Refugee advocacy and the theatre of inclusion

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About Performance

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Between July 1999 and December 2001, approximately 9500 asylum seekers arrived on Australia's shores seeking sanctuary and protection. This most recent wave of asylum seekers to Australia consisted mainly of Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians, and has been referred to as the 'fourth wave' of asylum seekers to arrive in Australia by boat. Following the much publicised events of 2000 and 2001 such as the *Tampa*, the Children Overboard affair, the sinking of the SIEV X, and the riots and hunger-strikes in Australian detention centres, a plethora of groups sprang up in Australia opposing the government's exclusionary policies. Historian Klaus Neumann argues that while a hardline approach towards refugees historically enjoyed bipartisan support in Australia, what was unprecedented was "the willingness of many ordinary Australians in the last few years to assist refugees and asylum seekers" (2004, 113). By 2002, thousands of Australians had signed up for a 'civil disobedience register' and provided funds for the establishment of a national organisation campaigning for a 'just refugee program' otherwise known as A Just Australia (Mares 2002, 257). This mobilisation of people at the community level involved the emergence of various groups and organisations providing various kinds of practical support to asylum seekers and refugees. This included the provision of settlement and accommodation support, legal aid, English language classes and health services. This mobilisation was not only concerned with raising awareness about refugee issues in the community, but was also involved in lobbying government for legislative change. As Lucy Fiske notes, the systematic government-driven policies of exclusion from above, stand in stark contrast to an equally determined push for inclusion from below, with "an unprecedented rise in community grass roots practices of including and welcoming refugees" (2006, 221).

This article investigates the place that the theatre holds in relation to the wider social movement of refugee advocacy in Australia. It examines the various kinds of interventions in support of asylum seekers emerging at the intersection between the theatre, the community, and refugee advocacy in Australia. What strategies of inclusion and participation do community theatre events involve? And in what ways do community theatre events seek to include those who have been excluded by the Australian authorities?

Authors David Watt and Graham Pitts identify a common feature of community theatre, noting that community theatre projects share certain methodologies which tend toward the conversion of a passive 'audience' into active 'participants'. They argue that "this conversion happens over a spectrum ranging between the poles of theatre *for* a specific community to theatre *with* a specific community" (1991, 123). The isolation of asylum seekers through mandatory detention and the conditions of temporary protection has meant that the majority of theatre engaging with the asylum issue involves a community of activists and supporters rather than refugees themselves (McCallum 2006, 136). As such, most of the community theatre engaging with the asylum issue can be situated as theatre *for* asylum seekers, involving the development and performance of work by professional artists for a community composed of a mixture of refugees, refugee advocates, and Australian citizens opposed to the government's asylum policies. Nevertheless, with its underlying radical political motivations, its focus on participation and cultural pluralism, and its imperatives to speak for and with marginalised communities, community theatre appears particularly well suited to the task of engaging with the experiences of asylum seekers.

This article discusses examples of theatre *for* and theatre *with* asylum seekers, paying particular attention to the various strategies enacted in performance to position audiences as active participants. In an effort to develop a more nuanced analysis, the range of audience participation strategies that these theatre works employ will be compared with the kinds of engagement emerging within the wider refugee advocacy movement. James Goodman argues that the refugee advocacy movement wavers between what he calls 'borderless cosmopolitanism' and 'reconstituted nationalism' (2003, 1). Goodman argues that the reconstituted nationalism position is marked by solidarity action 'for' refugees and is an approach that appeals to humanitarian values in order to assert the inclusivity of the Australian nation. In contrast, the borderless cosmopolitan position rejects the legitimacy of the nation to exclude or include others and is geared towards the cosmopolitan aspiration of 'breaking the borders' between 'us' and 'them'. While national refugee solidarity expresses a humanitarian vision and a faith in the inclusivity of the nation, the globalist refugee solidarity position prioritises human rights by appealing to a sense of common humanity and is marked by solidarity action 'with' rather than 'for' refugees (ibid. 5-7). While the two approaches identified by Goodman are not mutually exclusive binary positions, they nevertheless offer a useful framework which reflects the diverging views among advocates and commentators on how best to mount a case for the support of asylum seekers, with those who insist upon the efficacy of humanitarian arguments (Dauvergne 2000) and those who prioritise human rights and Australia's obligations under international law (S. Taylor 2001).

