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#LetThemStay:
Visual representations of protests and community mobilization for asylum seekers in Australia

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The indefinite mandatory detention on the mainland and in offshore processing centers of asylum seekers applying for protection in Australia is particularly controversial due to the government's notoriously harsh policy. In response, large-scale public protests have been staged across the country in recent years to register popular dissent and convey concerns to decision-makers. However, dominant media representations of protests have historically been largely negative, often cast as ineffectual at best, and at worst, violent clashes that alienate the broader population from the cause in question. This paper outlines a visual analysis of media representations of protests that took place in February 2016 against the proposed deportation of 267 asylum seekers from the Australian mainland as part of the #LetThemStay campaign. Through the analysis of four photographs from a range of media outlets, we found that depicting peaceful protests methods and community mobilization complicated dominant understandings of protests and protesters. Indeed, #LetThemStay demonstrated the political power of compassionate solidarity between participants afforded the privilege of safe residency and citizenship, and those forcibly absent who are denied such rights. As such, the paper highlights the impact of peaceful protesting, while also recognizing its limitations in changing Australia's punitive asylum seeker policies.

Keywords: Asylum Seekers | Offshore processing | Protests | Visual Analysis | Australia

"If I were to remain silent, I'd be guilty of complicity."
— *Albert Einstein*

Over the past year, the world has witnessed a resurgence in protests, ranging from the *Women's March* in the United States following the inauguration of President Donald

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Trump in January 2017, to organized protests calling for the resignation of President Park Geun-hye in South Korea, and of President Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. Protests are a form of community mobilization through which participants and citizens publicly convey their concerns and dissent to decision makers (Battaglini, 2016). The motivation to protest is often based on the belief that such public and collective events can lead to policy shifts or social change (McIntyre, Sevil, & Smith, 2013). Media outlets worldwide extensively broadcast and publish photographs of protests, demonstrations and rallies[1], showing "[p]lacards with slogans, crowded squares, (…) close-ups depicting protesters' feelings, as well as images of violent confrontations between protesters and riot police" (Veneti, 2017, p. 280). Importantly, the choice of media depictions of protests and community mobilization is never accidental (Veneti, 2017). Dominant representations of protests have been used strategically in the media to portray events as fuelled by conflict, with protesters (often constructed as holding extreme political views) creating chaos and disorder requiring police intervention, in ways that can undermine the social movements and delegitimize the issues at the center of protests (Arpan et al., 2006). As a counter-narrative to these dominant representations, this paper examines the significant and well publicized Australian #LetThemStay campaign launched in February 2016. Multiple peak organizations came together to stage large-scale public protests against the Australian Government's asylum seeker policies in multiple cities across the country. We deploy a visual analysis to highlight how this example of *peaceful* community mobilization was effective despite certain limitations. Our discussion of four examples of visual representations linked to #LetThemStay campaign suggests that peaceful protests run counter to media and public assumptions about the nature of protests, and this is one of the key factors that contributed to the campaign being labeled a success. The peaceful protest strategies in the context of #LetThemStay campaign in fact *complicated* dominant understandings of protests and protesters. The discussion in this paper aims to expand our current understandings of community mobilization, particularly in relation to refugee and asylum seeker issues.

Australia's current asylum seeker policies are highly debated in the public domain, particularly in relation to the indefinite mandatory detention of people on the mainland and in other nations in deplorable conditions while their applications for protection are assessed (Lenette, Karan, Chrysostomou, & Athanasopoulos, 2017). The #LetThemStay campaign emerged after refugee activists and concerned citizens protested against the transfer of 267 asylum seekers (including 54 children and 37 babies) from Australia to Manus Island (in Papua New Guinea) and Nauru, which are both offshore processing sites for the Australian Government. The campaign was also triggered by the dismissal of a high court case against the Australian Government questioning the legality of mandatory detention on Nauru in February 2016 (Byrne & Anderson, 2016). Despite the dismissal, significant momentum had gathered, and the #LetThemStay campaign launched on 4 February following the court decision. #LetThemStay organized protests occurred in 12 major cities over two days, attracting thousands of people to pressure the Australian Government to stop the deportation of this group of 267 asylum seekers. The #LetThemStay campaign focused on 'Baby Asha' who was living in detention with her family in Nauru, and was burnt following an accidental hot water spillage. She was flown to Brisbane, Australia for medical treatment; however, doctors refused to release her for transfer back to Nauru based on

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[1] In this paper, we refer mainly to protests but at times use the word rallies and demonstrations to refer to the same sets of events.

moral and ethical grounds. A spontaneous 24/7 community picket emerged outside the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital for 10 days, protesting her deportation (see Bavas, 2016). Following a period of community detention on the Australian mainland, Baby Asha and her family were eventually transferred back to Nauru in June 2016, sparking further protests (Lenette et al., 2017).

