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Acknowledging Gerard. Articulating social representations and identity through process & content: the resettlement of refugees in regional Australia

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It is a pleasure to submit a paper in Gerard's honour, and it is with the greatest humility that I write about the influence that Gerard has had on my research. Gerard's contribution to theoretical thinking in social representations and identity is immeasurable. I would like to pay tribute to Gerard's ideas by discussing a particular theoretical tenet central to Gerard's work, and the explication of this in research that has investigated how regional communities in Australia understand the recent resettlement of refugees.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AS PROCESS AND CONTENT

In his 2001 paper, *Representations, Identities and Resistance,* Gerard writes that "social identity appears as a function of representations themselves" because, he argues, "identity is as much concerned with the process of being identified as with

making identifications" (Duveen, 2001, p.257). Arguably, the dichotomising of identity into process and content has lent this split a false sense of conceptual veracity which, in turn, has led to an abundance of work on how identification occurs but with little reference to the content associated with these processes. Gerard describes this as process-driven vacuous research "a transparent glass case enclosing nothing" (Duveen, 2001, p.267).

In his 2001 paper, Gerard also states that the conceptual separation of process from content was never Tajfel's intention who, he argues, was very much concerned with " the weight of the individual in the social world (p.267). Tajfel was not only concerned with the processes involved in identifying if a person was Jewish, but also what it meant to *be* Jewish in Europe in the 1940s, or Black *in* Britain in the 1960s (Duveen, 2001; Tajfel & Dawson, 1965).

The conceptual separation between process and the content in social thinking is often justified by the *flawed* logic that the first is culture-free whilst the latter is culture-specific. The former are general and invariant whilst the latter are variable and particular. This distinction implies that processes of identification are a type of rule or law that, because they are impervious to cultural influence, can be imposed on, or applied to, multiple contexts (Moscovici, 1982).

The tendency for research to be overtly concerned with process is, arguably, also exacerbated by the assumption that identity is concentric, that is the point of reference for identity is the individual (Moloney & Walker, 2007). There are two possible explanations for this. First, the prescriptive nature of the collective representation of the individual encourages us to think that the individual is at the centre of the constitutive process. This leads to an over-warranted concern with individual agency and responsibility (Farr, 1991), and a focus on such things as the

individual's motivation to achieve a positive social identity, and the levels of identification, salience and knowledge with in and out-group memberships (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006).

Second, the theorisation of social identity frequently starts with the processes of categorisation and then explicates process as the central component of identity ignoring the question of why these categorisations were made in the first place. The problem with this is that categorisation becomes an antecedent to identity and not a product of representations (Duveen, 2001).

Identity as a social location

The idea that social identity should, or could, be understood as a social location within representational structures is at odds with much social-psychological research, which typically answers what social identity is through the tenets of social identity theory (see SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In fact, the construct of social identity appears objectified; an entity in its own right embedded in a network of meanings linked to SIT. Gerard talks of identity "as being points or positions within the symbolic field of culture" and suggests William James as the *locus classicus* of this "sense of identity" (2001, p.257). As a location within representations, this conceptualisation redresses the absence of symbolic context that characterises much social categorisation research within the SIT tradition (for example, see Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McCarthy, Hayes, 1992) and allows for a different perspective on the role of categorisation in the identity process.

IDENTITY, MIGRATION & AUSTRALIA

The importance of understanding identity as a function of representations is highlighted by the Australian public's perception of immigration polices, and indeed their own history. Frequently contested in the national Australian media, the polarised and often vitriolic debates over immigration reveal a public divided over Australia's approach to border-protection, the acceptance of refugees and the processing and detention of asylum-seekers (Schweitzer, Perkoulidis; Krome; Ludlow & Ryan 2005; Mares, 2002; Moloney, 2007). This divisiveness echoes what Hanson–Easey & Augoustinos (2010) call a "fear of difference (p.2) and appears counter-intuitive given, with the exception of the Australian Aboriginal people, that Australia was populated through immigration.

