Afterword

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The contributions to this volume argue that Australian and New Zealand immigration, refugee and citizenship policies, and public debates about these policies, are marked by the absence of an informed assessment of past policies and practices. Glenn Nicholls, for example, suggests that those rewriting Australia's deportation policies since 1989 have ignored the knowledge built up by those administering past policies, while Amy Nethery shows that Australian debates about asylum-seeker policies refer to German concentration camps rather than to the local institutional predecessors of Port Hedland, Woomera and Baxter immigration detention centres.

How can such amnesia and disregard for historical analysis be explained? Policy makers and contributors to public debate might be convinced that new policies are self-evidently superior to old ones and that the present is infinitely more complex than the past. Those identifying current policies as being akin to policies adopted in the past often intend to draw attention to the supposedly retrogressive nature of the former. There is a tendency to perceive history as inherently progressive and progress as something that manifests itself in ever-increasing complexity. While immigration legislation enacted in either Australia or New Zealand in the early twentieth century usually consisted of a few short paragraphs, some of today's laws—such as New Zealand's Immigration Bill 2007, which is currently before Parliament—contain as much text as a novel. Because of a seemingly unprecedented level of complexity, even the mistakes of the past are rarely considered relevant.

Today's immigration legislation is indeed far more complex than that of 100 years ago. The amount of information available to us is far greater now than it was even a generation ago. We live in a globalised world and policy makers have to factor in an ever-increasing array of external influences. Such observations, however, could easily lead us to underestimate the past. Views of the past as a much simpler, less sophisticated and inherently inferior version of the present are evidence both of a certain degree of arrogance and of the propensity to view the past only through the lens of the present—that is, to adopt a Whiggish perspective, according to which only those aspects of the past count that have prefigured the present. By ignoring historical dead ends, those looking towards the past for guidance fail to appreciate the complexity that previous policy makers had to grapple with.

Any attempt to look to the past for guidance ought to be informed by the expectation that there is more to the past than what can be seen through a

'presentist' telescope. Nethery's argument that we are better able to understand the nature of Australian immigration detention centres if we explore the characteristics of civilian internment camps, quarantine stations and Aboriginal reserves, rather than liken detention centres to concentration camps, is convincing. Ideally, however, an analysis of the institutional predecessors of immigration detention would take into account their complex history, even if that seemingly made them less useable. When the Australian Army established internment camps at the beginning of World War II, they were initially known as 'concentration camps' (and listed as such in the public telephone book).[1] That was not because their creators saw any similarities between the Orange and Hay internment camps, on the one hand, and Dachau and Sachsenhausen, on the other, but because both the Nazi authorities and the Australian military used a term that had been coined by the British during the Second Boer War (1899–1902) to refer to camps for the confinement of non-combatants. And while the comparison with other forms of extrajudicial detention highlights some of the main features of today's immigration detention centres, it can also obscure the differences between Australian detention facilities that were operating some 50 years ago (such as Sydney's North Head detention centre, which was established in May 1959 in the grounds of a quarantine station) and the immigration detention centres at the turn of the twenty-first century.[2]

Philippa Mein Smith and Peter Hempenstall have recently drawn attention to Australians' striking lack of interest in and ignorance about New Zealand and New Zealanders' lack of concern for whatever has been happening in Australia. They point out that such disregard is surprising given the strong ties between the two countries.[3] These ties have extended to the area of policy making. As Ann Beaglehole discusses in her contribution, New Zealand's refugee policies have at times been influenced by Australian responses to refugees; there have also been instances in which Australian policy makers are highly attentive to a particular response to refugees adopted by New Zealand.[4]

In his chapter, Roderic Pitty demonstrates the fruitfulness of 'comparative insights' and advocates a process of 'mutual learning'. Australians and New Zealanders would do well to look beyond their own pasts and each other's presents. Given the similarities—and instructive differences—between the two countries, Australian policy makers could learn from the successes and failures of New Zealand citizenship, immigration and refugee policy in much the same way as New Zealand policy makers could let their decisions be informed by past developments on the other side of the Tasman Sea. In both countries, public debate about such policy would be richer if it drew on Australasian historical perspectives.