One of the earliest examples of theatre *with* asylum seekers was staged by Urban Theatre Projects (UTP), a professional company specialising in creating theatre work with and for marginalised communities of western Sydney. *Asylum* premiered as a free community event on 31 May 2001 in a small disused wallpaper shop in the western Sydney suburb of Lidcombe. UTP enlisted the support of four community agencies as partners and collaborators on the project, including The Sisters of Mercy Refugee Service, The Refugee Council of Australia, the Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, and the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre (Talbot et al. 2001, 3). These networks helped to establish contacts and generate support in the local community, assisting the company in eventually recruiting four asylum seekers willing to be involved in the project. The documentary theatre production was directed by Claudia Chidiac with dramaturgy by Khoa Do, and featured the Australian actor Anna Nguyen along with the refugee/performers Sepideh Fallah, Nahro Saaid, Cyrus Sarang and Angel Boudjbiha.

Audiences arriving at the performance space were greeted by two actors in the role of border guards. The guards were positioned behind raised platforms so as to gaze down on the audience lining up to enter the performance space. The two actors speak in foreign tongues, Kurdish and Farsi, yet it is the audience that are made to feel like foreigners. Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Stephen Dunne provides an account of how an audience member might have been greeted upon entering the performance space:

> ...on the floor there is a white line you cannot cross, except with the permission of two gatekeepers who stand above the crowd. They ask questions, but not in a language you speak. As they aggressively hurl inquiries at you, inquiries you cannot understand, you nod, or smile, or try to explain that you want to get in. Some people are instantly admitted, some are dismissed with a wave of a hand, sent to the back of the queue. (Dunne 2001)

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins note that while theatre audiences necessarily gaze at a spectacle onstage, implicated in that action of watching theatre is "an authoritarian gaze of watching *over* others" (1996, 248). In *Asylum*, the processing by the border guards gazing down on the audience appears to be an explicit attempt to disrupt the authoritarian gaze of the audience which could potentially maintain the asylum seeker performers "in a position of subservience" (ibid.). The inversion of power relations between the asylum seekers and the audience continues into the performance space, where the audience are ushered into seating banks positioned behind two-metre high fencing. As the last audience member is admitted, two actors carry in and affix the last section of fencing, literally caging the audience into their seats (Chidiac et al. 2001).

By staging an inversion in the power relations between the refugees and the audience, the audience participation in *Asylum* resembles the various solidarity actions emerging from the cosmopolitan 'no borders' position in the refugee

advocacy movement. For Goodman, such a position asserts no essential distinction between 'us' and 'them', and denies 'our' right to exclude others (2003, 8). The border guards, the checkpoint, and the caging of the audience in *Asylum* temporarily invert the positions of 'us' and 'them', 'refugee' and 'citizen', effectively illustrating the often arbitrary power relations involved in exercising the right to exclude 'others'.

Audience participation in *Asylum* is also engendered through the documentary nature of the production. The majority of the scenes in *Asylum* involve direct address to the audience with the performers relating the events that led to their arrival in Australia. In the performance, the Iranian performer Cyrus Sarang recounts his traumatic experiences of fleeing Iran, living in fear for his life in India, and finally his treatment at the hands of the authorities on his arrival in Australia. By re-telling his own story in direct address, the performance strives to situate the audience as active participants. As Paul Makeham explains:

> The telling of real stories directly to the audience serves always to remind that the play is not merely an artefact, produced by a group of professional specialists to be passively consumed as 'Art'. Rather, performance of the text directly engages and includes its audience as participants in an exchange, thereby enhancing the play's potential for social effect. (1998, 168)

Derek Paget explains that in documentary theatre, if events or issues are to be articulated on stage in something approaching their full complexity, a 'presentational mode is required' one which subordinates "the role of feeling in a process committed to understanding rather than emoting"(1990, 43-62). For Paget, the acting style deployed in documentary theatre is a presentational approach pioneered by Meyerhold, Brecht, and Piscator. With Sarang's testimony, however, the emphasis on a dispassionate presentational style of acting characteristic of documentary theatre gives way to one that is emotive and urgent. Indeed, Sarang's address reaches a climax when a voice from the wings asks: "do you have any proof?" To which Sarang angrily responds: "what more can I give you. I am standing right in front of you. I am your proof." But what is particularly intriguing about this segment is that a moment later the actor lets out a piercing scream and launches into a series of choreographed martial arts movements (Chidiac et al. 2001).