Accounts of Australian history cluster around two polarised views. The "Official" traditionalist view of white settlement of an uninhabited land opposes a "White Invasion" view of a land already inhabited by the Indigenous Aboriginal peoples. Metaphors utilising discourses of "fit" and "spatial dichotomies" maintain the official traditionalist view whilst justifying the white Australian hegemony and the manifest social categories of "us" and "them" (Augoustinos & Riggs, 2007).

Identity and refugee resettlement in regional Australia

Australia's Humanitarian programme accepts approximately 13, 000 people each year who are subjected to persecution or a violation of their human rights in their home country (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Australia has a long history of offering refugee status dating back to 1938 when protection was offered to Jews escaping Nazi

Germany through to the acceptance of refugees from war-stricken countries such as Vietnam, Lebanon and Afghanistan and more recently, Africa (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010). Assessment of refugee status is through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who, with regard to the changing state of world politics, determines the size and composition of the resettlement programs in Australia each year (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).

The focus of the Humanitarian Refugee program for 2000 -2007[1] on Africa was in response to the protracted civil war and associated famine that generated prolific numbers of refugees and displaced persons (Commonwealth of Australia 2007; Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010). Many of these refugees were (and still are) resettled into the regional areas of Australia.

Representations of Australia's history, immigration policies, definitions and practices, and, indeed, a refugee's country of origin are crucial in understanding the success of the resettlement programmes. Refugees do not arrive into an empty social space. Despite the resettlement community's lack of experiential knowledge of the refugee's country of origin and their journey to Australia, established networks of beliefs, values and ideas already exist in the host country that position newly arrived groups into the social matrix, even before they arrive (Moloney 2007; Philogène, 2000). Moreover, resettlement is an active process based on joint participation and acceptance (Jenkins, 2004). In order to make sense of resettlement, the community draws on established meaning systems about what a refugee is, and what a community's response should be (Jenkins. 2004; Philogène, 1999; 2000).

[1] The number and origins of the humanitarian refugee intake into Australia is decided yearly. In 2007, the quota of refugees from Africa was drastically cut (from 70% to 30%) and the change in quota was released to the public through the media. The then Immigration Minister, Kevin Andrews, used the media release as an opportunity to state publicly that the resettlement of refugees from Africa into Australia was problematic – even though there was no empirical evidence to verify this claim (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010).

What does it mean to be a refugee?

What it means to be a refugee was a central question in a research programme that investigated how regional communities made sense of the recent resettlement of refugees from Africa. It is within this context that two particular studies that highlight the power of representations in constructing identity are discussed.

In Hanson-Easey and Moloney (2009), respondents, from a regional town in Australia where refugees from Africa were resettling, were asked in a between-group word association task what sprung to mind when they thought of either *Africa*, *Refugees from Africa* or *Refugees*. This particular research design expanded previous findings by asking whether the elicited image of Refugees (a boat and a group of pitiful people who were clearly in need of help: Moloney, 2007; Worboys & Moloney, 2005) would be retained when the super-ordinate category of Refugee was linked with the Refugee group's place of origin. Would the conjoining of place of origin create a cognitive polyphasia where two separate inclusive and possibly incompatible representations are elicited or would the elicited representation of Refugee be mediated by place of origin such that the separate representations of Africa and Refugees overlapped?

What we found attested to the "deprivation image of a refugee"[2] found previously. Interestingly whilst the same group of word categories was elicited for both Refugees and Refugees from Africa (*poor, war and hunger),* the image was differentiated by *disease* when the term *Refugee* was delineated by Africa as a country of origin, and *boat* when the term Refugee was presented alone. More telling perhaps, was the finding that the word category *disease* was also elicited for Africa, whilst *boat*

[2] Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010 use this term

had been found in previous research to be a central word category for *Refugees* (Worboys & Moloney, 2005)

Historically, the media has reified the association of disease with Africa through news reports, charity drives, and 'band-aid' style concerts (Hanson-Easey & Moloney, 2010). In a similar way, the national debate over immigration policies that has dominated the headlines in Australia since 2001, has consistently referenced those seeking protection once on Australian shores (as opposed to seeking protection whilst in another country) as both asylum-seekers and refugees (Moloney, 2007). When respondents were asked what thoughts sprung to mind when they thought of *Refugees from Africa*, or *Refugees*, representations embedded in media communications were elicited.

