



Max Planck Institute for the Study of  
Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser  
und multiethnischer Gesellschaften

*MMG Working Paper 13-12 • ISSN 2192-2357*

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Belonging in the nation-state:  
Civic and ethno-belonging among recent  
refugees to Australia



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MMG Working Paper 13-12

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,  
*Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity*  
Göttingen

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ISSN 2192-2357 (MMG Working Papers Print)

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## Abstract

The question of who 'belongs' is a matter of hot debate across many Western nation-states. As a result of globalisation processes and suspicions raised by the New York and London bombings, questions are being asked about the ability of liberal democracies to successfully absorb migrants, particularly those who are culturally significantly different from the mainstream populations. Refugees are often the target of such concerns. Yet signatories to the UNHCR convention are legally obliged to accept refugees, and most are committed to assisting refugees to develop a sense of belonging through the delivery of settlement and integration programs. Refugees to Australia, for example, who come through its official resettlement program, receive some of the best government-funded settlement services in the world. These services cater to their material, medical and, to some extent, their social needs. This paper asks the extent to which this results in the development of a sense of belonging among refugees uprooted from their homelands and transplanted to a culturally, politically, and geographically distant place. It explores the facets of belonging identified inductively from a corpus of data from qualitative interviews with 77 refugees from a range of backgrounds, living in Western Australia, and a Photovoice exercise with a subsample of 10 families. Thematically, interview narratives map clearly onto civic and ethno conceptualisations of the nation-state and belonging within it. While refugees assert their civic belonging in terms of access to services and rights available to refugees and to Australians more broadly, their sense of ethno-belonging is much more ambivalent, due to a perception of exclusion from the mainstream population. Photovoice responses tell a slightly different story, one that highlights the significance of processes of reflexivity and recognition. Both suggest that for refugees, belonging is a project, rather than an end. Possible reasons for this pattern of responses are considered, as are implications for the concept of the nation-state and for processes of integration and social inclusion more generally.

**Keywords:** refugees, Australia, belonging, integration, civic and ethno nationalism, cosmopolitan, post-national

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This research was funded by Lotterywest and undertaken in collaboration with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Western Australia. The assistance of research coordinator Lisa Hartley and 12 bilingual assistants is gratefully acknowledged, as is time spent at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. ARC Future Fellowship FT100100432 has supported the author in the preparation of this paper.

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## Introduction

For those born and raised within a nation-state, who are able to track their roots through several generations, who are visibly similar to the majority of the population, and who share a common language and culture, national belonging is taken for granted. As Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) has argued, 'Belonging tends to be naturalised, and becomes articulated and politicised only when it is threatened in some way.' Belonging requires recognition (Habermas 1994; Keane 1997). While belonging is taken for granted in nation-states, the politics of belonging, public debate about who is 'in' and who is 'out', has become increasingly shrill as a result of processes of globalisation, and more specifically, the perceived terrorist threat from within, rendering recognition contestable. It is therefore necessary to interrogate 'the politics of belonging and how it relates to the participatory politics of citizenship as well as to that of entitlement and status' (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

Refugees, as displaced persons fleeing persecution in their countries of origin, are by definition one of the populations least likely to hold a naturalised sense of belonging and most likely to be the target of challenges to claims to belonging. Yet some countries accept refugees under the UNHCR program, offering a lucky few the opportunity to begin a new life in a place to which they may one day feel they belong, a potential new 'home'.

Australia is relatively generous in this regard. It accepts around 20,000 UNHCR approved refugees annually. It is ranked third in the world in terms of its resettlement commitment (by raw numbers), and first in terms of per capita intake (UNHCR 2010; UNHCR 2013). These refugees have access to settlement services designed based on principles of equity and multiculturalism, providing both material and social-emotional support, and which are seen as among the best in the world (UNHCR 2009). Initial settlement assistance is extensive and includes free English language tuition, and dedicated settlement services for the first six to twelve months of settlement. This program provides reception and assistance on arrival, including information, referrals and housing services. It also provides cultural orientation and short-term torture and trauma counselling. After twelve months of intensive support, humanitarian entrants can access a series of ad hoc programs that provide immigration assistance, housing, and community group funding. Services for refugees tend to focus on material and psychological aspects of settlement, but some also target belonging and integration.

The objective of these services is to assist refugees to settle successfully. Settlement is usually equated with integration, specifically attaining ‘a degree of self-sufficiency, to participate in the social and economic life of the community and to retain what might be described ... as a degree of personal identity and integrity’ (Goodwin-Gill 1990: 38). Successful settlement offers the ability to participate fully in economic, social, cultural, and political activities (Valtonen 2004: 86). The relative importance of each of these elements is a matter of some debate. Turning settlement theory, which saw material and economic integration as paramount, on its head, Ager and Strang (2008: 166-191) developed a model that identifies ten domains of integration, represented in an inverse triangle with four layers (see Figure 1). They argue that the more material aspects of settlement (the top layer), which act as markers of integration while simultaneously being the means of achieving it, namely employment, housing, education, and health, rely upon the second layer, social connections. Social connections are of three types: social bonds (connection within one’s group), bridges (connections between groups), and links (with structures of the state), which are, in turn, facilitated by language, cultural knowledge, safety, and stability (the next layer). The whole, Ager and Strang argue, is built upon a foundation of rights and citizenship. They suggest that the flavour of rights and citizenship will differ in each settlement country, resulting in different integration outcomes. Settlement policy and services tend to be focused on the top layer, and can neglect the middle levels.

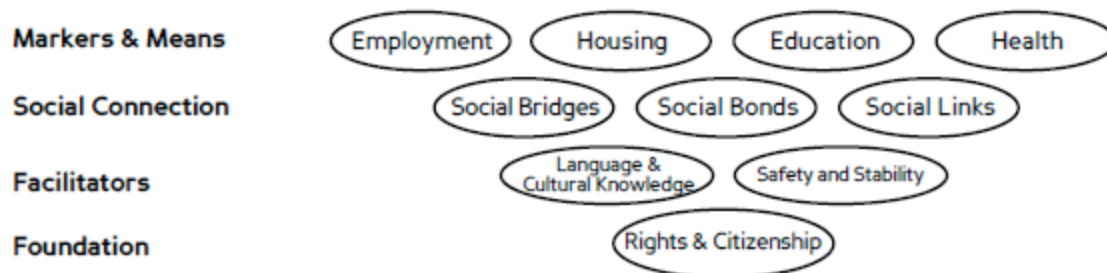


Figure 1: A conceptual framework defining core domains of integration (Ager and Strang 2008: 170)

Definitions of settlement often do not acknowledge explicitly the importance of these two middle layers – social connections and cultural security – in enabling the development of a sense of belonging, or emotional connection to the nation-state and its people. Nor do they recognise the challenges of ensuring a sense of belonging is developed among refugees who may be quite different culturally from the majority population.