Goodman describes how the cosmopolitan 'no borders' position within the refugee advocacy movement is marked by a celebration of a 'disobedient' refugee identity. Goodman suggests that this is an identity which refuses state oppression and insists on the right to move across borders in the name of common humanity. Highlighting forms of 'uncivil' protest, the 'no borders' approach manifests a personification of 'unruly cosmopolitanism' and an 'un-subjugated humanity' (Goodman 2003, 7). The urgent and emotive delivery of Sarang's testimony and the subsequent lapse into the intimidating martial arts movements stages a celebration of defiance in the face of refusal and rejection. In this way the sequence

stages a clear non-compliance with audience expectations, with Sarang adopting an 'unruly' and 'disobedient' subject position.

An early example of theatre *for* asylum seekers was presented by the Melbourne Workers Theatre (MWT) in collaboration with Platform 27. *The Waiting Room* premiered on 15 May 2002 at Melbourne's Trades Hall. The group-devised project was directed by Richard Lagarto and involved the actors Wahibi Moussa, Steve Mouzakis and Valerie Berry. Research for the production began while Lagarto was employed as a temporary project coordinator on UTP's *Asylum*, and involved visits to detention centres and interviews conducted with former detainees, lawyers, and social workers (Barclay 2002; D'Cruz 2007b, 170).

The performance includes moments of agitprop satire depicting Australian government ministers and public relations officials, dressed in white 'Ku Klux Klan' masks attempting to formulate policies that will serve as deterrents against the perceived threat of asylum seekers. The outwardly racist depiction of government ministers in these segments may be situated as a critique of the impact of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party with its anti-Asian and anti-immigration agenda on the formulation of the government's exclusionary policies towards asylum seekers and the subsequent revision of Australia as a tolerant multicultural society (Manne and Corlett 2004, 31-32).

Lagarto explained that the performance was an attempt to show "the truth about what was happening behind the razor wire and media white-wash and suggest that the responsibility to change it or leave it lay with all of us" (D'Cruz 2007b, 173). In *The Waiting Room* a direct appeal to the responsibility of the audience is made in the final scene of the play in which a detainee (Wahibi Moussa) is locked up in a large cage onstage. A 'Big Brother' style voice delivers a speech instructing the prisoner to find two people in the audience willing to take her place (D'Cruz 2007a, 168). After volunteers from the audience are locked into the cage, the key to the lock is suspended from a wire hanging from the ceiling, and the imprisoned audience members are left to the mercy of the remaining spectators. The performance concludes only after the volunteers are freed from their imprisonment by the remaining audience, at which point the performers re-enter the stage to accompany the audience in rapturous and congratulatory applause (Lagarto et al. 2002).

A number of reviewers made the point that the production and the audience participation lacked political impact because it 'preached to the converted' (Gallasch 2002; Prior 2002; Thomson 2002a). David Schlossman challenges the critique of preaching to the converted, so often made of political theatre, arguing that even if one accepts that the audience of political performance tends to already share the views of the performer, overtly political performance plays a crucial role in forging commitment within that community (2002, 29). D'Cruz insists that

the play highlighted the fact that "it is sometimes necessary to speak on behalf of those who lack a public voice" (2005, 216). As Andrew Shaw commented in his review of the play, "Yes it's a message play, but it's a message the detainees can't deliver in person" (2002).

While accepting that advocates are often faced with the imperative of speaking on behalf of others, a more nuanced analysis of the reservations about the audience participation in *The Waiting Room* can be usefully explored by comparing the performance to the kind of solidarity actions emerging from the 'reconstituted nationalism' position of the wider refugee advocacy movement. As theatre staged *for* asylum seekers, the audience participation in *The Waiting Room* resembles the kind of solidarity actions described by Goodman which appeal to humanitarian aspirations in order to reassert the inclusivity of Australian national identity (2003, 5). A critique of such a position highlights the liberal notions of sympathy and charity underlying humanitarian responses. As Savitri Taylor argues, such a position is contingent on the privileged position of the giver, for like charity, humanitarian responses are "something that may be given or withheld depending upon the perceived worthiness of the supplicant and the perceived cost to the giver" (2001, 195). Taylor argues that by employing sympathetic frames of reference, humanitarian responses to asylum seekers often work simply to affirm Australia's own self image as being compassionate and generous to others (ibid. 194). Damian Grenfell and Anna Trembath argue that the national solidarity position is problematic in that "it runs the danger of leading to a focus on how we, as non-refugees, relate to Australia, rather than primarily focusing upon the conditions of refugees in detention" (2003, 10). As an example of theatre for asylum seekers, MWT's *The Waiting Room* unintentionally falls into the trap of replicating this problem. By making the audience participation the centrepiece of the play, the production inadvertently threatens to overshadow the conditions of detention that the play sets out to expose. Moreover, in contrast to the xenophobic and explicitly racist version of Australia enacted through the satirical depiction of Australian diplomats and ministers as Ku Klux Klansmen, the production offers audiences a deliberate invitation to enact the spirit of inclusivity. The audience participation, and the rapturous applause that accompanies the freeing of the audience volunteers at the end of the performance, in many ways resembles a self-congratulatory display of liberal tolerance, allowing audiences to re-affirm the Australian self image as a tolerant and accepting nation.