We begin by reviewing the literature on how understandings of protests as a form of community mobilization have been constructed, and outline recent examples of protests specifically related to refugee policy on the global scene. We critique how visual representations of protests have perpetuated certain ideas about rallies and demonstrations. Following the outline of our methodology, we provide details on the themes we identified in our four case studies. Our discussion then links these themes to the literature, focusing specifically on how protests convey compassionate human ties and solidarity between participants who are afforded the privilege of safe residency and citizenship, and those absent from the rallies who are denied such rights. We suggest possible areas for future research in our conclusion.

Literature Review

Protests as Community Mobilization

There has been considerable interest in protests as a form of community mobilization particularly in the second half of the 20th century, notably through events that reflect periods of major socio-political change, such as anti-war demonstrations and civil rights movements (Battaglini, 2016; Di Cicco, 2010; Edelman, 2001; Rosenberg and Winkler 2014). In recent times, protest culture has seen a resurgence; collective power has driven major campaigns such as the international *Occupy Movement* (since 2011, to protest against global socioeconomic inequality), the *Arab Spring* (starting in 2010, to demonstrate against restrictive political regimes in several North African and Middle Eastern countries), and *Black Lives Matter* (since 2013, campaigning against racism and violence – particularly police brutality – against African-Americans in the US). Protests can now use digital media for personalized collective action, as in Segerberg and Bennett's (2011, p. 770) analysis of the 2009 G20 London Summit protests during the global financial crisis, where "the more personalized collective action process maintain[ed] high levels of engagement, agenda focus, and network strength". This resurgence testifies to the ongoing commitment of organized or newly formed groups to effect sociopolitical change through 'speaking truth to power'. However, social protests are far from being a modern phenomenon; indeed, people have collectively mobilized against injustice since the days of Ancient Greece and Rome (Clement, 2016), but the means of protesting are changing (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011).

Protests can take a number of forms in response to specificities of differing social, cultural and political contexts, and the myriad social movements that scaffold protest have been theorized in numerous ways (Edelman, 2001; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011). However, our interest in this topic is specifically about how protests have come to be understood in contemporary societies, and how such events are represented particularly in the media. Protests are largely constructed and portrayed as a "public nuisance", where such collective action is positioned as "*bothersome*; *impotent*; and *unpatriotic*", doing little more than disrupting the equilibrium of everyday life (Di Cicco, 2010, p. 137, emphasis in original). In his analysis of mainstream mass media outlets' framing practices in the US in their coverage of the Global Justice Movement, Boykoff (2006)

identified five deprecatory and interlinked frames: Violence, Disruption, Freak, Ignorance, and Amalgam of Grievances; this was not necessarily intentional but influential and damaging all the same.

Concurrently, while protests are often conceptualized as sites of disorder and violence, there has been a shift from "parochial", "defensive" modes of collective mobilization (involving acts of public damage, invasion, and riots), to more recent social movements that have been conceptualized within an explicitly ordered framework as in Segerberg and Bennett's (2011) study. This new trend has emerged "as a challenge to the state that employs a protest repertoire of public meetings, demonstrations, and strikes and that attempts to bargain with established authorities on behalf of its constituency" (Edelman, 2001, p. 296). These elements can be identified in the examples named above (*Occupy Movement, Arab Spring, Women's March* etc.), and as such, protests represent effective strategies for individuals and groups to mobilize and express their concerns and dissent in a (more often than not) visible, collective manner, with the explicit aim of providing support, raising awareness, or demanding change.

Protests against government policies denying basic human rights to asylum seekers – while not new – have grown in number and scale over the last decade, and are often "sustained and linked transnationally" (McGuaran & Hudig, 2014, p. 28). In recent years, protests against anti-refugee policy have taken place across the globe, from Italy and Greece, to Tunisia and Australia. Writing about the European context (the Netherlands and Germany in particular), McGuaran and Hudig (2014, p. 28) assert that "protesters' demands go beyond individualistic claims and target not only national but EU policy"; additionally, "[s]olidarity among the migrant and refugee support groups is strong and well organised and the mainstream media is becoming increasingly sympathetic to their plight". When it comes to protests against the deportation of refugees, research by Rosenberger and Winkler (2014) in Austria shows that personal ties and affective emotions such as friendship and solidarity were named as the main reasons for protesting. However, such affective attachment could also limit the potential for broader policy change, as protests often focus on individual cases (or relatively small groups as in the #LetThemStay campaign) instead of protesting against the general principle of deportation or the policy that created the problematic situation in the first place. Protesters motivated by social ties and affective emotions for individuals or small groups can thus inadvertently undermine potentially more significant impacts on policies that affect many more people (Rosenberg & Winkler, 2014).