These elicited images are potent for multiple reasons. First, refugees who arrive into Australia are subject to rigorous health screens before they are accepted therefore associations of *disease* are misplaced, and highlight how media representations of a country of origin: in this instance Africa, permeate group identity. In a similar way, the association of Refugees with *boat* highlights not only that the distinction between refugees and asylum-seekers is blurred but the pervasiveness of the media in promoting this morphosis; as the majority of refugees and asylum seekers arrive by plane (Mares, 2002).

More importantly, perhaps is the manifest potency of these representations as tacit frameworks that direct communications about these groups, and hold the potential for use as rhetorical resources to justify prejudicial viewpoints and to legitimise policy and legislative decision (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2010). They also provide fertile ground for the cultivation of identity (Duveen, 2001).

Imposed identity

> *"Identity then is not some thing, like a particular attitude or belief, it is the force or power which attaches a person or a group to an attitude or a belief, in a word to a representation (Duveen 2001, p. 268).*

In conceptualising identity as a location within representations, Gerard (2001) brings attention to the different relations that exist between representations and identities. Imposed identity, or the imperative obligation imposed on individuals to adopt an identity, is the representation-identity relation that we sought to methodologically explicate the process-content link within. The relevance of this to our research is that imposed identity is typically manifest through immutable characteristics such as ethnicity, age, or gender and is argued to be a powerful force in social positioning (Philogène, 1999; Tajfel & Dawson, 1965).

Whilst the term refugee is used to described an individual who has entered Australia on Humanitarian grounds[3] (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), it is argued that the term refugee is an identity lost replaced by a vacuous administrative label (Rajaram, 2002), and a construction of the host country (Grove & Zwi, 2006). Our question was how does the resettlement community identify refugees groups from Africa. What names or category labels are used by the community and, importantly, what meaning systems are communicated by these category labels[4].

In order to do this, a non-directive question was used in a double word association task (Moloney & Blair, 2009)[5]. Using the frame of ancestral groups or

[3] And, having applied to enter whilst living outside of Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009)

[4] For further discussion of category labels and representations see Augoustinos (2001)

[5] A *double* word association task was used in both studies (drawing from Wagner, Valencia, & Elejabarrieta, 1996, Wagner, 1997, see also Moloney, 2007; Moloney & Walker, 2005). In the typical word association task, respondents are asked to write the first 5 – 7 words that spring to mind when they think of a stimulus word/s. The word association task was

countries of birth, respondents were asked to write the first 5-7 groups that that they thought best described the community[6]. This frame mirrored that used in the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). This first word association task was extended by a linked second association task where respondents were asked to further associate with the associations they had made by writing 3 associations for each of their previous associations. In this way, process and content were inextricably linked. Respondents had to first identify a group (using the term that *they* chose to identify the group with) before they wrote what sprung to mind when they thought of the group they had just written. Importantly, if they didn't identify a group they did not proffer any associations for that group. At no stage did the methodology highlight that refugees from Africa was a group of interest to the researcher, nor did the methodology direct the respondents through the wording used in the questions.

The findings were unexpected. First, in contrast to our early research (Hanson-Easey & Moloney 2009), refugees from Africa were *not* identified by the community as *refugees* but as Sudanese. The Sudanese refugees were the first group of refugees from Africa to be resettled into this community in 2000/1. Resettling subsequent to this were refugees from other countries in Africa such as Togo, Eritrea, the Congo and Ethiopia. However, when the respondents were asked what groups they thought best described the community, all the refugees from Africa were unequivocally identified in the elicited associations as Sudanese.

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extended in this research such that respondents were asked to further associate with the associations they had just made. That is respondents were asked to look at the first three associations they had written, and then to write three further associations for each of these associations.

[6] The respondents were drawn from the same regional community as those in Hanson-Easey & Moloney (2009).