The previous two case studies provide useful examples of the divergent approaches in refugee advocacy. They also highlight how the presence or absence of asylum seeker performers in theatre events might produce subtle but important differences in the kinds of engagement that theatre productions can potentially engender. However, while Goodman identifies a bifurcation in the refugee solidarity movement between nationalist and globalist approaches, he also points

out that despite their differences "the two approaches are also complementary, offering alternative possibilities for dialogue, consciousness, and action" (2003, 9). He suggests that "taken together, the two strands of refugee solidarity constitute a political community that is embedded in national frameworks but paradoxically reaches out beyond them..." (ibid. 10). Goodman's comments point to the possibility of reconciling the divergent views and approaches of theatre makers, advocates, and activists within the refugee solidarity movement. The next section discusses another important example of theatre *with* asylum seekers by attempting to illustrate how globalist and nationalist approaches within refugee advocacy might usefully converge.

Kan Yama Kan premiered at Trades Hall in Melbourne on 18 July 2002. The production was presented by The Fitzroy Learning Network (FLN), a migrant and community resource centre based in Melbourne that offers support services to asylum seekers released into the community on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs). The TPV was a central feature of the Howard government's exclusionary policies, and provided that asylum seekers whose claims for protection were approved would be issued with three-year protection visas instead of permanent residency. The policy stipulated that after the three-year term of the visa expired, applicants would be required to re-apply for protection. Moreover, asylum seekers on TPVs wishing to visit family and relatives would have no right of return should they leave Australia, and would have no right to sponsor family members left behind in their countries of origin. The TPV conferred considerably fewer rights to refugees than those awarded permanent residency. TPV holders had no right to settlement support services, no access to English language classes or interpreter services, and had limited access to mainstream social welfare assistance such as health care and income support (Mansouri 2002; Schloenhardt 2002; J. Taylor 2004). As Lucy Fiske suggests, "the granting of temporary protection with such limited rights serves to further exclude people politically, socially and economically from society" (2006, 221). FLN programs were designed to ensure that refugees and TPV holders develop the skills and connections they need to participate fully in the community. The Network links refugees and TPV holders to other community services including health centres, schools, employment agencies and legal representation.[1] The FLN carries out an important function of ensuring that TPV holders are accepted as part of the local community.

As mentioned above, a principal feature of the TPV is that asylum seekers are required to re-submit applications for further protection every three years. This may help to explain the disproportionate number of theatre productions staged *for* rather than *with* asylum seekers. The refugees recruited to be involved in *Kan Yama Kan* expressed a real concern that their involvement might jeopardise their

1 Refer to the FLN website: http://www.fitzroylearningnetwork.org.au

future chances of reapplying for protection. Director Robin Laurie explained that in devising the production, "there were quite a few people who were afraid to speak because they were worried it would be held against them when their status was being decided. So we brought actors in to help" (Kleinman 2002). The collaborative project involved a team of professional actors and writers working with a group of eleven asylum seekers who were recruited through the free English lessons offered at the centre (Irwin 2002). The cast of eleven asylum seekers were supported onstage by the professional actors Alice Garner, Majid Shoukor and Lisa Maza. The asylum seekers contributed their own stories to the production which were worked into a script by a team of writers including Arnold Zable, Carmel Davies, Ramez Tabit and Jo McIntyre (Ball 2002). Workshopping and talking with the refugees, the team of writers determined which stories the refugees were prepared to tell and how to do so safely (Kiraly 2004).

The performance opens with Shoukor greeting the audience in Arabic, with his greeting translated by his co-narrator Garner. The two actors position themselves firmly within the performance mode of storytellers, asking the audience if they are ready for the evening to begin. The remaining actors coax the audience into responding, setting up the kind of dialogical interaction and audience participation that will characterize the unfolding play. The play is loosely modelled around the theme of the 1001 Arabian Nights, with each of the refugee/actors entering the performance space to recount part of their journey to Australia, their experiences in Australian detention or the challenges they face living in the community on TPVs. Importantly, like UTP's *Asylum*, the play utilises the real stories of asylum seekers in direct address to the audience. This serves to engage and include the audience as 'participants in an exchange' (Makeham 1998, 168).