Nevertheless, recent evidence counters the notion that protests are simply disruptive events of no consequence. For instance, the impact of a series of rallies in response to President Trump's US 'Muslim Ban' in early 2017 is a case in point, where a shift in public opinion of migrants and refugees has been noted (Collingwood, Lajevardi & Oskooli, 2017). The initial executive order banning the entry of visitors (and initially lawful permanent residents) from seven predominantly Muslim countries in the US for 90 days, and of all refugees for 120 days (indefinitely for Syrian refugees) was signed on 27 January as a measure to prevent acts of terrorism on US soil. Preliminary results from surveys conducted just before and right after Trump's executive order was signed, saw an additional 25 percent of Democrat voters and 15 percent of Republicans oppose the President's action, with 20 percent of all survey participants stating that the protests – many organized at major US airports and landmarks – had an impact on their opinion of the country's immigration policy (Collingwood et al., 2017). The subsequent court case blocking the executive order's implementation was strongly supported by ongoing

community mobilization. The rise of anti-immigration and support for right wing, xenophobic political views cannot be ignored in relation to this topic, given that many protests in relation to refugee policy arise in response to these alarming trends (see McGuaran & Hudig, 2014).

Visual Representations of Protests

A substantial body of research (see, for example, Iyer, Webster, Hornsey, & Vanman, 2014; Brochu, Pearl, Puhl, & Brownell, 2014; Proitz, 2017) indicates that images produced and circulated by the media have powerful impacts on emotional and political responses to the subject being portrayed, and can shape public opinion. Research looking at protests from 1967 to 2007 in the US found that these events are predominantly portrayed negatively (Di Cicco, 2010). As such, there is considerable scholarship on the effect of selection bias in media coverage of protests, which refers to how news outlets carefully select only small sections of protests against, or rallies supporting, different social issues (McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996; McCarthy, Titarenko, McPhail, Rafail, & Augustyn, 2008). In this way, selective representation of events can minimize or delegitimize a cause: for instance, Craig's (2002) analysis of media coverage of protests at the 2000 Melbourne World Economic Forum highlighted how protesters were consistently demonized and ridiculed, with only a small segment of the media debating the issues at the source of the protests. Furthermore, representing a protest or rally as a large gathering, with many people participating and supporting the issue, has a greater effect on shifting public perceptions, compared to when such events are represented as small and 'insignificant' (Craig, 2002; McCarthy et al., 1996; 2008). As a result, protesters may feel they have to adopt radical strategies to achieve their aims of receiving media (and thus public) attention (Boykoff, 2006).

Furthermore, Veneti's (2017) research on Greek photojournalists covering local protests reveals the impact of decisions about what to photograph and present to audiences on such charged events. Interestingly, she notes that while peaceful protests can generate images that focus on the protesters' placards and concerns, the "vibe" of the crowd, and its size, predominantly "it is the images of violence that are the most saleable pictures" (Veneti, 2017, p. 286). What is interesting then is to reflect on how photojournalists are inevitably aware of professional and political expectations about reportage on protests, and particularly of the anticipated reception (and political function) of images that document such events. Photojournalists are arguably predisposed to capturing images of protests, rallies, and demonstrations in ways that conform to these expectations and the focus on the potentially disruptive, violent, and chaotic aspects, so that their images are marketable. And yet, as our ensuing analysis suggests, these images of protest conflict are not necessarily required or celebrated by a jaded public; indeed, visual representations that counter the prevailing narrative surrounding protests have critical impact. Here, we seek to complicate these dominant understandings of protests and protesters by exploring the potential impact of depicting peaceful demonstrations through four examples capturing different aspects of community mobilization. In doing so, we challenge predominantly negative historical narratives of protest convention and significance.