Settlement therefore is often approached using a mostly 'civic' version of the nation-state, and 'belonging' to it, as opposed to an 'ethno' version. These are the two major paradigms within which the nation has been conceptualised. The nation was historically conceived as a collective of individuals 'belonging' together on the basis of a shared language, culture, traditions, and history (Gellner 1996), that necessitated an organic connection between compatriots, an ethno/cultural nationalism. It is a 'community of fate'. It has been increasingly argued, however, that civic nationalism, i.e. commitment to a common destiny and government through shared civic institutions, can just as adequately serve as the foundation of cohesive nation-states, and may be a more appropriate model in a globalised world (Brown 1999; Kaufmann and Zimmer 2004; Pearson 2000; Smith 1991). This is the 'community of choice' model (Pakulski and Tranter 2000). Habermas (1994: 128), one proponent, argues that migration has produced such diversely populated nation-states that they can no longer rely on common ties of ethnicity, shared history or shared values for cohesion. Instead, commitment to a single political culture and 'procedures for the legitimate enactment of laws and ... exercise of power' (1994: 135) should form the basis of national identity (see also Giddens 1985). This distinction between civic and ethno-belonging mirrors the binary that early sociologists made in relation to the cohesive principles of societies generally, such as Tonnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity (Yuval-Davis 2006). However, it also illustrates the fundamental ambiguity in the concept of the nation-state, which yokes together cultural and political forms of collectivity (Connor 1998).

One aspect of this dichotomy is the distinction between *citizenship* and *nationality*, 'between the notion of the citizen as an individual abstracted from cultural characteristics, and that of the *national* as a member of a community with common cultural values' (Castles 1997: np). This distinction requires a separation between one's political rights and obligations, and membership in the group that feels itself to be 'the nation'. While nation-states were culturally and ethnically homogenous, this duality was not an issue. But for modern settler societies such as Australia, disentangling these two notions is difficult. The two concepts become elided – membership of the political unit and membership of the national community are assumed to coalesce, but in reality may not. It is perhaps the anachronism of the model of the nation-state that is at fault. Thus, while 'citizenship is meant to be universalistic and above cultural difference, ... it exists only in the context of a nation-state, which is based on cultural specificity: on the belief in being different from other nations' (Castles, 1997: np).

More recently still, the relevance of either form of national belonging has been challenged with arguments about post-nationalism and the growth of the cosmopolitan perspective. These arguments suggest that processes of globalisation are gradually eliminating the need for any form of state-level belonging whatsoever (Beck 2006; Hedetoft and Hjort 2002). It has been suggested this is particularly the case for refugees who, having been forced to break their connection with their geographical and imagined homeland, are less in need of a sense of national belonging and more likely to have a post-national orientation (Haggis and Schech 2010; Pollock et al 2000).

In the Australian context, support for ethno-nationalism and criticism of civic nationalism has been voiced by Betts and Birrell (2007), who distinguish between patriotic and proceduralist orientations to the nation. The proceduralist approach, equivalent to the civic approach, sees membership of the nation-state 'not as a sign of belonging to a distinct people with their own history, memories, evolved culture, and sense of facing a common future. Rather such membership [involves] adherence to laws and procedures rather than ... patriotism and loyalty' (Betts and Birrell 2007: 50). Members need simply be tolerant and law-abiding. Betts argues this rather limited and shallow perspective is actually held by very few Australians – only by a few 'interested' parties such as cosmopolitan academics and ethnic advocates (see Johnson 2007: 196). Betts and Birrell (2007: 47) suggest that, in contrast, most Australians espouse a 'patriotic' or 'ethno' version of national belonging which places a high value on the affective connection between compatriots, seeing it as:

a union of people who have something like a family feeling for each other, in the sense that they acknowledge strong bonds with their fellow Australians and thus a compassionate interest in their compatriots' well-being...[and] deep feelings of attachment to their native land.

Whether the distinction between ethno-patriotic nationalism and civic-proceduralist nationalism can be maintained in light of empirical evidence has been challenged, with research in Australia suggesting that emotional connection to the nation-state among migrants is linked to the valuing of civic rights and responsibilities (Fozdar and Spittles 2010), and others arguing that a more nuanced categorisation of membership, and therefore types of belonging, is needed.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, more generally, Wodak

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1 For instance, Jones (2000) identified four ideal types of Australian identity, using an inductive procedure. These are: dogmatic nativist; literal nativist; civic nationalist; and moderate pluralist. On the other hand, Pakulski and Tranter (2000) suggest 'ethno-national', 'civic' and 'denizen' are the three most common orientations to the nation-state. However, a majority of writers use the standard ethno vs. civic distinction.

et al (2009) argue that the very notion of ‘civic’ versus ‘ethno’ nationalism (they use the German terms *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation*) is an idealised abstraction:

If *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* are mutually exclusive concepts, they cannot adequately account for the national processes of identification in a particular nation-state. Discourses of national identity constructed by residents of any given state will always contain or imply both cultural and political elements (Wodak et al 2009: 5).

This theory provides the lens through which to understand the sense of belonging among settling refugees in Australia in terms of their relation to the nation-state and its people. After reviewing the political and policy situation in Australia, this paper offers evidence that while refugees assert their civic belonging based on access to the services and rights provided by the government and available to all Australians or specifically to themselves as refugees, they also emphasise the importance of a sense of ethno-national belonging. This is somewhat aspirational, however, framed as something they hope to achieve at some point in the future and dependent upon a variety of factors, most notably acceptance by the mainstream population. Both forms of belonging appear to have an affective component. Implications in regard to the concept of the nation-state, and for processes of integration and social inclusion, are considered.

## Background: the Australian context

Australia has a complex relationship with questions of identity and diversity. It has the highest proportion of overseas-born people in the Western world (around one in four), and almost half its population are first- or second-generation migrants. It has been argued that

(...) the most important single lesson of the Australian experience is the key role of citizenship and of economic, social, political and cultural rights in bringing about good community relations. ...[which] gives [its people] access to the political system and the opportunity of full social participation. It also gives them a sense of belonging, and the security necessary to develop long-term perspectives (Castles 1992: 564).

Yet despite this, and the fact that three decades of multicultural policies encouraged positivity towards diversity and produced a range of policies designed to assist migrants and refugees to integrate, the nation-state retains aspects of its history, spe-

cifically the fact that it was built on a mono-cultural White Australia Policy that excluded non-white migrants until the early 1970s, and the country remains relatively Eurocentric in outlook and identity (Hage 1998; Jupp 2007). Research consistently shows vague support among the general public for Australia's growing diversity, but migration generally, and specific multicultural policies, are viewed with suspicion (Bean 2002; Goot and Watson 1995; Markus 2012; Moran 2005: 208).<sup>2</sup>

As has been mapped in many countries (see Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), the last decade or two has seen a retreat from the multiculturalism of the late twentieth century. Xenophobic tendencies in Australia were fostered by a conservative government that held power from 1996 to 2007, whose policies and rhetoric were decidedly against multiculturalism (Joppke 2004; Jupp 2007; Tate 2009; Tilbury 2007). Refugees were a particular target during this time, especially those arriving by boat to claim asylum. This government encouraged concern about the possible loss of the Euro-Christian national character of Australia, and its implications for social cohesion, shared values, and national identity. The first decade of the century saw the conservative federal government express unease that the growing proportion of increasingly diverse migrants could make for an unstable polity. It responded by introducing a number of policies and engaging in widespread political rhetoric that sought to build ethno-nationalism based on a more traditional, homogenous version of Australia than had been encouraged in the 1980s and 90s, during its multicultural heyday (Anderson and Taylor 2005; Fozdar and Spittles 2009; Jupp 2007; Moran 2005; Tate 2009).

