Courier Papua New Guinea* and *Papua New Guinea Today* reflects a vacillating shift of responsibility of the tragic event. Both PNG media corporations provide narratives of the incidents occurring outside of the processing centre. They also affirmed the actions of the PNG nationals as being appropriate to deal with the transferees who escaped from the centre. If the PNG nationals did enter the processing centre it was only

to assist the service-provider to regain control of the centre during the uprising.

One prominent web-based article posted read 'Asylum seekers arrested in PNG' (*The Post Courier Papua New Guinea*, 17 February, 2014). It states that 30 asylum seekers had breached a back fence and after running were confronted by riot police and sustained 'injuries from fighting with the guards'. Another article posted read 'Australia maintain position on asylum seekers' (Umbo 2014). It highlights a media statement released by the Australian High Commission clarifying that the transferee who sustained injuries had breached the external perimeter fencing of the centre. It also noted that the PNG police never entered the perimeter.

The following are from two prominent web based articles:

'Asylum seekers arrested in PNG' (*The Post Courier*, 16 February, 2014) states that 30 asylum seekers had breached a back fence and after running were confronted by riot police and sustained 'injuries from fighting with the guards'.

'Australia maintain position on asylum seekers' (*Papua New Guinea Today*, 18 February, 2014) highlights a media statement released by the Australian High Commission clarifying that the transferee who sustained injuries had breached the external perimeter fencing of the centre. It also noted that the PNG police never entered the perimeter.

It was important for the PNG government to establish that injuries occurred to the transferees as a result of their escape from the processing centre. This justified any action by the police to deal with the situation. Support for the political frame that affirms the rightful actions of PNG and the inappropriate actions of the transferees is shown by the PNG media sources.

*The Papua New Guinea Today* later acknowledges the differences of viewpoint as to what occurred in an article titled, 'Reports of violence and serious injuries amid conflicting accounts of Manus detention facility uprising' (18 February, 2014). One claim is that 'locals armed with machetes, pipes, sticks and stones attacked asylum seekers'. Another view by asylum seekers' advocates was that service-provider 'security personnel have allegedly teamed up with locals armed with machetes and rifles to re-enter the camp and round-up asylum seekers'. Another refugee advocate claims that it was locals who breached the fence and that 'PNG police and locals carried out systematic attacks, savage attacks on the asylum seekers'. However, Local PNG MP Ron Knight asserted that the responsibility lies solely with the service-provider. It shows 'shoddy camp management and lack of responsible authority'. Furthermore, he points out that his staff were turned away from the centre when they tried to find out what was going on, 'all guards that turned back my staff are expatriate ... They are arrogant and totally responsible for the situation'.

As more details emerged, *The Papua New Guinea Today* acknowledges that PNG police and locals possibly entered the processing centre. However, it provides a sense of justification due to the lack of competency by the service-provider to deal with the situation. The *Post Courier Papua New Guinea* in an article titled 'Shocking claims after Manus Island bloodbath' refers to the incident as a 'debacle' and resulting from 'a combination of poor crowd control, inadequate fencing and furious asylum seekers, who have been unable to get answers on what their future holds' (21 February, 2014). The boundary of the fence takes on significance territorially. If the transferees crossed the fence-line through escaping, any actions by the PNG authorities to correct such were seen as justified. If the PNG police and locals crossed the fence-line into the centre, this was also justified on the basis of the need to restore order, due to the service-provider's lack of an adequate response.

The Australian media outlets framed the event differently however. At the time of the riots *The Sydney Morning Herald* outlines that the transferees were attacked by PNG nationals who entered the processing centre when a fence had been broken down (20 February, 2014, p. 1). Its focus is on the border of the fence-line. A former interpreter, who was in the centre at the time, was the initial source of the information. The PNG nationals are profiled as the perpetrators of the trouble. This contrasts with the previous narratives of PNG news reports that claim the PNG nationals were trying to retain order. It also supports the political frame negating Australia's responsibility for what occurred. The service-provider shared some responsibility for employing within its staff what could be considered as rogue operators from a PNG background.

Newscorp's *The Australian* main focus was on the success of government policy in stopping the boats (maintaining border control), the appropriate conduct of staff working in the offshore facility and the deplorable actions of the asylum seekers. The transferees were held responsible for the source of the trouble, a clear misbehaving out-group. Saxton (2013) makes the observation that government responses are constructed as being reasonable and humane, while the actions of asylum seekers are often framed through notions of deviancy. In *The Australian*, the service-provider and the Australian government's actions were deemed as being appropriate. The transferees' actions however were categorized as the source of the problem.