Methodology

This research aimed to examine prominent examples of visual representations of the #LetThemStay campaign in the Australian media in February 2016, by selecting four different photographs documenting these protests. We used purposive sampling to find relevant images on the topic; we conducted a broad Google Images search using "protest" and "Let them stay" as keywords to make out selection. We aimed to select images from diverse news outlets that are known to adhere to different political views; *The Guardian* for instance tends to produce more social justice-oriented, left-wing content, while *Herald Sun* publishes more conservative, right-wing views. Three of the images were published through online media outlets (*Herald Sun, The Guardian,* and *news.com.au*) and one was from a multi-platform, entertainment website (*Mashable*). As such, ethical considerations in terms of informed consent from those being photographed and the possibility of invasion of privacy were minimized, as the images were derived from secondary sources. In our broad images search on the #LetThemStay protests, we did not come across any articles or photographs that indicated that these events had led to public damage, violence, invasion, or riots. In fact, none of the articles we perused described the campaign in a negative light. Furthermore, visual analysis is subjectively fashioned by the photographer and then subjectively examined by researchers (Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008), and so objectivity was not the purpose of our endeavor. Figures 1 to 4 were selected because (i) they portrayed four different and creative strategies of protesting, and (ii) they illustrated the *peaceful* element that characterized the #LetThemStay campaign. We use these four images here as discrete case studies of representations of peaceful protests and community mobilization as a viable, effective tool to bring attention to issues of concern.

The photographs were analyzed using Collier's (2004, p. 40) "open viewing" method to describe the themes apparent in each image; open viewing involves immersion in the photographs to identify the key aspects depicted. The themes from this analysis were then compared and contrasted with the findings of scholarly articles on media representations of protests. Our focus on the visual was not only appropriate given the importance of visual elements or installations in many forms of protest in this campaign and in our sample, but also given that a visual angle constitutes an innovative way of adding to current understandings of how protests are constructed, particularly in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, a topic that is of worldwide concern. Using Collier's (2004) open viewing method, we first looked at each image to describe what we saw in as much detail as possible to inform our discussion. We then considered the contextual elements of each image to deepen our understanding of our initial interpretations of what the photographs might convey to audiences.

Even though the focus of our analysis is on visual representations of the #LetThemStay campaign in media outlets, we also refer briefly to the text of the online articles where the photographs were featured, to determine whether there was congruence between text and images used to illustrate the stories. We did not undertake a thorough critical discourse analysis of the text, given that this was a short-term, unfunded project. However, since we recognize the crucial importance of how words, rhetoric and images are enmeshed and used in the media to shape public opinion, particularly in relation to refugee and asylum seeker issues (see Cooper, Olejniczak, Lenette, & Smedley, 2017), failure to acknowledge the key messages in the text of the

articles would be amiss. We provide a broad assessment of the kind of content prominent in the text in each article featuring the figures below for this purpose.

Analysis

Case Study 1

Figure 1: #LetThemStay protests at Melbourne rally (photograph by David Crosling) *Source:* Travers, B. (2016, February 8). 'Let them stay': Thousands rally in Melbourne to stop refugees being sent back to Nauru. *Herald Sun*.

The first image shows a large group of women and men of different ages (as well as a couple of children) extending into the frame of the photograph. The people depicted are from different ethnic backgrounds, although the vast majority seems to be white Anglo-Saxons. It is not uncommon that images of protests show large gatherings of people, with many iconic imagery including outraged, shouting faces. However, the first point of difference is that the facial expressions of the people in the foreground are predominantly positive, with some looking directly into the camera and smiling, and many lifting up their signs sending a clear message of support for refugees. The peaceful gathering conveys a sense of concerned, active engagement and harmonious solidarity from a diverse group of protesters and citizens. The colorful posters and signs being held up are prominent in the photograph; many bear the words 'Let them stay', as well as photographs of the babies at the center of the protests, providing key contextual information about the purpose of the gathering. Other signs convey broader concerns – though clearly linked to the issues at the center of the protests – through the use of words like 'Racism', 'Refugee', or 'Human'. Figure 1 emphasizes the peaceful tone of the event as an appropriate way of publicly conveying those concerns to decision makers.

The text of the article highlights participants' rationale for being involved in the protest and their concerns surrounding the central issue through the inclusion of direct quotes. One is from a young girl aged 12, stating her reason for participating in the protests: "*They're trying [to] look for a better chance," she said. "It's not their fault, Australia should let them in*." Others quoted were refugee activists speaking about the

horrific conditions in detention facilities where the asylum seekers would be deported: "One day spent in detention is one day too many for a child," he [Save the Children representative] said. Still others emphasized the need to garner support for refugees and asylum seekers by lobbying the Australian Government to show a more compassionate stance towards asylum seekers: "She [Teachers for Refugees representative] encouraged workers from all professions to galvanise support among colleagues."