The effect of this retreat on migrants, particularly visibly different migrants and refugees, has been a degree of ambivalence about whether they belong in Australia, due to a perception that they are not welcomed by the majority mainstream population. Negativity towards refugees is widespread, with up to 75 per cent of the population seeing refugees as a threat (Markus 2012; Power 2010; RCOA 2009). This is partly due to the population equating refugees with asylum seekers who arrive by boat, against whom there is significant resentment. The flip side is that refugees regularly report experiences of racism, producing a sense of exclusion, as their claims to belonging are rejected by the majority population (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2007;

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2 Two thirds of Australians support multiculturalism, with three quarters seeing migrants as making Australia open to new ideas and cultures. However, only 16% support minorities maintaining their distinct traditions, or government providing funding to preserve these (see Goot and Watson 2005: 185-186).

Correa-Velez et al 2010; Dhanji 2009; Hatoss 2012; Iredale et al 1996; RCOA 2009; Tilbury et al 2004).

But migrants' sense of belonging is also, necessarily, related to their experience of movement and separation from home and family, which can result in a feeling of being torn between belonging to two or more places, or not belonging anywhere (Rapport and Dawson 1998). As Falicov (2005: 399) asks: 'If home is where the heart is, and one's heart is with one's family, language, and country, what happens when your family, language and culture occupy two different worlds?' In linking the notions of home and belonging, Hedetoft and Hjort (2002: ix) have noted that the English word 'belonging' is a compound of *being* and *longing*, combining the political and cultural ordering principles of the nation-state (the civic and ethno versions described above). Unlike the native born, who are both existentially and emotionally *within* the nation-state to which they belong, migrants may *be* in one place, but *long* for another.

For refugees in particular, these factors (displacement from 'home' and emplacement in a somewhat hostile environment), combine to produce a rupture point that can challenge their sense of who they are and their place in the world. Giddens (1993) emphasises the importance of re-establishing what he calls 'ontological security', a secure sense of oneself and one's place, after such ruptures. Ontological security is based on a taken-for-granted knowledge of what to expect and how to 'be' in the world. Like belonging, defined as 'a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings' (May 2011: 368), much of this is therefore culturally specific. Thus, while it has been argued that belonging is always a process of becoming (Fortier 2000; Probyn 1996; Yuval-Davis 2006), it is this sense of ease in one's present, an ease fundamentally connected to relationships (with people and place), that is important for ontological security. For refugees, re-establishing a sense of belonging is an important part of re-establishing ontological security (Fozdar 2012).

While there is a growing body of literature detailing the challenges refugees to Australia face in the settlement process, little research exists indicating how they understand and experience belonging and how it both influences and is influenced by the factors identified above. A recent article, promisingly entitled 'Longing to Belong', focuses on refugee youth and their sense of well-being, rather than belonging per se (Correa-Velez et al 2010). The authors found that the well-being of refugee youth in Australia is strongly associated with indicators of belonging (social inclusion), particularly subjective social status within the broader Australian community, perceived discrimination, and bullying. Not surprisingly, they found that being socially valued

affects well-being positively, and being excluded, for instance through accent, ethnicity, religion, colour or being identified as a refugee, has a negative impact. The ability to participate and make a contribution was found to be particularly important for young refugees' sense of belonging. Similarly, in a study of identity among 14 South Sudanese refugees living in a regional Australian town, Hatoss (2012) found a strong desire to belong thwarted by being positioned as outsiders by mainstream Australians.

No quantitative data exists indicating the levels of belonging felt by refugees to Australia. A recent comprehensive report into refugee settlement in Australia by Hugo (2011) did not look at belonging specifically, but offers evidence of high levels of social participation by refugees both within ethnic communities and with the wider community, and generally high levels of satisfaction with life in Australia despite various barriers to participation. The largest study of migrant settlement, conducted with cohorts from all visa categories who arrived in 1993-1995, 1999-2000 and 2004-2005 (Richardson et. al. 2002; 2004) mainly focused on material aspects of settlement (sponsorship, use of interpreting and language services, qualification assessments, employment, housing, use of welfare, transfer of assets and income). Indicative of migrants' engagement with the wider society is data on their perceptions of Australians and interactions with neighbours. The report on the 2004-5 data (LSIA 2006) states that migrants have overwhelmingly positive views about life in Australia, with 98 per cent saying they had been made to feel welcome since coming to Australia and 96 per cent feeling that they were settling into Australian society. Only seven per cent said that they do not speak with their neighbours, and more than 30 per cent said that they speak with more than five of their neighbours. Seventy-eight per cent participated in at least one community activity such as religious activities, school activities, activities arranged by people from their home country, local community activities, and activities involving sports or hobbies. However, the study did not include humanitarian entrants.

Given the lack of research into refugees' sense of belonging, together with the apparent tension between the level of official government support in terms of service provision, but widespread negativity among the general population and in government rhetoric, it is useful to explore the extent to which refugees see themselves as 'belonging' within an Australian context, using subjective notions rather than social indicators.

## Methodology

The research reported in this paper was undertaken in 2011 as part of a larger study of refugee settlement. The broader study included interviews with humanitarian entrants, focus groups with service providers, and a Photovoice exercise. The data analysed for this paper are taken from interviews with 77 humanitarian entrants who had been in Australia for less than four years. The research sought the views of a wide range of individuals who represent the proportions of humanitarian entrants from different communities settling in Western Australia. The range of source countries/ethnicities of participants included Burundi, Congo (Democratic Republic), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan (Dinka), Sudan (Bari, Zandi, Baki), Burma (Chin), Burma (Karen), Sri Lanka, Afghanistan (Hazara, Tajik), Iran, Iraq, and Palestine/Jordan. Participants ranged in age from youth to elderly; 36 were male and 41 female. The diversity among participants is acknowledged, in terms of countries of origin, cultures, experiences of work, education and family, existing networks, visa categories, and so on. However, here the focus is on several features of responses that were relatively consistent across such differences.

One-on-one interviews were undertaken by bilingual interviewers. Interviews were audio recorded and subsequently bilingual assistants translated them into English. The interview schedule included questions relating to refugees' experiences of education, training, employment, English lessons, health, belonging, integration, citizenship, and social networks.

Analysis of the data was undertaken inductively by two researchers independently coding a sample of transcripts for major themes. Categories were compared, re-examined, and refined with the aim of maximising both internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.

Another method used was a Photovoice exercise. A sub-sample of refugee families was given cameras to document their settlement experiences visually. Photovoice allows participants to represent their experiences in a medium other than language (see, for example, Joanou 2009; Karlsson 2001; Morrow 2001; Prins 2010; Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001). The method is a culturally appropriate tool for research, and carries a commitment to building theories and applications from within communities. It does this by shifting control over narratives and representations to local community members (Dutta 2007), away from researchers' often deductive questions. Photovoice has been used in research with refugees both in the developing and developed

worlds. It has been found to be particularly useful with this group. It is also associated with resilience and giving back to communities (Garcia del Soto 2008).

A subsample of 10 self-selected families participated in the Photovoice project, five from Middle Eastern countries, three from Burma, and two from African countries. Participants attended a training session to learn basic digital camera skills. Through a series of interactive exercises, they discussed how to use photography to capture their settlement experiences creatively and were briefed on the importance of gaining the consent of those whose photographs they took. Participants were asked to take at least five photos on each of the following themes, over a period of three weeks: My home; My learning experiences; My employment experiences; My friendships; My life in Australia; Where I feel I belong. After the participants had completed the task, they discussed the meaning of each of the photographs with the researchers. These discussions were recorded verbatim. Analysis consisted of perusal of the photographs for common themes and consideration of the participants' explanations of the photographs. In this paper the photographic material is dealt with separately from the interview data as it tells a slightly different story.