Thus, in 2001, Australian policy makers and public commentators would have been well advised to pay attention to the panic that led to the passing of New

Zealand's *Immigration Amendment (No. 2) Act 1999* on 16 June 1999, which provided the government with an opportunity to depart from the customary bipartisan approach to immigration matters. The law gave the New Zealand Government greater leeway in detaining unauthorised arrivals and prosecuting people smugglers. It had been prompted by news of a boat carrying 102 Chinese suspected asylum-seekers and heading for New Zealand, which journalists and politicians had interpreted as evidence that the country was about to be swamped by a tidal wave of illegal immigrants.[5] The 'boat people' never materialised. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now possible to see that the hysteria of late August and early September 2001, when the Australian Government introduced legislation supposedly designed to protect Australia from a large influx of asylum-seekers, was probably equally unwarranted. With the benefit of hindsight, it also seems apparent that the Labor Party gained little from supporting the government's position and that it might have been wise to follow the lead of the New Zealand Labour Party, which held firm and opposed the government's policy in 1999. Similarly, recent debates in New Zealand about the level of Asian immigration—perhaps best epitomised by the controversies about remarks by New Zealand First leader, Winston Peters—could have benefited from an informed assessment of similar debates in Australia in the first half of the 1990s, which were initiated by the historian Geoffrey Blainey, taken up by the Leader of the Opposition at the time, John Howard, and later reignited by Pauline Hanson.

While I would like to reiterate the argument put forward in all chapters—namely, that history *does* matter—I would also like to caution against overly simplistic expectations according to which histories are to save us from memories. The history that ought to inform policy making and public debate is necessarily in itself shaped by memories. It is always partial. While historians often claim that they are able to distinguish fact from fiction and that rigorous research allows them to arrive at accurate representations of historical developments, they too do not have unmediated access to the past. Policy makers who govern by looking back draw on a history, or on a range of histories, rather than on the past itself.

An appreciation of the making of memories and histories can therefore be as important for policy makers as a thorough understanding of the complexities of the past. Such an appreciation is particularly crucial when memories or histories have a constraining effect by favouring certain analogies and thereby limiting policy options. According to popular understandings of the country's historical response to refugees, which seem to be shared by many decision makers, Australia has been particularly generous and welcoming in the past. As Beaglehole's contribution shows, such understandings are equally prevalent in New Zealand. While it is important to critique such views where they are unfounded, it might be as important to explain why Australians and New Zealanders have imagined themselves as being the world leaders in humanitarianism.

Historical analogies are sometimes deliberately invoked to provide a narrow, simplistic or misleading view of the past and can be an effective means of propaganda. Former US President George W. Bush, for example, might not have lasted two terms in office if he had not been a master at invoking historical analogies to silence critical assessments of his policies.[6] In Australia and in New Zealand, the government has played an active role in propagating particular understandings of the past. Governments of various political persuasions have encouraged patriotic histories—that is, narratives about the past in which the nation's achievements are highlighted and its people are credited with a range of positive attributes. Thus, both New Zealand and Australia are said to have an excellent record in the reception and resettlement of refugees. The two examples most often cited in both countries concern the resettlement of Hungarians after the failed uprising in 1956 and of Indochinese after the end of the Vietnam War. Not only does the focus on Hungarian and Indochinese refugees distract from Australia's and New Zealand's miserly responses to refugee crises on other occasions, it emphasises the resettlement of Hungarians and Indochinese refugees. The emphasis on resettlement privileges the final result, rather than the process. In the case of Indochinese refugees, the narratives focus on the large number of refugees resettled and usually fail to mention that Australia did not open its doors until Malcolm Fraser took over from Gough Whitlam, and that New Zealand resisted playing a significant role in the resettlement of Indochinese refugees until 1979.[7]

Emphasising the status of Hungarian and Indochinese arrivals as refugees, these narratives do not mention that the criteria under which Hungarians were admitted to New Zealand and Australia from the end of 1956 have very little in common with the criteria that govern today's selection of refugees from camps in, say, Kenya or Thailand. The selection process in 1956 and 1957 differed from that in 2009 not least because Hungarians were perceived to be victims of the enemy in the Cold War, and because the Australian and the New Zealand economies needed additional labour. It would be hard to imagine that Burmese refugees being resettled in New Zealand today would ask to be repatriated because they 'fled' in search of adventure and are homesick—as happened in the case of some Hungarians resettled in New Zealand in the late 1950s.[8]

Arguing that the incoming Obama administration in the United States ought to make better use of historical analogies, Eric Stern observes: 'Just as keeping an eye on the rear view mirror is an essential part of driving an automobile, attending to the past is part of crisis navigation.'[9] Attending to the past ought to be an integral part of policy making and public debate about policy, irrespective of whether the policy is a response to a crisis. As, however, the motorist does not really see the cars behind her, but images of those cars in her rear-view mirror, we only ever see histories rather than the past itself. As the

motorist who is keeping an eye on the rear-view mirror is able to see only some of the cars behind her, so commentators and policy makers tend to see only histories of a segment of the past. And as it is impossible for the motorist to see everything behind her, irrespective of how many mirrors she has in her car, we necessarily privilege some aspects of the past over others. Which aspects of the past are visible to us depend on a range of factors, such as the prisms that dominate public discourse and access to historical knowledge.