The effectiveness of the performers' testimonies is enhanced simply because there is little attempt to present polished performances. The actors struggle not only to remember their lines, but also to remember the English translations of their own stories; the alien English words for the pain and the suffering that they know all too well. Moreover, the fact that the majority of the refugee actors are generally untrained in the 'method' of psychological realism, keeps them from 'disappearing' into the characters that they play. Sonja Kuftinec identifies this as a common phenomenon in community theatre in which community actors, through their lack of experience and their physical and emotional awkwardness, present as both actor *and* character, as community member *and* artist (1996, 101). The direct address by the untrained refugee/actors in *Kan Yama Kan* highlights the position of the refugee participants as both actors *and* members of the wider community.

The performance ends with a musical number in which the entire ensemble congregate onstage and invite the audience to join in by clapping or singing along

to the music (Laurie et al. 2002). The participation that the cast attempts to elicit from the audience is evoked as a celebration of a shared and common humanity. In this way *Kan Yama Kan* resembles the various solidarity actions emerging from the cosmopolitan 'no borders position' in the refugee advocacy movement which asserts no essential distinction between 'us' and 'them' (Goodman 2003, 8). The assertion of a common humanity within globalist refugee solidarity reflects the underlying principle of universality foundational to human rights discourse which recognises that "all human beings are of inherent and equal worth" (S. Taylor, 195). Unlike citizen rights which are derived from membership of a nation state and are thus contingent on nationality, human rights are derived from a belief in a common humanity, regardless of social markers such as race, religion, gender or educational status (Fiske 2006, 222-23).

The universality underlying human rights discourse has been criticised by cultural relativists for eliding important differences between cultures and for imposing 'Western' cultural standards that privilege notions of individuality (see Bhabha 2002; Donnelly 1984). Yet as Lucy Fiske and Jim Ife argue, universality does not necessarily enforce 'sameness', rather it is a principle that enshrines the essential worth of every human being while allowing for and even encouraging cultural and religious diversity (2006, 302). In *Kan Yama Kan*, the dialogical interaction with the audience, the documentary form of the production and the use of direct address by the untrained actors, all work to engage audience participation in order to evoke a celebration of common humanity. Yet this celebration does not elide the important differences between the audience and the refugee participants, rather it works to highlight the conditions of the TPV and the limited rights that the visa category entails which work to exclude refugees from society.

Kan Yama Kan sold out before the run even began. Part of this success may be that the performance offered audiences the chance not only to hear the experiences of asylum seekers, but also the opportunity of meeting in person a handful of the 'others' politically demonised by the government (Thomson 2002b). Indeed the kind of community interaction and personal contact with asylum seekers integral to the production is an important aspect of FLN's overall strategy in refugee advocacy. Anne Horrigan-Dixon, the coordinator of the FLN, describes the facilitation of direct communication between refugees and the wider public as the most effective form of advocacy, arguing that "it changes people, and gives a personal face to the issue" (2005). Horrigan-Dixon argues that close to 2000 audience members attended the original production of *Kan Yama Kan* and those 2000 individuals went on to become 'grass-roots activists' (ibid.).

The ability of *Kan Yama Kan* to facilitate personal interaction between asylum seekers and the wider Australian community may in part reflect the decision to include the production as part of a larger campaign which was toured to Canberra

in November 2003, where the performance was staged in the Parliament House Theatrette. The 'Refugees Say Thank You Australia' campaign involved some fifty TPV holders, some of whom met with Ministers in an effort to highlight the difficulties they endure as a result of their temporary protection status (Pountney 2003).