An article titled: 'Humane border policies should silence the critics: riots on Manus underscore the need for a hard line policy' (*The Australian*, 21 February, 2014, p. 11) states that 'the riots on Manus Island underscore the need for the government's tough border-protection policies'. This article establishes the newspaper's preferred frame within the political debate that offshore processing and turning back the boats is having a positive outcome. There seems little concern expressed regarding the tragedy that occurred on Manus Island.

Another article on the front page of *The Australian*, titled 'We're no cannibals, says Manus MP' (20 February, 2014, p. 1) states that:

The insinuation that Manus is a lawless society of machete-wielding cannibals is insulting and not worth trying to defend. Manus has the reputation as the friendliness place in PNG, with among the most compassionate people on earth. Our police reacted under PNG law to protect lives and property with reasonable force ... the mobile police-unit, whose methods though brutal are effective. (Callick 2014, p. 6)

The cause of the incident was again put back upon the transferees as the people to blame. In a continuation of this article with a subtitle 'Inmates to blame for riots, says Manus MP' (*The Australian*, 20 February, 2014, p. 7), the PNG Prime Minister's chief of staff claims that the incident 'was sparked by differences between rival asylum-seekers'. He based this assertion on an interim report from the PNG government's investigative team. The MP makes effort to uphold the reputation of the PNG nationals. He establishes that they reacted appropriately within their laws to protect the community. The MP also discredits any claims of injustice. *The Australian* supports this claim of a rightful response by PNG to the events that occurred.

There was a notable total lack of prominence featured in NewsCorp's *The Daily Telegraph's* coverage of the incident on 20 February, 2014. On the following day, 21 February, it overtly positions border protection policy as effective and the transferees as causing the social disruption. It reinforces the notion that the transferees are the out-group (to Australia's interests) contributing to problems, a stance mirroring *The Australian's* coverage. In an article 'Manus Island inquiry needed to quiet lobby', the proposed success of government policy is expressed:

those who want to see illegal arrivals successfully thwart Australia's life -saving policy will say anything, do anything, to distract attention from the reality that the flow of boats has all but stopped ... with fewer people attempting to arrive illegally there will be fewer deaths. (Akerman 2014, p. 65)

The issue is being framed around people's illegal entry by boat. There is no mention about people arriving and seeking asylum from conditions of turmoil in the countries they have fled from. The stance taken is that 'illegal arrivals' are actually hindering Australia's effort to protect lives. Further to this, an inquiry is viewed as a distraction from the real issue of the need to stop asylum seeker boats coming to Australia. This reflects the broader issue of emerging global patterns of displaced refugees and nations such as Australia using developing sovereign territories such as Papua New Guinea and Nauru to assist their border control objectives. Nethery & Silverman (2015) suggest that poorer states are given financial and diplomatic incentives to assist. When flashpoints of unrest occur in these regional offshore processing centres, these nations can be used as scapegoats by Australia to mask deeper socio-political issues of detaining 'illegal' refugees. Griffiths

(2013) points out that 'although conceptually speaking the state is highly present in immigration detention, in practice it is distant, acting through intermediaries' (p. 266). Australia is intentionally distancing itself geospatially from clashes and conflicts for which it is primarily and ultimately responsible.

Another part of the article reads 'according to advocates' spin, the Manus Island escapees were promptly beaten up and worse by islanders' (Akerman 2014, p. 65). The writer uses the terms 'spin', to question the accuracy of anything that the advocate states. The injuries of the transferees occurred in the compounds of the processing centre on Manus Island (Cornall 2014). The word 'escapees' is used to position the transferees as having done the wrong thing, rather than using the neutral term 'asylum seekers' or 'transferees'. The incident is linked back to the behaviour of transferees as an out-group, instead of treating it as a tragedy. This supports the proposition made by Alexander, Brewer and Herrmann (1999) that within specific intergroup situations, people are ready to accept allegations about out-group's characteristics, intentions and motivations with very minimal information.

The article then contrasts the positive attributes of the 'islanders' on Manus with the 'escapees' behaviour. 'Local Manus MP says that the Islanders are compassionate people who have taken escapees into their homes and given them food but when their 'guests' turn up with weapons, the friendship gets a little strained' (Akerman 2014, p. 65). Previous to the night of the tragedy some asylum seekers had escaped, but had later returned to the processing centre. The documented weapons were metal bars and wood. They were carried by transferees for self-defence, as they were scared of the locals coming and attacking them (Cornall 2014). The PNG nationals are portrayed as compassionate, hospitable and generous people, patient in their friendships. In contrast, the 'escapees' are framed as people that lack social courtesy and manners. They were a possible threat to society, hence being part of the dangerous out-group. The 'escapees' had disrespected the offers of friendship and hospitality by bringing weapons with them in their visiting. This supports the findings within the Cornall report that 'some of the locals nearby were scared about what could happen if the transferees broke out of the centre' (2014, p. 99). However, the transferees were equally scared as to what might happen if the 'locals' entered the perimeter of the processing centre (2014, p. 57). The fence-line represented a clear geospatial demarcation of a possible two-way threat with people on each side fearing the 'other'. The next section will explore the sociocultural interaction between the PNG nationals and the transferees as it relates to notion of dehumanization.