## Results

The focus of this paper is the ways in which refugees articulate and represent their sense of belonging. It reports two key findings, generated inductively: that refugees living in Western Australia predominantly express a sense of civic belonging rather than ethno-belonging in relation to the wider Australian community; and that a desire to belong in a broader sense (related to ethno-belonging and more obviously affective, but also based in ascription) is expressed as an aspiration that refugees hope to achieve at some point in the future. Their photographic representations of belonging support these findings, although civic belonging was not represented in response to this category. Almost all images of belonging focused around social connections within refugees' own communities/families, or with nature, rather than the wider community (although photographs of younger members often included members of other ethnic communities and occasionally of the mainstream). Both data sets suggest something of a rupture between formal and informal belonging experienced by refugees living in Australia.



Interview data related to belonging was generated mainly from responses to two questions – ‘do you feel you belong here in Australia’ and ‘do you think that white Australian people feel that you belong here’.<sup>3</sup> These questions were designed to pick up the self-identification and other-identification aspects of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

To give the reader a general sense of the flavour of responses, a quantitative analysis of the qualitative results indicates that when asked about their personal sense of belonging, 50 of the participants responded generally positively, 21 in the negative, and 6 offered no response. Of these 11 responses were ambivalent, including both positive and negative aspects. On the other hand, when asked whether the majority population feels they belong, 41 responded generally positively, 27 in the negative, and 9 offered no response. However, many participants gave mixed or highly qualified responses. Only 23 were unqualified in their positive response. Thus, participants generally felt that they belong in Australia, but are far less certain that the rest of the population agrees.

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3 The wording of this second question was somewhat controversial, particularly among the ‘industry/community partners’ on the project, due to the explicit identification of Whiteness. The concern was with both the naming of Whiteness and the perceived implication that exclusion or inclusion was the sole responsibility of ‘Whites’. Australia is predominantly a ‘White’ country - the CIA Factbook (2012) states that ‘ethnic groups’ in Australia consist of: ‘white 92%, Asian 7%, aboriginal and other 1%’. While such a classification is highly problematic, it does indicate that by far the largest proportion of the population, including migrants, are ‘White’. The history of colonisation and the White Australia Policy ensured that the population is predominantly ‘White’, and the political, economic and social structures privilege Whiteness. Whiteness studies researchers have argued that the commonest axis around which exclusion occurs in Australia is race-based – specifically White and non-White (Anderson and Taylor 2005; Moreton-Robinson 2005). Hage’s (1998) argument that Australia is fundamentally a ‘White nation’ formed the rationale for the wording of this question. More simply, however, alternative framings were problematic – for example, leaving out ‘White’, i.e. ‘do you think that Australian people feel you belong here’, implies the refugees are not themselves Australian; and replacing ‘White’ with ‘mainstream’ may have lead to confusion among a population with low levels of literacy. None of the respondents balked at the question in any way, indicating the terminology was not problematic to them. Participants also did not restrict their discussion of experiences of exclusion to White Australians – some told stories of experiences with Aboriginal Australians.

### *Belonging*

Participants who had been in Australia for a number of years, and even some of those who had been in Australia a very short period of time, stated that they ‘hundred per cent belong’. Many told stories of personal acts of kindness shown to them by neighbours and others, producing a sense of acceptance and inclusion from mainstream Australians.

Far more frequently, however, this sense of belonging was identified as resulting from having access to rights and services. Even for those who felt they did not really belong in other senses, their right to receive services, like other Australians, was offered as evidence of belonging. Participants contrasted this access to services with their experiences in other countries of transition or of origin, noting their gratitude and appreciation.

The following quotes illustrate the ways in which, despite an initial negative response to the question based on a personal perception that they do not belong, the right to access services and to ‘assistance as a citizen’ provides something like an objective proof of belonging. The right to education, health care, employment, citizenship and social security, as well as freedom and dignity, are identified in the quotes below. Gratitude for services provided by the government, and indeed protection by the government, is expressed. This assistance is the foundation for an expectation of a positive future.

**Interviewer:** Do you think you belong here in Australia?

**Respondent:** Not really because I do not understand Australian people ... in terms of communication, as I can’t express in front of them and let myself be understood.

**Interviewer:** Where do you belong/do not belong?

**Respondent:** I know that I belong to Australia, because I receive all assistance as a citizen.

(Male, Congo, 3 years and 5 months in Australia)

Here the participant initially responds that he does not belong in Australia because he does not understand ‘Australian people’. This appears to be about both a technical inability to speak the same language, but also a cultural inability to communicate. Yet when pressed on where he belongs, if not in Australia, he responds with certainty that he ‘knows he belongs to Australia’ due to the assistance he receives ‘as a citizen’, presumably government services. This gentleman could not technically be a citizen,

as there is a four-year residency requirement for Australian citizenship, thus it is his perception that access to formal state-provided services means formal belonging. A similar response was offered by another African-background participant.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: I don't feel welcome here sometimes, even though I wanted to be one of the Australians. But I'm hoping one day, I will feel Australia is my home too.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that there is anything that could make you feel more like you belong here? If yes, what?

Respondent: I belong here because the security here is good, I don't have to worry about anything. I'm getting the services that are normally needed to have progress, such as education, health. I can grow to what I wanted, and my dreams can be true.

(Male, Sudan [Dinka], 1 year in Australia)

This response follows a very similar format to the one above. An initial negative response due to feelings of unwelcome, despite attempts to connect and a positivity that at some point in the future this will become a reality, is followed by an assertion of belonging due to access to services that support achieving one's goals.

The following quotes from Middle Eastern background participants illustrate how a comparison with the lack of access to services in the countries of origin or transition is contrasted with the participants' current situation, resulting in strong affect ('love') and a sense of belonging resulting from access to education, social security, health care, and opportunities, as well as freedom and dignity.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: It is a very complicated question to answer. We got refuge to this country because of the persecutions and many other sufferings and difficulties that we faced in our own country. I could not get a proper job, my wife and I and our children were deprived of getting higher education. All these obstacles and hardships in our daily life in Iran affected us a lot. I love Australia and I think I belong to this country as this government is providing a good education and a lot of opportunities for my children. We have freedom in our daily life and we have dignity to live as a human being.

(Male, Iran [Arian] 1 year and 1 month in Australia)

**Interviewer:** Do you feel that you belong to Australia and the area you live in?

**Respondent:** I want to tell you something regarding the support you get from Australia. I feel that I belong to Australia because I have the same support that the Australian people get from the government such as the social security, Medicare etc. ... Also when I compare what Australia offered us with some wealthy Arab countries, I really feel that I belong to this country.

(Female, Iraq, 4 years in Australia)

For some, the mere fact of living in Australia means belonging. But this is related to one's civic duty to follow the laws. If one does so, one belongs. The law here is an official measure of belonging, implying that one's right to be here is dependent on one following the law, and one's following of the law is evidence of one's right to be here.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

**Respondent:** Yes, I belong here in Australia. Because we no longer live in Burma, so we have to follow the rule and live as they make the rule for the country. Therefore we are belonging here in Australia.