Sean Scalmer notes how in increasingly media influenced contexts, activists face increasing challenges in attempting to publicise events and causes in order to mobilise support (2002, 41). The decision to include *Kan Yama Kan* as part of a larger activist campaign may reflect a sophisticated understanding and appreciation of the theatre as a useful publicity tool in gaining media exposure in order to mobilise support to influence government policy. Within the wider refugee advocacy movement, advocates have been criticised for being 'reactive rather than proactive' in their efforts to counter the refugee stereotypes propagated by the government (Phillips 2000). In contrast to government propaganda labelling asylum seekers as 'queue-jumpers' and 'illegals' and situating them as undeserving of Australian compassion, Neumann argues that refugee advocates have focused on assuring the public that refugees are "essentially good people" and that "they would be able to make a valuable contribution to Australia" (2006, 10). Savitri Taylor argues that refugee stories told with the intent of tapping into these existing humanitarian and economic frames of reference are ineffective, since they simply work to either confirm our own compassion or appeal to our economic self-interest (2001, 198). Melissa Philips argues that refugee advocates require media training in order to be able to state a case effectively for support of refugees and asylum seekers without reinforcing stereotypes that label them as victims, as needy recipients of welfare payments, or as a burden on society (2000). Savitri Taylor argues that instead of resorting to the language of humanitarianism, advocates should instead make 'a serious effort to introduce the language of human rights into public discourse about asylum seeker issues' (2001, 197).

Horrigan-Dixon concedes that in the early days of the refugee social movement, refugee advocates suffered from a lack of media training; "we didn't have 'key messages' as the PR people call them and there was no strategic thinking about how to tackle the issue' (2006). She explains that "when we took the 'Refugees Say Thankyou Australia' campaign to Canberra we had a strategic media leader... and we employed a PR agency to develop our key messages and assist with stories in the media" (ibid). According to Horrigan-Dixon the campaign "succeeded very well as we had good coverage across the whole of Australia, including regional and rural Australia" (ibid).

While on the surface the 'Thank You' campaign can be seen to appeal to certain humanitarian aspirations by appearing to situate asylum seekers as both worthy and grateful recipients of Australian 'generosity', beneath the surface

the campaign served the important function of emphasising the human rights of TPV holders and reminding government ministers and the public at large of Australia's obligations under international law. The TPV holders who met with ministers emphasised their right to housing, education and health services; rights effectively denied them under the conditions of the TPV. Moreover, the thrust of the campaign's focus was to emphasise Australia's obligation under the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees not to 'refouler' or deport refugees to their countries of origin once the three-year term of their visas had expired. In many ways the 'Thank You' campaign appeals to immediate humanitarian concerns while emphasising the longer term priority of human rights.

The example of *Kan Yama Kan* highlights how community theatre interventions in refugee advocacy combine a commitment to local community action and participation while maintaining a global perspective and a concern for human rights. This is theatre that can be usefully conceived as thinking globally while acting locally, and it is a feature that characterises the kind of theatre interventions that other refugee advocacy groups have initiated such as Children out of Detention (ChilOut), Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), and Actors for Refugees (AFR). In providing advocacy and support for asylum seekers, all these groups share similarities in their theatre-related initiatives, organisation, and operation. They represent a 'new breed' of non-governmental agencies with a reliance on a network of individuals and informal alliances (Stubbs 2004, 90). This informal organisation is typical of many new social movements, being characterised by what David Graeber calls 'horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralised, non-hierarchical consensus democracy' (2002, 70). The final section of this article briefly examines the kind of theatre-related activities that these groups have initiated and have been involved in.

Children out of Detention (ChilOut) is a group of parents and citizens opposed to the mandatory detention of children in Australian immigration detention centres. Since its inception the group has grown to include over two thousand members (Stubbs 2004, 90). Throughout its development the group has sought to counter the federal government's policies on asylum seekers through various means, by holding 'information nights', helping to set up 'community action groups', and assisting members to lobby their Federal MPs to ensure that the issue of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers 'is kept before the public' (Hiles 2007a, 167). In its aim to publicise the treatment of asylum seekers in detention the group has played a vital role in facilitating and supporting several theatre interventions.

One of ChilOut's most successful initiatives was the establishment of a visitors programme, which gave 'ordinary' Australians the opportunity to visit the

Villawood detention centre to get to know the detainees imprisoned within (Hiles 2007a, 166). Through this programme ChilOut was able to introduce theatre makers such as Linda Jaivin, Ros Horin and Nigel Jamieson to asylum seekers in detention, forging connections and friendships that would go on to inspire several important theatre productions such as *Halal-el-Mashakel* (2003), *Through the Wire* (2004), and *In our Name* (2004) (Hiles 2007b).