After the tragic events of 16 April 2009, when an explosion killed several people aboard a boat carrying asylum-seekers near Ashmore Reef (see Introduction), policy makers and commentators tried to make sense of the available policy options by referring to the Tampa crisis and the 'children overboard' saga in 2001. 'Suddenly, as if history is destined to repeat itself, Australia is facing a fresh divisive debate about asylum seekers,' Michelle Grattan, political editor of the Melbourne *Age*, wrote.[10] She and her colleagues, however, had only one particular history in mind. It was not the only obvious choice. They could have reminded their readers of the divisive debates in late 1977, when the then Labor Party President, Bob Hawke, criticised the Fraser Government for admitting Indochinese refugees, or of the arrival of asylum-seekers in 1989, when Hawke, as Prime Minister, called into question the motivations of Cambodian 'boat people'.[11]

I was reminded of Hawke when reading that Darwin residents had donated 'a pile of clothing' for the refugees who had been evacuated to Darwin after the explosion of 16 April 2009.[12] In 1977, Hawke had much support in Darwin. On 22 November 1977, the Waterside Workers' Federation called two two-hour strikes in Darwin 'in protest at the "preferential treatment" given to refugees, claiming concern about quarantine arrangements, adequacy of Australia's defences and questioning the status of the boat people as refugees'.[13] I could equally have remembered, however, that Darwin has a tradition of accommodating and supporting refugees, be it the East Timorese who arrived from late 1975 onwards or three Portuguese asylum-seekers in the early 1960s.[14]

The past is fascinating in its diversity, even if glimpsed only through a rear-view mirror. It is to be hoped that those making and debating immigration, refugee and citizenship policy in New Zealand and Australia develop a deeper appreciation of the benefits that can be gained from detailed historical analysis. This is not to say that such analysis ought to determine policy or that a consideration of precedents and analogies ought to come at the price of a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. Those studying the rear-view mirror too intensely will find themselves at the side of the road.

Endnotes

1 E. H. Bourne to R. H. Croll, Deputy Chief Publicity Censor, 6 January 1941, National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA], SP109, 310/01.

[2] According to a letter drafted by the Department of Immigration for the Minister for Immigration in late 1958, the minister's 'sole objective in directing the establishment of such centres was to ensure that men (particularly young men) whose deportation I have had to order, solely because of their having entered or remained in Australia without proper authority, should not be thrown into gaols and there forced to associate with criminals, to the possibly great detriment of their characters'. T. H. E. Heyes to Director General of Health, 26 November 1958, NAA, A1658, 874/9/1 section 1.

[3] Mein Smith, Philippa and Hempenstall, Peter 2008, 'Rediscovering the Tasman world', in Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hempenstall and Shaun Goldfinch (eds), *Remaking the Tasman World*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, pp. 13–30.

[4] See, for example, Neumann, Klaus 2004, *Refuge Australia: Australia's humanitarian record*, UNSW Press, Sydney, p. 43.

[5] Bain, Helen 1999, 'Law rushed to detain boatpeople', *Dominion*, 16 June 1999; 'Unwelcome by boat', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 June 1999; Shaw, Bob 1999, 'More boat people may be on the way', *Evening Post*, 17 June 1999.

[6] On Bush's use of historical analogies, see Noon, David Hoogland 2004, 'Operation enduring analogy: World War II, the war on terror, and the uses of historical memory', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 339–66.

[7] Gallienne, Robin 1991, *The Whole Thing Was Orchestrated: New Zealand's response to the Indo-Chinese refugees exodus 1975–1985*, Centre for Asian Studies, University of Auckland, Auckland.

[8] See, for example, the correspondence in Archives New Zealand, IA 1 116/68 part 1.

[9] Stern, Eric K. 2009, 'Crisis navigation: lessons from history for the crisis manager in chief', *Governance*, vol. 22, no. 2, p. 191.

[10] Grattan, Michelle 1999, 'There and back again on refugees', *Age*, 17 April 1999.

[11] 'Hawke: return bogus refugees', *Australian*, 29 November 1977; Richards, Eric 2008, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1901*, UNSW Press, Sydney, p. 296. The response to the arrival of the first Indochinese 'boat people' in 1976 was also far more complex than is generally being remembered today; see Grant, Bruce 2009, 'After the exodus', *Inside Story*, 29 January 2009, <http://inside.org.au/after-the-exodus/>

[12] 'Darwin donates clothes, says prayers for asylum seekers', *ABC News Online*, 20 April 2009, <www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/04/20/2546899.htm>

[13] Viviani, Nancy and Lawe-Davies, Joanna 1980, *Australian Government Policy on the Entry of Vietnamese Refugees 1976 to 1978*, Centre for the Study of Australian–Asian Relations, Griffith University, Brisbane, p. 21.

[14] Neumann, Klaus 2005, '"Stayputs" and asylum seekers in Darwin, 1961–1962: or, how three Portuguese sailors helped to undermine the White Australia policy', *Journal of Northern Territory History*, vol. 16, pp. 1–25.