(Female, Myanmar [Karen], 2 years and 1 month in Australia)

Some participants felt they had not yet achieved certain perceived markers of civic belonging, but expected to at some point in the future, suggesting the processual nature of belonging as a project of becoming (Fortier 2000; Probyn 1996; Yuval-Davis 2006). Thus, this Iraqi man responded to a question about how he can be made to feel he belongs with a focus on temporality – he responded to a ‘what’ question with a ‘when’ response. He suggested that once he has found employment and can actively participate in civil society, then he will have ‘reached Australia’.

**Interviewer:** What issues can make you feel you are belonging here?

**Respondent:** When I feel the similar status like I did in my native country, which means I must have work and income and be active with society and have a clear goal and approach to my future. At that time I will feel I reached Australia.

(Male, Iraq, 1 year and 8 months in Australia)

Those who had achieved these markers felt their belonging was evident in their civic contributions to their adopted society such as abiding by the law, working, and paying taxes rather than receiving welfare (known in Australia as Centrelink). This was offered as proof of their belonging.

**Interviewer:** Okay, next let us discuss about identity and sense of belonging. You have come to Australia. Do you feel that you belong to this place, that you are part of this society?

**Respondent:** Yes, I do. We have come here now and don't want to give any trouble to the government. We are working, earning our living, paying tax and also paying to Centrelink. I don't want to take money from Centrelink. We have come here and they are taking good care of us – we have no complaint.

(Male, Sri Lanka, 1 year in Australia)

The fact that they had been allowed to come to Australia, and to remain in Australia, to 'be' here, was enough evidence of belonging for some participants. For others, citizenship, the technical legal definer of national membership, was seen as a marker of belonging, whether this was already achieved or something aspired to (see also Haggis and Schech 2010).

Some of these extracts are notable for their linking of a civic conception of the nation-state and belonging within it, with an affective response – access to services and rights and the positive future these offer engenders warm feelings among participants. Australia is spoken of as 'home', and as 'loved'. However, such statements of affective connection were more common among the smaller proportion of participants who saw their belonging in more 'ethno' terms, as being evidenced in the connections they had to other Australians, and their experiences of kindness and friendship.

The overwhelming evidence of a sense of civic belonging among the participants suggests that their relationship to the nation-state is a formal one, based upon their recognition by the state as members eligible for the various types of formal support available. However, their sense of informal belonging was far less certain.

### *Un-belonging*

When participants responded negatively to the question about whether they belong in Australia, a few related this to a lack of access to services, i.e. to structural exclusion. Much more frequently, however, un-belonging had to do with a sense of social exclusion. The lingering effects of the White Australia Policy were specifically identified by participants as producing an environment where they felt they did not belong, and where their claims to recognition as legitimate members of the national community were rejected. This was

particularly notable among the African-origin participants, and some from the Middle East. Participants told stories of everyday experiences of exclusion that made them aware that they were not seen as belonging by the mainstream population. As the following quotes illustrate, while access to services was seen as something that theoretically should provide the basis for belonging, because it can ‘make dreams come true’, an affective sense of connection is unavailable due to a perception of exclusion by the wider society in everyday interactions due to colour difference, cultural differences, and the lack of a sense of welcome. Thus, while participants aspire to ethno-national belonging, it has not yet been achieved.

**Interviewer:** **Do you feel that you belong to Australia and the area you live in?**

**Respondent:** Actually I can’t doubt that Australia is a very convenient country and we have very good support from the government but I really have some concerns about the way of treating us. I feel like most of Australian people are racist; they judge you just because of your colour.

(Male, Ethiopia, 1 year and 6 months in Australia)

Again, belonging, real belonging, is represented as something more than simply access to services. While government support is appreciated, the treatment in everyday interactions with ‘Australian people’ is problematic, with this man feeling he is being judged by his colour.

The situation is the same for the African-background woman quoted below. She notes that she has tried to feel she belongs in Australia, to leave her country of origin behind, but the lack of a welcome acts as a barrier to achieving this. While she says ‘sometimes you don’t get what you need’, she is not talking about education and health care, which she acknowledges as being accessible and helping to make her dreams come true. It is the need to belong, for others to acknowledge that she belongs in Australia (for recognition), that she is referring to.

**Interviewer:** **Where do you feel you belong - to Australia, your local area, somewhere else or a combination of places or nowhere?**

**Respondent:** I feel like I’m still belonging to South Sudan. I wanted to belong here, but sometimes, I don’t feel welcome in the society.

**Interviewer:** **Can you tell me what you mean by not feel welcome here?**

**Respondent:** Yeah, I was perceived not in a welcoming way. Sometimes, you don’t get what you need.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that there is anything that could make you feel more like you belong here? If yes, what?

Respondent: Things such as education and health make me feel like I belong here. I can achieve what I want, and my dreams can be true here as well. However, the society won't accept me.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: No, not all.

**Interviewer:** Can you talk a little about that, why you think you're not being considered by white Australians as one of them?

Respondent: Ok, yeah, the first thing most of the white Australians ask of me is 'Where are you from?' To me, this suggests that I don't feel welcome here. Sometimes, if I answered that 'I'm from here', they further asked, 'Where are you from originally?' To me, that doesn't matter; I'm Australian and I live here. No need to ask further where I came from.

(Female, Sudan [Dinka], 4 years in Australia)

The tendency of Australians to ask 'where are you from' was noted by a number of participants who generally saw this as signalling that they were not accepted as 'belonging' to Australia. This is a very common phenomenon experienced by visibly different migrants in Australia, and particularly refugees<sup>4</sup>. While refugees consider that their *being* here should suffice as evidence of belonging, the mainstream population offers a constant reminder that they are not part of the taken-for-granted landscape. They are constantly recognised as different – something Greg Noble (2005), playing on Goffman's classic rule for urban interaction ('civil inattention'), has called 'uncivil attention'. The refugees' place in Australia is under constant question. In such a situation, (re)developing ontological security is unlikely.

Visible difference was identified as the cause of this sense of un-belonging mainly by African-background participants. When asked 'do white Australians feel you belong here', a large proportion of the African sample responded with statements such as 'no, not at all'. Some went so far as to say they felt they were seen as subhuman. In the following quote, the sense of exclusion moves beyond a perception that mainstream Australians do not wish to communicate, it is that they do not want Africans to be in the country, and see them as 'like an animal'.

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<sup>4</sup> See Hatoss 2012 for a discussion of the positioning and category work that the 'where do you come from' question achieves in relation to Sudanese refugees in Australia.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: I don't think the white Australian people, they don't want to communicate with us, they don't like us to be in Australia – example in my work place in [department store] where I was working, they see me like I am not part of them, they see me like an animal. In TAFE [vocational education and training provider], they segregate 'this is Africans'. ...they think we are not part of them; they don't want us, the Africans, to be here.

(Female, Sudan, 2 years in Australia)

For others the sense of exclusion was more subtle – while other Australians were friendly in a distant or surface manner, some participants felt that they were not truly accepted as 'real' Australians, feeling there was a degree of segregation in the way the population interacted, and that they are considered only 'guests', not members. They feel they are not seen by other Australians as 'real Australians', or 'as their own people'. This was particularly the case for those from Middle Eastern backgrounds, as can be seen in the following quotes.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel you belong here in Australia?