Case Study 2

Figure 2: Protesters in front of the State Library in Melbourne (Photograph by AAP Image/David Crosling). Source: AAP/News Corp Australia Network. (2016, February 5). Malcolm Turnbull unaware of leaked paper as the government is 'aiming' to get children out of detention. *News.com.au*.

This photograph also depicts peaceful protesting at a #LetThemStay rally, although unlike Figure 1, the majority of people in the frame are identifiable as police officers. However, the presence of several law enforcement representatives does not appear threatening, nor does it convey a sense that the situation is out of control and in need of containment. Nevertheless, as most protesters are sitting on the ground while police officers stand behind them, the framing of the photograph still portrays a reminder of state power ready to be exercised over civilians if deemed necessary. The majority of people sitting beneath the banner are clapping in unison to express their dissent or concern. A large white banner calling for the closure of offshore processing facilities on Manus Island and Nauru and an end to indefinite mandatory detention is prominent and central to the image acting as an apparent divide between protestors and police officers. However, some of the police officers are standing so close to the group of protesters holding up the banner that, despite not touching it, they almost appear to be holding up the banner in solidarity. While a sense of state authority is still evident in this image through the visibility of uniformed law enforcement officials, the peaceful

nature of this protest is clearly conveyed as the dominant theme. In contrast to sharp division between state and citizenry so familiar in dominant representations of protestors and law enforcement, the proximity of the police officers almost augments to the sense of solidarity and coming together.

The first half of the accompanying news article's text reports on an issue that is seemingly not directly related to the #LetThemStay protests, i.e., new parliamentary measures to address terrorist threats through more stringent assessment of asylum seekers. However, it then shifts to report on Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's comments about the proposed deportation of 267 asylum seekers ("*One child in detention is one child too many,*" *Mr Turnbull said "(…)but the key element in doing so is ensuring that people do not get on people smugglers' boats and put their lives at risk."*), followed by the Minister for Immigration Peter Dutton's statements (*Mr Dutton reiterated his intention not to put any child in harm's way. "We have to be compassionate on one hand but we have to be realistic about the threat from people smugglers."*). Of note, the phrase used by Mr Turnbull is very similar to the one uttered by the Save the Children representative in Case Study 1, although a clear point of difference is the immediate justification of harsh policies and 'deterring' people smugglers as integral to the political rhetoric. Their comments come into sharp contrast with reports in the same article on Anglican Dean of Brisbane Peter Catt's offer to give 'sanctuary' to the group of asylum seekers in churches across the country to avoid deportation. This compassionate narrative functions as a peaceful form of institutional resistance and civil disobedience, supported by comments on the increasingly fragile mental health state of asylum seekers from United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights spokesperson, Rupert Colville.

Case Study 3

Figure 3: 37 cribs on Bondi Beach, Sydney (Photograph by Frank Gazzolla)
Source: Lieu, J. (2016, February 12). 37 baby cribs were placed on Bondi Beach in powerful message supporting of asylum seekers. *Mashable Australia*.

In this photograph, 37 cribs (for 37 babies to be deported) were placed on Bondi Beach, an iconic and picturesque location in an affluent part of Sydney, and a very popular tourist destination. Bondi Beach, with its readily recognizable Pavilion in the background, has been photographed countless times. However, this frame reveals a stark reminder that the stunning landmarks of Australia are only to be enjoyed by a privileged few. The cribs offer a unique and powerful representation of babies sleeping peacefully; the scene is pervaded by a sense of innocence that calls attention to the cruelty and absurdity underpinning the Australian Government's asylum seeker policy. The imagined infants lying peacefully in the cribs on the Bondi Beach sand are those deemed too 'dangerous' to be permitted to stay in Australia. This installation stands against the natural landscape, placed in a seemingly incongruous location, yet purposefully erected quite literally at Australia's coastal border. The incomplete campaign hash tag is visible on a small sign to the right-hand side, but the words 'LET THEM STAY' in large print in the foreground are prominent, unmistakably making the purpose of this installation explicit. There are people standing at the back of the cribs, and while one cannot ascertain whether they are protestors or beach-goers, there is no suggestion of this being a chaotic event. In fact, the muted uniformity of the cribs, all the same size and color, is only interrupted by the use of vibrant sheets, generating a sense of peacefully harmony with the natural border. The installation is clever and poignant; the people the installation calls on the Australian Government to remember are the same ones made forcibly absent, and who cannot speak at the protests in their name. There is something equally poignant in representing silent cribs, to encourage those who witness the installation to imagine the babies' ordeal as they await deportation and are forced to live in detention (other images from the article showed cribs with barbed wire wrapped around them to illustrate the harsh conditions faced by babies and children in detention). This image does not include any babies or pictures of them, and so uses a different strategy to Figure 1. As such, this form of protest is disruptive in another way; it is likely that such a large installation would affect the routine of beach-goers and encourage them to think about the purpose. Significantly, the fact that this protest took place at Bondi Beach meant that it was likely to garner wide public interest and media attention in the campaign, as the location is clearly recognizable.