Second, in the interlinked second section of the double word association task, where respondents were asked to further associate with each of their first associations, the word category *disease* was *not* elicited for Sudanese rather, the elicited image centred around the associations of *beautiful*, *peaceful*, *singing*, *tall* and *very black*. This image can be interpreted in a variety ways - as aesthetic evaluative categories that serve as "rhetorical disclaimers for more covert prejudiced comments", as indicative of a "multicultural fantasy" where the image allows for an appreciation of 'other' cultures at some degree of social distance (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, in submission, p 31), or, as simply a description drawn from respondents own personal experience of seeing these refugee groups in the community in their traditional brightly coloured dress.

Word associations elicit the ideas, values and beliefs that frame socially-derived thinking about an issue. They elicit the images that spring to mind. Therefore without further contextualising research, conjecture as to what these images mean remains theoretical. What we argue can be taken from these findings is that the image elicited when respondents identified the groups themselves using their own terms was markedly different from the images elicited when respondents were asked to associated with the terms Refugee or Refugee from Africa (see Hanson-easey & Moloney, 2009).

Further, we propose that the results of the latter study (Moloney & Blair, 2010) exemplify *representations preceding identity* (Duveen, 2001) within an imposed identity context. The identification of the refugee groups by the community was inextricably linked to what was understood by the community about the re-settlement process. The category of Sudanese, which theoretically is a sub-ordinate category to

refugee was used as a super-ordinate category to identify the refugee groups from different countries in Africa as Sudanese.

The double word association task also elicited a disproportionate frequency of the groups in the community in relation to each other (when referenced against the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Ninety- eight percent of the community have Anglo-Saxon heritage with the category of Australian accounting for 51% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Yet, 3 minority groups: Sudanese[7], Indians and Indigenous Australians were elicited more frequently in response to the question of what groups best described the community, than the groups: Australian, English, Irish and Scottish.

Philogène talks of identity in contradistinction, that is minority identity as a dynamic social structure anchored to the identity of the mainstream group but referenced in contradistinction (2007). Joffe (2007) also argues that it is the "other" who defines who the members of the dominant group are by who they are *not.* Both tenets speak to the influence of representational systems on the construction of identity, and that identity as seen by others will not, by virtue of its socially-derived nature, mirror more literal accounts; reminding us how identities are resourced from representations. It is possible that respondent's self-identification influenced their identification of others.[8]

What can be concluded, perhaps, is the pervasiveness of representations in informing the perceptions that people hold of others. Whilst, the salience of skin-colour may have been a category delineator, equally possible are explanations of Australian versus non-Australian and minority identity referenced against the

[7] Populations estimates: Sudanese (population approx 200/61,000), Indians (726/61,000) and Indigenous Australians (381/61,000) Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006

[8] The majority of respondents self-identified as Australian, or as having Anglo-Saxon heritage

mainstream (see Philogène, 2007). Moreover, Howarth (2009) reminds us that as researchers we are not immune from representations of race in our interpretation.

CONCLUSION – A TRIBUTE TO GERARD

In closing, the most important reason for writing this paper was to pay tribute to Gerard, and to recognise the huge influence that his work has had, not only on my own research, but on the research of others. One of the challenges for research into social identity is how to *empirically* investigate the pervasiveness of representations in informing identity, without falling into the reductionist mind-set.

For me, Gerard's greatest contribution was that, through his own research, he constantly reminded us that identity was never all that it seemed. He inspired us to look further than design manipulations of process if it was *identity* that we really wanted to understand:

> *Individuals are so inextricably interwoven in a fabric of social relations within which their lies are lived that a representation of the individual divorced from the social is theoretically inadequate. There is no pure "individuality' which can be apprehended independently of social relations, an individual is inconceivable as a viable entity without a sustaining net work of social relations*
>
> (Duveen & Lloyd, 1986, p.219)

It is with great sadness that I submit this paper in acknowledgment of Gerard's immeasurable contribution to social representations theory. I feel it is fitting to give Gerard the last word on how he saw the relationship between social representation and identity:

> *The relations between social representations and social identities remains in need of further elaboration and clarification. Indeed, beyond some generalities, it is not even clear if the relations between representations and identities remain constant across contexts, or whether these relations may not take rather different forms in different contexts"* (Personal communication, 2006).

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