Respondent: No, I do not feel that sense of belonging to Australia at present.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: Yes. Of course all Australians treat us very friendly but I think they do not accept us as real Australians. They try hard not to show it. But I believe this segregation exists.

(Female, Iran, 1 year in Australia)

**Interviewer:** Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

Respondent: Australians never treat us badly but they rarely accept us as their own people.

(Female, Iran, 3 years and 7 months in Australia)

**Interviewer:** Do you have any relationships with white Australians? Have you found difficulties to meet Australian people?

Respondent: Actually not strong relationship only 'hi', 'bye' and 'see you!' Because Australian people don't want to create any deep relationships with migrants and they just consider us as guests in Australia.

(Female, Iraq, 3 years in Australia)



**Interviewer:** **Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?**

**Respondent:** Some of them yes, but I always feel that I am strange from this society. Also the Australian people don't do anything to make you feel that you belong to Australia. Instead of that, they are trying to avoid you sometimes. Also they don't welcome people to their house.

(Female, Iraq, 4 years in Australia)

For some of these participants, it was not outright racism or a simple lack of engagement, but a more subtle sense that different cultural norms meant that real connection with mainstream Australians was difficult, producing only shallow relationships. These included different perspectives on the use of alcohol and familial relationships, and different rules of courtesy and hospitality. Once again the lack of welcome is noted, but also a perception of avoidance by the mainstream. Yet there was still an expectation by many that this would eventually be resolved over time.

**Interviewer:** **Are there things that you do or would like to do in Australia that you would consider part of integration but that may not fit with how the term 'integration' is commonly used?**

**Respondent:** It is the problem of connection with Australians. I personally have this problem of connecting with them. Maybe this has to do with me, but in reality I do not think that is just me. For example, in our culture we just go and visit people anytime and find reason to talk when we wanted to, but I have found it very difficult to do this with Australians. They get very tired being with us after half an hour and they cannot bear it anymore. I think it is a cultural problem which should be solved, maybe by passing of time.

(Male, Afghanistan, 1 year and 4 months in Australia)

**Interviewer:** **Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?**

**Respondent:** Australian people are kind people but I think it is only cultural conflicts, because different perspectives make our life different from their life, such as raising children, no alcohol, we don't acknowledge boyfriend and girlfriend relationships.

(Female, Iraq, 3 years in Australia)

These extracts are notable for their clear articulation of social and cultural barriers to integration. These range from outright racism to much more subtle experiences of exclusion due to cultural difference and the lack of a sense of welcome and acceptance by the mainstream population. These serve as barriers to refugees seeing

themselves as belonging – evident in the way ‘Australians’ are referred to in almost every extract as a category which does not include the speaker. All extracts identify instances of everyday interaction where instead of welcome and engagement at a level of closeness that might generate a sense of ethno-belonging, participants have been met with responses that are limited, constrained, and that engage with them as outsiders.

This sense of exclusion is best summed up in this incident relayed by one of the participants of Iraqi background, who, when he asserted that he is Australian, was told by a police officer ‘you are not Australian, you are a citizen’, clearly indicating that Australian-ness means something more than a legally conferred civic identity.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that white Australian people feel you belong here?

**Respondent:** Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I remember one day the police officer stopped me while I was driving. When he asked me about my details he asked me, ‘Where do you come from?’ I told him that I am Australian, he looked at me and said, ‘You are not Australian, you are a citizen.’

(Male, Iraq, 4 years in Australia)

The examples above clearly suggest that the mid-level domains of integration identified by Ager and Strang (2008: 170), those they see as important ‘connective tissue’ linking foundational principles of citizenship and rights to outcomes in the domains of employment, housing, education and health, but which are also vital for the sense of connection to place and people that is national belonging (according to these participants, at least), are missing. Like Ager and Strang’s respondents, participants in the current study see social connection as a defining feature of belonging in an integrated community. Like them, tolerance is not enough; active mixing and intimate interpersonal engagement are desired. Like them, belonging is seen as involving ‘links with family, committed friendship and a sense of respect and shared values’ (Ager and Strang 2008: 178). This is something participants felt was currently missing, but aspired to at some point in the future. Yet it would be remiss to underestimate the value of the belonging generated simply through having access to services, as the earlier extracts demonstrated.

### *Evidence from Photovoice*

Does the data from the PhotoVoice exercise add any clarity to this understanding of refugees' sense of belonging? Unfortunately, not straightforwardly. Perhaps as a result of the data collection tool (the camera) and logistical difficulties around trying to capture a sense of civic belonging in visual images, the photographs of 'belonging' did not obviously divide into 'civic' and 'ethno' in the way the interview responses did. While there were photographs of services accessed and appreciated (or not), such as education and training facilities, language centres, parks, and employment assistance services, these were not included in the participants' 'Where I belong' sections. Instead, the photographs revolved around a single key theme denoting both people and place: family and ethnic community and places associated with each; and much less frequently, nature. Alienation of various types was also represented creatively by some. By far the most common images, however, were of family and ethnic community.

A note about the ways method influenced the responses is apposite here. While in the interviews participants were asked about their sense of belonging in relation to Australia ('do you feel you belong in Australia') and its people ('do you think white Australians feel you belong'), the question or topic for the photo exercise was much more open-ended: 'Where I feel I belong'. This invited self-reflexive responses and the opportunity for creative and symbolic responses. The different wording and data collection tool (camera, as opposed to verbal interview) may partially account for some of the difference in responses.

Belonging with nature was occasionally represented in images of sunsets, flowers, and parks (not reproduced here). In these cases, belonging was associated with place, broadly defined. The fact that the natural environment offers a sense of belonging may be the result of an extrapolation of the universality of these physical phenomena. However, for some it was something peculiar to Australia, as the following quote illustrates: 'I love nature and the sunshine in Australia. It makes me feel like I belong.' However, nature was also more commonly associated with family and commensality – the same photographer said he feels he belongs when he is '... cooking kebab in the park, with my family and relatives. It makes me feel happy.' This sense of belonging was not articulated in the interviews, indicating the value of the Photovoice approach.

For others, rather than place, material objects such as books, and the ideas they generate, represented belonging. Image 1 shows an Iraqi participant taking a book from his bookcase. He said of this photograph: 'I love to read, this is where I find

myself. It helped me to fit in, as I learnt colloquial language and jokes that most refugees don't know. It is important to be part of society.' His argument is that immersing himself in reading (he was a science teacher in Iraq) enabled him to learn the nuances of the language, allowing for better communication with other Australians. He also uses books to learn about society and culture: 'Books are my best friend and the only one I talk to. I have always read books to learn about different societies and norms.' In this statement, books are less about offering opportunities for social engagement – the notion that books offer belonging, being one's only friend, is a poignant representation of a 'second best' version of belonging. This same gentleman, who has been mostly unemployed or working in unskilled jobs since arriving, said he 'finds himself in work' and joked that his wife 'finds herself in shopping'.