The accompanying news text emphasizes how quickly this installation was put together, yet still attracted 200 participants, showing community mobilization and commitment to the central issue. The organizer was quoted saying, "*We are sending [Australian Prime Minister] Malcolm Turnbull a very clear and visual message that the people of Bondi — the people who vote for him — have spoken, and they want to let them stay.*" This sentence reinforces the status of citizens as protesters and voters of democratically elected leaders in a privileged society. There is a conscious decision to use a large, visual, symbolic strategy to convey the protesters' message to the Prime Minister about dissent on a policy approach that is implemented in their name as citizens who are voters. Their criticism of the harsh government stance is clear, as is their challenge of the Prime Minister's approach, particularly in relation to the plight of babies as innocent victims.

Case study 4

Figure 4: Protesters on Sydney Harbour (Photograph by Greenpeace)
Source: Slezak, M. (2016, February 14) #LetThemStay protest takes to Sydney Harbour in fight for
267 asylum seekers. *The Guardian*.

Similar to Figure 3, this photograph depicts another form of protesting, published approximately 10 days after the campaign began. The installation takes place in front of arguably the two most significant landmarks that symbolize Australia, namely the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Harbour Bridge, on a 'picture perfect' day. By framing the photograph to include these iconic landmarks, the protesters and photographer were possibly highlighting the national nature of the campaign. The protesters sitting on two separate inflatable boats are from non-government and activist organizations *GetUp!*, *ActionAid*, *Amnesty International Australia* and *Greenpeace*. This installation represents a bold protest strategy in terms of using maritime space, which was more than likely to attract public and media attention. The use of boats to place the highly visible #LetThemStay banner in the middle of the harbor seas is also ironically linked to the most polemicized aspect of asylum seeker policy in Australia, given that it is most punitive towards those people who arrive by boat to seek protection, and are then subject to mandatory, indefinite detention. However, the protesters can freely express their opinions as part of the campaign, and have access to resources to 'stage' this protest, in contrast with asylum seekers who face life and death situations on boats, and have their freedoms curtailed out of sight while in detention.

Unlike the Australian Government leaders' statements in Case Study 3, the text here refers to politicians' supportive statements, like the Premier of the state of Queensland, Annastacia Palaszczuk, who opposed the deportation of these asylum seekers and directly challenged the Prime Minister's stance ("*My government stands absolutely ready to look after the people who are due to be sent back to Nauru – we stand ready, willing and able to do that," the premier said. "I call on the prime minister to show some humanity.*"). The article also quotes Queensland's minister for health's support of Brisbane-based clinicians' decision not to be complicit to causing more harm to the

asylum seekers they cared for. The text refers to other protests events (like the one in Case Study 3), highlighting the wide reach of the campaign. While the Australian Government's position is reiterated, the article emphasizes the mobilization of key activist organizations as a collective, and the state politicians' challenge of the Australian Government's stance.

Discussion

The #LetThemStay campaign was labeled a success by organizers and many media outlets, considering that more than half of the 267 asylum seekers at the center of the protests, including all of the 37 babies and their parents, were released into onshore community detention settings within a month (Oriti, 2016). However, the more contentious policies related to offshore processing in Nauru and on Manus Island, namely mandatory and indefinite detention in deplorable conditions, and regional resettlement (i.e., in countries in the Asia Pacific rather than Australia) for asylum seekers who arrived by boat were left unchanged. This is similar to McGuaran and Hudig's (2014) account of the outcomes of protests involving refugees and asylum seekers in the Netherlands in 2012-13, whose claims for protection were denied; while some successes emerged as a result of community mobilization, the refugee policy itself remained fundamentally unchallenged. As research from Austria by Rosenberg and Winkler suggests, focus on individual cases of deportation can lead to "short-lived responses to events (…) bound to specific situations and might decrease or even vanish in the absence of the original trigger" (2014, p. 180). In addition, Rosenberg and Winkler (2014) found that protesters motivated by affective emotions, such as friendship and solidarity towards individual cases potentially limit the impact and scope of protests to boarder refugee policy issues. Despite the presence of #LetThemStay campaign-related news in the Australian and international media for approximately two weeks, and the strong focus on the plight of Baby Asha in particular, the impetus created and the attention garnered fell short of pressuring the Australian Government to change some of the more detrimental and scrutinized aspects of its asylum seeker policies. In fact, it is possible that the focus on the small group of 267 people at risk of being deported, and the overwhelming focus on children and babies as vulnerable or innocent victims of government policy (to the detriment of adults who may be positioned as unworthy of sympathy), may have undermined the potential for the protests to have a much broader impact on other relevant policies and on public opinion (see, for example, Di Cicco, 2010; Rosenberg and Winkler, 2014). This is difficult to establish based solely on our visual analysis, but it is worth noting the similarities with the Dutch and Austrian context for example, in terms of limited policy change.