### **Making Sense of the Events of 18-20 February**

Evidence revealed the serious injuries that occurred to the transferees were linked primarily to the PNG mobile police squad working for the

PNG government. The mobile squad was not the local police, but a paramilitary elite-style police-unit which was heavily armed (Cornall, 2014). Cornall points out that the violence that 'resulted in injuries to transferees ... only occurred after the perimeter fence had been breached by the police mobile squad and they were followed in by PNG Nationals and local villagers' (2014, p. 77). A number of PNG nationals and one expatriate, who worked for the service-provider, had joined the PNG mobile police squad and were also held responsible for the excessive violence (2014, p. 77).

The PNG nationals had been operating at two levels however. On one hand, they represented the service-provider and had responsibility for the security and welfare of the transferees. On the other hand, they needed to respect and show dignity for their country and its people. When comments of disrespect were made by some transferees toward the PNG nationals during the riots, a minority of PNG nationals participated in the violence. Moral principles of care by some of the PNG nationals and one expatriate became inoperative in relation to the level of brutality shown to the transferees. Bilson (2007) asserts that 'our ability to act in oppressive and inhumane ways is associated with a rational domain which dehumanizes or makes invisible the subject of our actions' and that 'oppressive actions are often associated with an inability to see the other' (p. 1379). Bilson also notes that abusive situations occur through a breakdown of respect toward other human beings. Staub (1990, p. 54) highlights that justification for mistreatment and suffering rather than empathy, occurs when a group is devalued and moral values or rules are superseded. Subsequent actions can then become abusive without being an ethical concern.

To understand how the uprising led to such a violent situation, the descriptors of 'moral exclusion', 'moral disengagement' and 'dehumanisation' become relevant. Research has demonstrated that dehumanization of a target group both increases aggressive behaviour towards them and is related to other aspects of moral disengagement (Castano & Giner-Sorolla 2006, p. 805). Opatow (1990) refers to this as 'moral exclusion' as a state of being 'when individuals or groups are perceived as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply' (p. 1). This then leads to morally excluded individuals being perceived as expendable nonentities and harming them becomes acceptable, appropriate and fair (Opatow 1990, p. 1). Bar-Tal (1989) refers to this occurrence as 'delegitimization', where the perpetrators feel they have a moral licence to harm others (Demoulin, et al. 2004, p. 269). This provides explanation as to what occurred in the tragic event. Ticktin (2006) points out that distancing of the self from the 'other' through detention and encampment negates relational responsibilities and leads to an increasing likelihood of dehumanization. The dehumanization that occurred in the Manus Island processing centre led to disrespecting the dignity of the transferees and neglecting their safety and welfare. The seriousness of violence by the PNG mobile police-squad and by those that assisted them, clearly extended beyond the need to restore order. It points to

the enactment of dehumanization. There was evidence of dehumanisation occurring that did contribute to the conflict.

The broader group of expatriate service-provider personnel were not known for dehumanizing the transferees however. Cornall (2014) documents that during the riot, the service-provider 'Incident Response Team' (IRT) acted bravely and at considerable personal risk to protect many transferees from harm' (p. 7). There was no evidence that they dehumanised the transferees. Cornall (2014) conducted an independent investigation through interviewing transferees, staff and stakeholders to compile a report presented to the Australian government. There was evidence that the service provider staff had a clear understanding of the offshore processing regime and demonstrated respect for the code of conduct agreed to within that regime. Primary emotions that upheld the transferees' dignity as humans were embraced. This area of positive regard for the transferees is important to explore in more detail. The next section will explore the area of positive intergroup interaction for rehumanization and how the geospatial boundary of a fence line contributed to hostility between diverse cultural groupings of people.