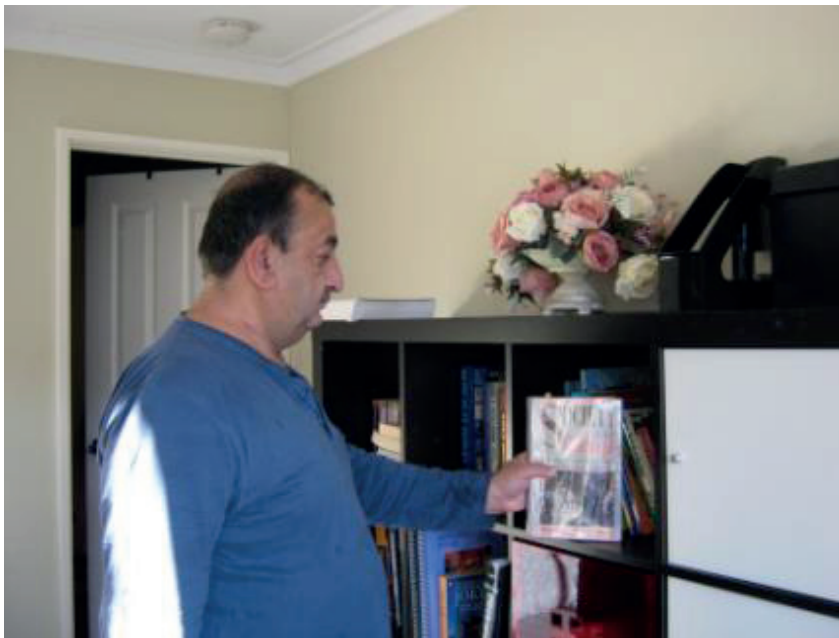


Image 1.

As noted, the most common theme in the 'belonging' photographs was their sociality – their narrative signalled clearly that belonging is about relationships. However, most of the photographs depicted relationships among members of the same ethnic community. The following was typical. Image 2 shows an Iraqi-background participant with members of his family at a food hall in a shopping mall. This participant said cooking and being with his family bring him a sense of belonging. He said of this image: 'I belong with my family.'



Image 2.

For others, belonging came from being part of a collective, such as a religious or ethnic community. For many humanitarian entrants, religion plays an important part in developing a sense of belonging. An Iraqi-background participant said of a photograph he had taken of his mosque: 'I belong here. Here I pray – I can return to my God.' He noted his friends go there as well, making it a community to which he feels he belongs. Similarly, in Image 3, one of the Burmese (Karen)-background participants represents how the church gives him a sense of belonging with a photograph of a Burmese



Image 3.

Christian church group singing. He said of this photo: ‘When I attend, we have good things in our heart. ... When go to church with Karen, we belong to the church.’

However, such collectives sometimes made people feel the opposite. Image 4 shows a social gathering of Muslims and Arabs in which one participant from Iraq represents this sense of isolation by posing her daughter slightly apart from and not facing the group. While this appears to be a photograph of a convivial community picnic, implying a sense of belonging to one’s ethnic community, something quite different is being represented. The photographer said of this photo: ‘I was very happy to see the Muslims and Arabs – the first time I got to something like this. I wanted to feel I was among my people but I didn’t feel a part of it. They are from many countries. I didn’t feel like I belong. I learnt here that just being together is not enough to feel like we belong. No one spoke to me or made me feel welcome.’ She went on to explain that shared ethnicity is not enough to ensure social connection and to suggest that she feels closer to mainstream Australians: ‘You know sometimes when I speak to my neighbour I feel closer to them. It’s not important for people to love each other if we’re from the same country. It depends – we’re all humans together.’



Image 4.

In a similar image (Image 5), which on the surface appears to be about one thing, but is in fact about another, an Iraqi-background participant represents not a typical ‘Aussie beach scene’ with a young man enjoying the sand and surf, but a sense of isolation and uncertainty. Ibrahim says that when he looks at the ocean he feels like a ‘small point in this huge world... searching’. He said it makes him think about

his ‘new life’. The image captures the ontological *insecurity* common among new migrants and refugees, the shifting ground, and the tentative steps being taken to try to establish oneself in this new terrain.



Image 5.

Both these images illustrate the point made by Giddens (1991) that in modernity, people’s sense of belonging becomes reflexive. These are not straightforward representational images but images suggestive of the inner life of the refugee struggling to find themselves in this new environment, undergoing a process of reconstruction whose ultimate goal is a more grounded form of belonging.

On the other hand, in their selection of ‘where I belong’ photographs, some participants also represented their joy at living in Australia. In this close-up self-portrait (image 6), one of the young African-background participants represents her sense of belonging saying: ‘I feel happy, I have many friends.’ While the focus of this paper has been on the ways belonging is influenced by the people, structures, and places that surround one (as this is what the interview questions and Photovoice activities generated), this image reminds us that belonging is always grounded in the self (May 2011).

In their discussion of home and belonging in a post-national world, Hedetoft and Hjort (2002) suggest that both these concepts are affectively, rather than cognitively, defined – they are fundamentally about *feeling*. These photographic images reflect belonging and unbelonging in complex ways, but appear to support this insight –



they are fundamentally affective. While the civic belonging identified in interviews occasionally was articulated as affective, producing ‘love’, it was predominantly cognitive, generated by a recognition of and appreciation for services provided. The photographs, on the other hand, represent this ‘feeling’ aspect of both belonging and unbelonging. The images that clearly imply a positive sense of belonging (Images 2, 3 and 6), represent relationships with family, community and friends, suggesting that ontological security is being re-established, albeit within one’s family and ethnic community. Images 4 and 5 and to some extent 1, and the accompanying explanations, signal that belonging has yet to be achieved, through highly evocative imagery. However, unlike the interview transcripts, which clearly articulated the source of unbelonging as being exclusionary attitudes and behaviours of the wider population, the photographic images tend to leave open the source of this sense of exclusion (possibly due to the difficulty of staging photographs showing agents of exclusion).

## Conclusion

Ager and Strong (2008) argue that their UK field study indicated that belonging is the ultimate mark of integration for refugees and that it is social relationships, and recognition and respect within these relationships, which determine one’s sense of



belonging. Evidence has been provided that refugees in Australia tend to experience belonging in relation to their access to rights and services, implying that their relationship to the nation-state is seen in civic or procedural terms. However, there is also a strong desire to belong in a more emotional and culturally meaningful way at an interpersonal level, a desire which is blocked, according to the refugee participants' accounts, through experiences of exclusion by the mainstream population and by cultural differences. As a result, their ethno-belonging is aspirational, something to be achieved over time. While photographs generated as part of a Photovoice exercise produced slightly different responses, they support the contention that the most desired forms of belonging are primarily affective and based in sociality. The two taken together suggest civic belonging, while important in the process of settlement, is somewhat 'shallow' and 'thin', representing a 'cultural deficit', as Hannerz (2002: 229-30) has argued. However, its value, perhaps as a transitional form of belonging, should not be underestimated.

The findings imply a number of things: First, that belonging is multi-scalar, with refugees experiencing differential access to this 'sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings' (May 2011: 368), depending on whether they are considering their relationship with family/community/place, with the wider Australian community, or with the state; second, that both ethno- and civic belonging are perceived as important to refugees in Australia; and third, the nation-state itself remains an important parameter of belonging for refugees, challenging the suggestion that a post-national orientation may be more likely among refugees. These are discussed briefly below.