'Belonging by proxy'

The most significant aspect that emerged from our brief analysis relates to citizens protesting in their own name but also *on behalf of* those not given the right to settle in Australia. As such, a sense of 'belonging by proxy' was created through this campaign. The strategies outlined in the case studies demonstrate protesters' compassionate and humane stance on the issue of asylum seeking (and deportation), and solidarity between those privileged with the safety of residency and citizenship who can express their concerns and dissent, and those absent from the rallies precisely because they are denied those rights. While it is "important that those primarily affected by government policies

[stand] up to oppose them and, by so doing, [are] able to mobilise widespread public support" (McGuaran & Hudig, 2014, p. 30), it may not always be in the best interest of asylum seekers to participate in such protests (peaceful or otherwise) if there was any risk that their visa assessment or their wellbeing might be compromised. In one example from Germany, asylum seekers were fined for acts of civil disobedience as forms of protest against their circumstances (McGuaran & Hudig, 2014). In the Australian context, reports of adult asylum seekers going on hunger strikes, sewing their lips together[2], or resorting to self immolation[3] as a way to protest their circumstances and express their despair abound, but these tragic incidents only seem to reinforce the negative perceptions and political discourse about detained asylum seekers – in addition to harming their health and wellbeing – in ways that focusing on children does not (see Lenette et al., 2017). Still, the idea that citizens and residents participate in protests to express their own opinions but also on behalf of non-citizens or non-residents represents an alternative that may be more effective, and at the very least, be more likely to receive positive attention. For refugees and asylum seekers at the center of those protests, this sense of 'belonging by proxy', while it may not resolve many aspects of their precarious situations, could have a major impact on their wellbeing and sense of hope for the future. This notion supports McGuaran and Hudig's (2014, p. 28) claim that many protesters' motivations and "demands go beyond individualistic claims".

Importantly, absent figures in the case studies above, i.e., asylum seekers at risk of deportation and children and babies in particular, play equally important roles, even though citizens-as-protesters still hold the privilege to express dissent, in ways that asylum seekers in such precarious situations could not. In Case Study 1 for instance, photographs of babies at risk of deportation make them present albeit in an indirect way at the rally as a reminder of the significance of the campaign. Conversely, in Case Study 3, the representation of babies is figurative, i.e., through the empty cribs installation, and is equally effective. Community mobilization can thus be expressed in many different forms on behalf of those who are absent from the event, and still have an impact, not only on the broader public but also on those at the center of the protests, i.e. through 'belonging by proxy'. The 'investment' of protesters, motivated by concerns of social ties, human relationships, and rights to find the best ways to convey their distress and dissent was essential to the #LetThemStay campaign's success. This element of expressing a strong sense of humanity, compassion, and even outrage becomes all the more relevant following the tragic deaths of asylum seekers while in detention (see for instance Cooper et al., 2017; McGuaran & Hudig, 2014). Arguably, the focus on children and babies had a major impact on mobilizing the community and triggering sympathy among a broader audience, given the abundance of evidence about the detrimental impact of detention on youngsters (see Lenette et al., 2017). This is a strength, but also a limitation in terms of possibilities for more fundamental policy change, given that the plight of adults is essentially erased when juxtaposed with the vulnerability and innocence usually symbolized by children.