### **Intergroup Interaction and Positive Contact with Out-groups**

This article highlights the complexity the media had in documenting the events that occurred without deviating from a preferred nationally sponsored political frame of analysis. It also raises concern regarding the final outcome of dehumanization as it relates to out-groups. In terms of social intervention, Intergroup Contact Theory accredited to Allport (1954) suggests that interpersonal contact can be effective in lowering incidents of prejudice towards minorities (Allport & Kramer 1946). Prejudice in its most extreme form leads to dehumanisation. It is understood to be a result of incomplete or inaccurate information about a group (ibid.). Contact Hypothesis on the other hand (Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes 2005) suggests that prejudice can be reduced through learning more about people within the minority group. Rothbart & John (1985) point out that the avoidance or separation from an out-group, enable negative perceptions to remain unchallenged. However, contact provides opportunity for disconfirming extreme negative perceptions previously held.

Meaningful contact between the broader PNG community and the transferees was absent prior to the incident on Manus Island. This contributed to the initial problem. What compounded the issue was some Iranians in particular within the processing centre, had negative perceptions toward the PNG nationals and the nation as a whole (Cornall 2014). Collective action was taken by the transferees through a socio-political protest. Beneath the surface, however, was a deeper-seated resentment towards the PNG nationals that could not be resolved by the incident. In response, a group of PNG nationals shared the same negative feelings towards some of the transferees due to the observable actions and attitudes of the transferees. This was

particularly related to those of Iranian ethnicity. In effect there was a two-way sense of hostility occurring between some transferees and some PNG nationals. This interfaced with a perceived in-group/out-group status, resulting in a flashpoint of violence.

Future flashpoints of hostility and potential violence could easily reoccur in the absence of positive links being built between the transferees and the PNG nationals. Wohl and Branscombe (2005) point out that when intergroup conflict ceases, ideally the negative emotions directed at the members of the out-group would also end. However, history shows to the contrary 'that the negative feelings resulting from intergroup conflict linger on long after the violence itself has terminated' (ibid, p. 288). In the event that offshore processing continues on Manus Island, in the absence of meaningful intergroup interaction occurring, negative feelings are likely to continue from the PNG nationals towards the transferees and vice versa. Changing this will involve relationship building, crossing the demarcation of the geospatial border of the fence-line.

Potential prejudice towards transferees will likely continue without the opportunity of transferees having regular meaningful contact with people outside of the processing centre. This is supported by Cornall's recommendation in his review of the Manus Island incident. He suggests 'it would be in the best interests of the future safety of transferees and the orderly management of the centre if there was a comprehensive community liaison program to address any resentment or negative attitudes' (2014, p. 99). Cornall also asserts that 'more intensive efforts can be undertaken to integrate the centre into the Manus community' (2014, p. 99). Opatow (1990, p. 7) points out that 'perceiving another as a worthwhile being, or discerning any thread of connectedness creates bonds, even with strangers' and that 'connection leads to attraction, empathy, and helpful behaviour, attitudes and behaviour consistent with moral inclusion'. Opportunities for interaction to occur between members of an in-group and out-group may result in the broader in-group having more empathic reactions to the out-group's situation. It may also promote what Esses et al. (2008, p. 24) refer to as a more inclusive in-group and more humanising perceptions.

More opportunities are needed for meaningful interaction to occur between the PNG community and the transferees. Changes of viewpoint by the broader PNG community may also impact the PNG nationals working for the service-provider. It may not have stopped the riots but could have curbed the extreme reaction from the minority of PNG nationals. This resulted in the violence and tragic outcome. Pettigrew (1998, pp. 4, 16) affirms the value of learning about an out-group to improve intergroup attitudes. This influences whether people seek or avoid contact with people outside of their in-group. Building a greater appreciation towards an out-group, helps break down derogation toward them. Positive intergroup contact is likely to alleviate out-group derogation or dehumanization.

Intergroup contact does not, however, negate the area of 'threat to identity' that Hornsey & Hogg refer to (2000, p. 144). They point out that 'social identity is threatened if there is the possibility of a loss of status, or the absence of the possibility to improve low status' (2000, p. 144). If either group's identity feels threatened (Crocker et al. 1987) or there is potential of a threat to self-image (Fein & Spencer 1997), this may lead to a prejudiced evaluation and the derogation of others. The PNG locals and the transferees had experienced a level of 'identity threat' which reached a flashpoint of frustration in the processing centre on Manus Island. The PNG locals risked having their country and sense of identity vilified by the transferees.