What has been called the 'Janus-face' of the nation-state (Bhabha 1990: 1) does not constitute an either/or orientation to belonging for any given individual grounded in exclusively civic or ethno conceptualisations, but neither does it produce a blended sense of belonging as other research has suggested (Fozdar and Spittles 2010; Wodak et al 2009), at least not for the refugees in the early stages of their settlement. Refugees clearly adopt, or foreground, a civic, politically based conceptualisation of the nation-state, and belonging to it, which allows them to claim some legitimacy in their adopted homeland (see Geertz 1963; Giddens 1993, 1985; Habermas 1994; Smith 1991). The nation-state is seen as a politico-legal system, where technical entitlement is what distinguishes membership and belonging. This produces a somewhat cognitive version of belonging, focussing on procedural entitlement to rights and services, *à la* Betts and Birrell (2007). Despite this, it offers a footing on which to ground the re-establishment of ontological security.

It is striking that refugees, in response to a question about belonging, should focus on this technical right to services. While it is possible that this is partly due to the context of the questioning (a researcher asking about their settlement experience more broadly and how it could be improved), or the question itself ('do you feel you belong *in Australia*?),<sup>5</sup> which makes salient different levels of belonging (belonging to what?), this response is most likely related to a number of other factors. One is the value of an assertion of belonging, of any sort, in a context where community negativity towards refugees is high. This results from a generalised negativity towards asylum seekers who are seen as illegitimate interlopers. These asylum seekers are generally not entitled to such government services. Therefore, pointing to one's access to services becomes a claim to legitimacy within the formal state structures – in the same way citizenship might. This is supported by Haggis and Schech's (2010) finding that refugees who came to Australia as asylum seekers are less likely to experience a sense of welcome, inclusion and belonging.

This effect is also likely to be related to the current socio-political context where the retreat from multiculturalism has seen a devaluing of diversity more generally and an emphasis on social cohesion, and a range of policies and rhetorics that have the effect of 'othering' those from culturally different backgrounds (Joppke 2004; Jupp 2007). Refugees' assertions of belonging in any form, civic or otherwise, may be one way of challenging the sense of exclusion they feel from the wider community, as 'ethnic others'. One's right to access services signals one's membership of the nation-state and is therefore a reasonable foundation for one's claims to belong. It is proof of one's right to be here and calls on Australia's sense of itself as a successful settler nation built on a strong foundation of citizenship and rights (Castles 1992).

Another possible reason for this sense of civic belonging is that the participants' main experiences in these early years of settlement have been interactions with the state and the services it provides, giving them a sense that this is what belonging in a modern democratic state is all about (quite different, in most cases, from their experiences in countries of origin or transition, as well as being different from the experience of other migrants who are not entitled to such services – it is unlikely migrants under the 'skilled' stream would speak about their belonging in these terms). Refugee status clearly shapes one's sense of belonging via access to official formal services, but ironically it is also the source of a sense of unbelonging as outlined above.

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5 Not all 'civic' style responses were made to this question – the civic/ethno divide was evident in a range of responses to questions about settlement.

Finally, the simple fact that participants had been living in Australia for at most four years may be partly responsible for this effect, as this is perhaps not long enough to develop a more ethno-based sense of belonging.

But this result, generated inductively, may also indicate that civic belonging is becoming a more widely accepted version of belonging in the modern nation-state. As Soysal (1994: 1) has argued: 'A new and more universal concept of citizenship has unfolded in the post-war era, one whose organising and legitimating principles are based on universal personhood rather than national belonging.' Her model of post-national belonging is based on the notion of universal human rights and the practicalities of the current globalised world that have resulted in movements of ideas, capital, risk, and people. However, here we have refugees basing their belonging on a set of rights specifically associated with their membership of an adopted nation-state, not as generalised humans, supporting Calhoun's argument that nations still matter (Calhoun 2007; see also Arendt 1973; Castles and Davidson 2000).

Evidence has also been provided indicating that the nation-state remains important on another front – that refugees additionally desire an emotional ethno/cultural connection to the nation-state, a sense of belonging beyond the purely technical, suggesting that expectations that ethno-national belonging would become redundant in a globalised world are perhaps premature. This was evident in both the interview and photographic data and was supported by responses to questions about how refugees' settlement experiences could be improved. These again split into civic and ethno categories: suggestions for programs designed to improve services or make them more accessible; and suggestions for programs designed to improve interaction between refugees and mainstream Australians (see Fozdar and Hartley 2012). These included programs to encourage mutual trust and friendship and to reduce racial and cultural tensions in the wider Australian community, such as through a family mentoring scheme and policy-level initiatives to recognise and respect cultural difference. Some suggested that Australians needed to be educated about why the government accepts refugees and the value they bring to the country, as well as broader provision of cultural awareness and anti-racism training to the general population to improve attitudes towards refugees and about cultural difference more generally.

The evidence provided suggests that the 'being' and 'longing' of belonging (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002: ix) is clearly divided in refugees' discourses – their 'being' in Australia provides access to services and rights that are unequivocal and that are seen as concrete evidence of their belonging, in one sense; but emotional connection and social and cultural inclusion remain something that is longed for, and that is

denied, at least in part, by the larger population. Rather than longing for their countries of origin, refugees in Australia appear to be longing to belong to their adopted country.

The desire for this level of informal recognition, acceptance, and connection to local others challenges the suggestion by Haggis and Schech (2010), and Pollock et al (2000) that refugees' focus and identity is more global. While an affective sense of belonging within their own ethnic communities exists for many (though not all, as one of the photographs indicated), a feeling of connection beyond this is desired – refugees want to *feel* Australian and to *feel* that other Australians feel they belong. Rather than free-floating global citizenship, or even national citizenship, they seek a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Appiah 2005), a sense of self grounded in their new home. It is possible this desire may be strengthened by the ethno-nationalism of the wider Australian population, as per the argument of Betts and Birrell (2007), making those from refugee backgrounds feel they are not really part of the community until they have achieved informal recognition and acceptance. This may be more important for refugees compared to those from other migrant backgrounds due to the lack of an option to remain as members of their countries of origin, either formally or informally.

Returning to Ager and Strang's (2008) inverse triangle model of the different domains of settlement, participants recognised their entitlement to assistance with the more material aspects of settlement (employment, housing, education, and health), and their foundation in rights and citizenship which sit at the apex (fulcrum) of the triangle. However, it is the mid-level domains, i.e. social bridges, and bonds, facilitated by language, cultural knowledge, safety and stability (Ager and Strang 2008: 170), that they hope at some point in the future to build. The social bonds that exist within refugees' own communities, and the social links with state structures that provide the services, while important in providing some sense of belonging, are not enough. Intimate, emotional connections with the wider population – represented in the central domain circle in their diagram – are the goal. This observation reminds us that belonging is about having a relationship to something, and that this occurs at multiple levels. Here, refugee participants identified their relationship to the state as offering some sense of belonging, and the Photovoice exercise offers evidence of their sense of belonging to family and ethnic community. In terms of scale, belonging appears satisfactory in relation to family, household and ethnic community, and to the state. It is the mid-level connections to the wider community that are missing.

This suggests that countries that accept refugees, such as Australia, may need, in addition to the provision of settlement services that provide for material integration, to focus on ways of encouraging a sense of belonging within the wider community. There are a range of forums in which this must play out. In the political sphere, Australia's leadership needs to publicly endorse humanitarian entrants in much more positive ways than it has in the past. At the grassroots level, education and engagement opportunities need to be expanded, building on existing goodwill. This would necessarily involve encouraging mainstream Australians to recognise the fact of Australia's diversity, as well as its value. These two changes would go a significant way to engaging with refugees' desire to belong in a broader sense.

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