Through the ChilOut visitor programme, playwright Linda Jaivin began making visits to the Villawood detention centre in November 2001 with the intention of conducting research for a play about asylum seekers (Crawford 2003). While visiting the centre, Jaivin met eighteen-year-old Iranian Morteza Poovadi who arrived in Australia seeking asylum at the age of sixteen. Poovadi spent four years in detention, shuttled between Woomera, Villawood and Port Hedland detention centres (Kerr 2004). Eventually Jaivin wrote *Halal-el-Mashakel*, a play inspired by Poovadi's story. ChilOut attended the initial readings of the play, organising an information booth in the venue's foyer with petitions and merchandise to help recruit supporters to their cause. In an interesting development, Morteza Poorvadi was released from detention on a TPV in December 2003. ChilOut was able to raise funds in order to sponsor the young Iranian asylum seeker, allowing him to join the production when it toured to the 2004 Adelaide Fringe Festival, where he débuted in the role of Sa'id (Hiles 2007b; Kerr 2004).

Founding member Dianne Hiles suggests that ChilOut's greatest logistical coup was its presence during the run of *In Our Name* (2004). With support from the theatre's management they were able to set up an information and merchandise table in the foyer before and after the performances. Hiles notes that the play not only re-ignited the fury of already committed ChilOut members, "it sent most of the audience out seething with indignation at what was being perpetrated against families such as the Al Abbadis 'in our name'" (2007b). Hiles argues that the presence of ChilOut at the production gave the audience an immediate focus as they left the play: "they were able to sign up to join us, sign petitions, buy tee-shirts or books, take brochures, or simply throw money at us" (ibid).

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) was founded by Anne Coombs, Susan Varga and Helen McCue in early October 2001. The trio decided to hold a public meeting in the Bowral Town Hall, five days before the federal election in November 2001. According to Coombs, nearly 500 people packed the hall, and as a result of coverage on radio and television and through the web, the group were inundated with requests from people wanting to join. Within days, RAR groups were starting up in regional areas of Victoria and NSW. Within three months there were close to thirty RAR groups established across the country, and by late 2002 the organisation had close to 5000 members (Coombs 2004, 126).

Like ChilOut, RAR has played an important role in publicising theatre events through its nation-wide networks, but importantly the group has also provided logistical support to a joint regional and inter-state tour of Shahin Shafaei's *Refugitive* (2003) and Linda Jaivin's *Halal-el-Mashakel* (2003) (Dick and Cochrane 2003). More specifically, the Whyalla branch of RAR in South Australia has also been heavily involved in initiating and supporting an important community theatre project in support of asylum seekers. Whyalla Rural Australians for Refugees (WRAR) was established and became linked with the wider Rural Australians for Refugees network on 7 July 2002 (Oates 2005, 6). The group focused on supporting asylum seekers and those Australians engaged in visits to the Woomera detention centre, and later to the Baxter facility when it opened on Whyalla's doorstep in September 2002 (ibid, 7). Importantly, WRAR supported drama workshops arranged by St. John's College staff inside the Baxter Detention Centre. Run by D'Faces, a regional youth theatre company, the drama workshops involved young people from Whyalla participating alongside young detainees (Thompson 2005). WRAR also went on to support a play emerging from the interactions between the youth participants in the drama workshops. Written by Bryan Martin and directed by Pryia Goldfinch *Open Arms* premiered by D'Faces on 13 April 2005 at the Whyalla High School Hall (Oates 2005, 6). The play was based on the interaction between Daniel, a 16-year-old member of D'Faces, and a detainee he met in the centre also called Daniel. The young member of D'Faces had originally initiated a petition to oppose the federal government's plans to relocate detainees to the Baxter centre. His hostility towards the detainees was transformed after participating in the drama workshops held at Baxter where he met and formed a friendship with the detainee participant who shared his name (Thompson 2005).

Actors Alice Garner and Kate Atkinson formed Actors for Refugees (AFR) in Melbourne in September 2001. The pair decided to form the group while chatting at a rally protesting the Federal Government's response to the *Tampa*. The group's principal aim is "to raise awareness of and above all humanise the plight of refugees" which they successfully achieved by enlisting dozens of influential professional actors to join the organisation and lend their support.[2] Like many of the other refugee advocacy groups, the AFR has played an important fund-raising role in many of its theatre initiatives. With the premier of *Club Refuge* as part of AFR's official launch on 29 May 2002, the group raised over $2000 which was donated to the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (ASRC) (Crawford 2002).[3] Similarly, the première of its second major play *Something to Declare* on 21 June 2003 raised a