Threats to identity can be minimized, however, if opportunities are made for meaningful inter-group interaction. People can become more confident to express their vulnerabilities and alleviate threats to social identity. Mountz (2003) did a case study of cross institutional responses to boat arrivals of Chinese migrants in Canada. Mountz discovered that 'those with more personal, proximate involvement produced narratives infused with more emotion, passion, and complexity enabled by intimacy' (2003, pp. 632, 633). Hiemstra's (2014) observation in relation to the US immigrant detention system shares some similarities to this context. Hiemstra recommends that 'transforming negative scripting of migrants lies in creating spaces that facilitates recognition of shared vulnerabilities' (2014, p. 584). That is, 'spaces where employees can perform a different relationship with migrants and break previous patterns' and thus create 'space for rehumanization for detained migrants' (2014, p. 584). Making spaces for positive interaction to occur between PNG national staff and transferees will contribute to this rehumanization process in the same way as suggested in the US context. A robust community liaison programme that facilitates interaction with the broader PNG community will also provide transferees the opportunity to develop more favourable perceptions toward the PNG locals. The last section of this article will review the notion of hospitality as it relates to transferees seeking asylum.

### **Conceptions of Hospitality to Transferees**

The mass movement of people as a labour force, alongside large movements of people seeking asylum through fleeing nation-states, provides challenges to geo-political borders. These challenges extend to the notion of hospitality, as to who is accepted and who is not. Border enforcement attempts to filter the unauthorized entry of asylum seekers as to who is permitted entry into a nation. However, border enforcement cannot prohibit the mobility of boats of asylum seekers.

Nation-states create spatial orderings of human activities with clear delineations between a nation and its exterior. Nation-states also partition populations into boundaries that mark official limits of human collectivities (Walsh 2013). Policies for the relocation of asylum seekers to Manus Island have been implemented to restrict their access to refugee status in Australia's migration zone. This reflects a geopolitical

anxiety about borders. Gelber and McDonald (2006) document the way a nation is able to reject the claims of outsiders through drawing boundaries of ethical obligation at its territorial borders and then securing public support for such.

Governments secure support from the public for the justification of exclusive practices. This is enacted by means of managing people's perceptions. Negative rhetoric towards asylum seekers as an out-group is drawn upon as a way of shaping or re-enforcing public opinion. When the 'other' is silenced and public opinion is managed, ethical responsibility and hospitality to the 'other' is negated. The themes of hospitality and exclusion become highly politicised. Derrida (2005) raises the notion of 'unconditional hospitality', the need for a thoughtful ethical response to asylum seekers. However, politically it becomes unworkable to practice unconditional hospitality to asylum seekers. Nation-states lose their ability to manage their borders and no longer maintain their sovereignty of the 'right to exclude' if they practice unconditional hospitality. Australia is reluctant to politically support notions of hospitality toward boat arrivals, when effort is simultaneously being directed to deter these boat arrivals. Worth (2006, p. 227) speaks of 'bounded hospitality' as an alternative response. This is grafted in what Darling refers to as 'politics of the hospitable' (2009, p. 658). An ethical response in considering the refugee claims of asylum seekers will embrace a measured level of hospitality.

Ethics becomes crucial in determining what is an appropriate response to asylum seekers. The notion of ethics extends to the themes of placement or positionality as a rightful inclusion or exclusion of people to a location. This includes whether geospatial boundaries are justified. Ethics also seeks to explain how a rationale of exclusion might be reconciled with humanitarian concerns or the economic benefits of migration. Ethics also relates to bio-politics and to how power is constructed towards out-groups and maintained in a location (Bernauer 1994). Every gesture of hospitality or the lack thereof is conditioned by the power of the sovereign nation-state (Darling 2009). People become impersonal towards an out-group and dehumanization can occur in the absence of hospitality, as was the case in Manus Island. In contrast, establishing greater levels of hospitality and interaction by the various personnel who interact with asylum seekers on Manus Island and in particular by the PNG locals towards the asylum seekers will have positive results. Such actions will help reduce threats to identity and curb levels of hostility from reoccurring in the geospatial zones of exclusion. These needed changes are problematic, however, while Australia retains its current immigration policy. Manus Island has to negotiate the responsibility of hosting transferees as a direct extension of Australia's immigration policy.

### **In Summary**

The purpose of this article is to present a narrative around the flashpoint of violence that occurred to an out-group of asylum seekers in a

geospatial region excluded from Australia's migration zone. Australia and PNG have sponsored contrasting media frames of human relations in documenting the flashpoint of violence. This article presents an alternative to the themes of out-groups, exclusion and dehumanization. It outlines the notions of hospitality and positive intergroup communication. Hospitality ensures that others are noticed, valued and validated. It also helps alleviate tension between in-groups and out-groups. Hospitality pushes humanity to move away from hostility by engaging people in meaningful positive intergroup interaction as a way of embracing the 'other'. The geospatial fence-line of the processing centre, however, prevents these processes from occurring.

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