Some additional points are also worth pointing out here. Interestingly, as mentioned above, stories on the #LetThemStay protests were consistent in framing the positive and peaceful elements of the rallies, which may be due to the overwhelming focus on

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[2] See news article: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2915818/Two-thirds-people-Manus-Island-detention-centre-hunger-strike-plans-resettle-Papua-New-Guinea-14-asylum-seekers-sewing-lips-together.html

[3] See Lucy Fiske's (2016) article for more details: https://theconversation.com/self-immolation-incidents-on-nauru-are-acts-of-hopeful-despair-58791

children and babies. Nevertheless, this approach explicitly challenges the general trends in studies of media depictions of protests as chaotic, violent, and out of control scenarios, especially given the idea that images of violence have more currency (Veneti, 2017). While this may be true in many cases, the examples discussed above revealed how depictions of peaceful protests and creative campaign strategies could be equally impactful and counter the 'out of control' assumption generally attached to protests; such images were therefore more likely to reach public consciousness. This was the case even when heavy police presence was evident (Case Study 2) and thus contradicts the common perception that protests are inevitably full of conflict. Portraying the #LetThemStay rallies in a relative positive light would likely have had a greater impact and encouraged people to consider the issues at stake more carefully, rather than casting the protests off as chaotic events fuelled by violence. Hence, the peaceful nature of the #LetThemStay protests complicated dominant understandings of protests and protesters.

The #LetThemStay hash tag itself became a *leitmotiv* for the protests and rallies in different locations, and signifies a novel way of engaging in public dissent using social media vernacular (similar to the #BlackLivesMatter or the #BringBackOurGirls hash tags that became recognizable around the world within days if not hours). The thriving relationship between public protests and social media is the focus of a growing body of research (see, for example, Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Trottier & Fuchs, 2015; Mattoni & Treré, 2014), opening up interdisciplinary discussions on the role of digital media to effect social change. For instance, Mattoni and Treré, (2014, p. 265) suggest "a move beyond a conception of media as mere social (and political) actors by looking at media also as technologies that might be appropriated and transformed by activists", as was illustrated in our case studies. Thus, the #LetThemStay campaign deftly employed a strong online presence in addition to public and visible strategies to gather momentum across the country.

In terms of congruence between reportage text and image, it is clear that visuals "do not merely supplement news" (Veneti, 2017, p. 1) but are integral to how public opinion is shaped by media articles. The diverse online media and entertainment websites in the case studies target different demographics and are likely to shape public opinion on the issue across audiences, as explored in previous research (Cooper et al., 2017; Veneti, 2017). While it was not possible to undertake a thorough critical discourse analysis of the text accompanying the four figures, the case studies still reveal some interesting links between images and text. In most cases, there is congruence between the messages in the visual depictions and the articles, i.e., support for the cause at the center of the protests. However, Case Study 2 presents an interesting juxtaposition between terrorist-related content, which, when associated with asylum seekers, has been shown to be particularly detrimental and misleading (see, for example, Grillo, 2005). Because of this focus on the Australian Government's stance in the article's text, a number of photographs depicting politicians were used, creating another important contrast with images of peaceful protests. The overall message of the articles remained supportive of the campaign, since there were no violent or chaotic events to report on. In sharp contrast, media articles reporting on the death of 23-year old asylum seeker Reza Berati during 'riots' on Manus Island in February 2014 emphasized infrastructure damage and violence attributed to asylum seekers, essentially eclipsing the circumstances leading to the tragic murder of this young man (Cooper et al., 2017).

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper challenges typical understandings of protests as rowdy crowds of people needing containment, to reveal more nuanced understandings of protests and protesters. Research on community mobilization through protests and rallies in Australia, is certainly limited despite the prevalence of such events and their representations in media outlets, and so we suggest some areas for future research. First, more in-depth exploration could uncover how maintaining momentum in the media on a particular issue can lead to positive outcomes, while also reflecting on what happens more generally after protests on a particular topic end and media attention turns to another issue. Second, future research could explore the role of images used in the media to support the cause of protesters, and how the diversity of protesters depicted impact such portrayals. This could include understanding the media practices that protesters use before, during, and after their mobilization (Mattoni & Treré, 2014). Third, we noted that acts of civil disobedience (such as churches offering safe havens, and doctors refusing to release Baby Asha) and creative campaigning methods (such as the cribs installation on Bondi Beach) were used as part of the #LetThemStay campaign; future research could consider how these forms of protest impact public opinion and policy outcomes, and how they relate to more visible forms of protests like rallies. Fourth, an interesting aspect that deserves more attention is how focusing on a particular group of people, or a particular aspect of contentious issues can actually undermine the potential for broader policy impact and social change (Di Cicco, 2010; Rosenberger & Winkler, 2014) – as was arguably the case here. An innovative angle would be to determine whether focusing on children and babies in fact erases the plight of adults in the same situations, due to assumptions of innocence and victimhood attached to children. Finally, it would also be essential to research the potential impact protests can have on shifting policy directions and on public opinion on refugees and asylum seekers specifically in much more depth using mixed-methods approaches.

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