2 Refer to the AFR website: http://www.actorsforrefugees.org.au

3 Since opening in June 2001, the ASRC has become the largest provider of aid, advocacy and health services for asylum seekers in Australia. The organisation provides direct aid and support to both asylum seekers in detention and refugees in the community on TPVs. Refer to the ASRC website: http://www.asrc.org.au

further $11,500 which was also donated to the ASRC (Aldred 2004). Over a period of three years, the organisation has allegedly staged and facilitated more than 500 performances dealing with the asylum seeker issue.[4] This success can largely be explained by the organisation's innovative use of the internet. The AFR's website lists general facts and information about refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, as well as links to other refugee advocacy groups. Importantly, the website also lists several scripts and associated advertising material such as posters and flyers. By simply going to the website and gaining permission from the organisation, small groups of concerned citizens around Australia could download a script and organise their own production in support of asylum seekers. Alternatively, groups could invite members of the organisation to perform in their local community. This may account for the astonishing quantity of performances that the organisation facilitated.

The AFR model has proved so successful that it has since been exported overseas to Britain. Following AFR's innovative approach, the professional theatre company iceandfire has adopted a similar working method of enlisting the support of professional actors and using the internet to network with local communities in order to disseminate the stories of asylum seekers to the British public.[5]

The use of the website by the AFR mirrors its use by other refugee advocacy groups. Coombs argues that without the internet and email, RAR could never have grown into a movement as quickly or as geographically dispersed as it has become. Moreover, members can feel included in the work of the network regardless of where they are located, and the technology gives them the ability to respond quickly to unfolding events (Coombs 2004, 131). Scalmer points to the changing relationships between activism and the media, and the important role that new technologies such as the internet can play in social struggles. Scalmer argues that events and activities by activists have become geared to drawing audience attention towards campaign websites. In other words, "the established media offer a means to draw an audience into the campaign's own story, rather than to try to force that story onto the media agenda" (2002, 41). While refugee advocacy groups have exercised considerable efforts to penetrate the mainstream media, supporting theatre events has also become a way to draw audiences' attention towards their own websites, where alternative refugee policies are outlined. For example, RAR's website is typical of the kind of information posted to interested parties, listing information about refugees such as 'facts' and 'myths', links to

4 It is difficult to corroborate the accuracy of this claim. The AFR Website lists more than thirty-five events in which the play *Club Refuge* alone is performed over a period of four years from 2002 to 2006. These performance events included tours to regional areas where the play was performed numerous times.

5 Refer to the iceandfire website: http://www.iceandfire.co.uk

other refugee support services and organisations, the latest news, lesson plans, upcoming events, and information on how to become involved (Stubbs 2004, 90).

Conclusion: The Theatre of Inclusion

While the examples of theatre *for* and *with* asylum seekers which have been surveyed in this paper reflect the divergent approaches within refugee advocacy between globalist and nationalist positions, the discussion also reveals that the theatre provides a space where aspects of both these disparate approaches might usefully converge. Fiske adopts a community development perspective to advance a model of citizenship where membership and participation within local communities is conceived as means for protecting and promoting global human rights (2006, 224). Fiske highlights how within the refugee solidarity movement, the provision and protection of the basic human rights denied to TPV holders such as housing, health, legal assistance, and job seeking among others, was claimed as a responsibility by Australian 'citizens' organising at the local community level. Central to Fiske's model is the importance of membership and participation, which are the crucial mechanisms through which citizenship is enacted and through which TPV holders are accepted as members of the local community (2006, 226-27). Whether it is theatre *for* or theatre *with* asylum seekers, whether appealing to humanitarian aspirations of remaking the nation or appealing to cosmopolitan aspirations that prioritise human rights, the significance of community theatre resides in its ability to elicit audience participation and promote the community inclusion necessary to counter the exclusionary policies of the government. The theatre emerging at the intersection between community and refugee advocacy is not only aimed at critiquing and bringing change to government policy towards asylum seekers, it has also played an important part in helping to ameliorate the effects of the policy by providing networks of social inclusion and practical social and community support to asylum seekers both in detention and to those recently released into the community on TPVs. Moreover, the kind of inclusion that these theatre interventions have involved is based on alliances and networks that extend horizontally across society, and in which aspects of citizenship and the rights of asylum seekers have been reconceived at the local community level. As Fiske explains, nation state based models of citizenship

> encourage us to look vertically, to look *up* to our leaders in the nation's capital for determination of who is included and who is excluded, of what our rights are and what our duties are, rather than looking horizontally to our neighbourhood and community looking *out* to those around us. (2006, 225)

Community theatre interventions responding to the plight of asylum seekers look out rather than up, situating their audiences as participants in a process geared towards the inclusion of others.

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