

❖ **Acting Strategically: Skilled Communication by Australian Refugee Advocacy Groups**

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Abstract

This paper discusses the major strategies and tactics of five refugee advocacy organisations in Australia: the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA), Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA), A Just Australia (AJA), Rural Australia for Refugees (RAR) and Children out of Detention (ChilOut). Along many others, those organisations played a critical role in the Australian refugee movement in 2001–2005. The success of that movement is to a degree to explain with refugee groups adopting modern and more efficient techniques of lobbying and public campaigns. The paper uses the concept of communication capital to describe the accumulation of symbolic capacity such as strategic positioning and information credibility (authority). Especially significant are the combinations of strategic positioning and tactical efficiency borrowed from Michael Porter. The main conclusion is cautiously optimistic. Even small and unofficial advocacy groups can be influential if they act strategically, provided they know how to accumulate communication capital (legitimacy and credibility as an information source based on message and media strategies) capital and make use of the professional skills of their volunteers.

[Epigraph]

ACTIVIST: We are issue-driven, not spin-driven. We do not need spin doctoring because we are morally right. We are honest; we tell the truth. And truth, you know, is contagious.

PRACTITIONER: You may be right, but you are also ignorant – if not arrogant. You think truth is like a bug: if you are sick enough, others would catch it, too. You are confusing influence with influenza.

(A dialog overheard during the Australia and New Zealand Third Sector Research Eighth Biennial Conference in Adelaide, South Australia in 2006)

Historical Change

From 2001–2005 a reinvigorated refugee rights movement took place in Australia. The trigger was complex. A major factor in this movement however, was the frustration among civil society groups with the messages and outcomes of the federal elections in 2001, fought and won on

an anti-refugee basis. 'Boat people' – officially 'unauthorised arrivals' – were automatically detained in refugee centres, some indefinitely. Tens of new grassroots groups emerged an internally fragmented, yet strategically and tactically more astute, movement to free the refugees (Coombs, 2004; Gosden, 2002; Marr & Wilkinson, 2003).

The impact of this movement on politics was palpable. Within a few years, it turned public opinion on refugee issues from three quarters *supporting* the mandatory detention of boat people in 2001–2002 (Goot, 2002, 72) to the same proportion in 2004–2005 *rejecting* the detention at least of children and families (Dodson & Metherell, 2004). Eventually in 2005, the Liberal prime minister John Howard — bowing to multiple pressures, including by internal party dissidents — was forced to release most of the detained asylum seekers, including all children and families. And in 2008, the new Labor government of Kevin Rudd further 'softened' the principle of mandatory detention by pledging to turn to it only as a last resort (Kelly, 2008).

Case Study

This historical change was, by any measure, an indication of success for the refugee movement. The question is how was it possible? The answer is dauntingly complicated. In this paper I explore five collective actors and their communication campaigns only. This is a tiny fragment in the whole puzzle.

I selected five refugee advocacy groups in Australia: the Refugee Council of Australia (RCA), the Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA), the coalition A Just Australia (AJA), Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR), and Children Out of Detention (ChilOut). The sample was not random, although there were also other groups and activists that refused my requests for an interview. I had sent a letter to 18 researchers and practitioners who, to my best knowledge, were experts in refugee advocacy. I asked them the question: which groups (one or more) stood out with their campaigns? All experts replied. Their answers are prioritised my list 1.

I examine and compare campaign cases. In social research, cases are the preferred strategy when it comes to answering 'how' and 'why' questions about a set of events over which the investigator has little or no control (Yin, 2003, 9). How exactly did the groups campaign and why some were more successful than others? Community organisations and networks of interacting organisations — such as the refugee movement — are especially suitable for case studies (Yin, 1993).

There are *alternative levels* and *problem types* of case studies (Patti, 2003, xiii). The level of this analysis is the organisation and its communicative performance. Even the comparison between organisations remains at the same altitude and does not elevate to the higher, qualitatively different, level of social movement or industry issue analysis. And the problem type here is an investigation of how well the organisations performed in the past and what we can take from that in the future. Other alternative problem types include solution seeking and learning from failure. In this text, I offer a critical analysis of some outstanding campaigns. The analysis taps into certain positive experiences without necessarily making them benchmarks.

The *theory* used to study the cases is a *descriptive* rather than an explanatory one (George & Bennett, 2005; Shavelson & Towns, 2002; Yin, 2003). An explanatory case contains hypotheses of case-effect relationships. Although there are some elements of campaign evaluation (checking outcomes against organisational objectives), I do not attempt to measure the impact of every single organisation, or of the five together. First, cause and effect in communications is perhaps the most unsolved issue. Today many researchers agree that one cannot isolate them without resorting to some sort of reductionism (Davis, 2005; K. Ross &

Nightingale, 2003; Scheufele, 1999; Schlesinger, 1990). And second, not single organisations and their campaigns, but the whole refugee movement would be a more appropriate level for an explanatory case study.

This paper rather applies a descriptive theory that covers the dimensions and scope of the case. I have built this theory using two dimensions that I believe best discriminate the communication strategies and techniques: 'tactical efficiency' and 'strategic positioning'. The theory is the way I organise the empirical material around this two-dimensional matrix and excludes other possible tools of description, comparison and analysis.

Advocacy Communication Against the Odds

The groups faced the challenges of an unfavourable communication environment, being disadvantaged as resource-poor, third sector organisations in general and refugee issue advocates in particular. They were up against major structural odds.

The resource-poor rarely get media coverage

Older research has found (Deacon, 1996; Deacon, Fenton, & Bryman, 1999; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Goldenberg, 1975; Tiffen, 1989), and recent studies only confirmed (Davis, 2000, 2003a; Greenberg & Walters, 2004; Jacobs & Glass, 2002), that the richer a pressure group, the larger its media coverage and vice versa. Economically well-resourced organisations may allocate finances for research and subsidise news (Gandy, 1982) that the media cannot resist, because the news-value of the supplied information is 'for free' or at least cheaper than an independent journalistic investigation. Such suppliers make media dependent on their informational 'shots'. That way, they set the public agenda — and push the resource-poor advocacy groups to the brink of public invisibility. As a rule, the refugee rights groups are among the poorest. They have neither financial nor infrastructural resources. They mostly rely on the donated time and money of their volunteers (Lyons & Passey, 2005).

Low importance of the refugee issue

Especially in the commercialised parts of the national public spheres, the pursuit of the news value has led to relatively stable hierarchies of media issue preferences. Some issues sell well and have higher preferences; some do not sell well and the media skirt them as often as they can. Communication strategists study those thematic inequalities in the public attention and respond to them with techniques of framing and reframing (Bonk, Griggs, & Tynes, 1999; Conway, 2004; Gandy, 2003; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Everywhere in the Western world, including in Australia, refugee issues which are usually related with human rights and ethnic diversity problems, are at the bottom of the public importance scale (Deacon, 1999; Greenberg & Walters, 2004; Miskin & Baker, 2003). For example, health and family agencies are much more fortunate, because both media and audiences recognise those issues as ones of highest priority.

Public opinion consists of two layers. On the surface — and this is what pollsters usually measure — it appears as differences in the *verbal judgement* (Blumer, 1948; Davison, 1989). The public is divided on an issue; they are either for or against or have not yet made up their minds. On a deeper level however, positive, negative and unformed judgements rest on the *cognitive base* of a *topic* that has gained public significance as a *social problem* (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Because public attention is a scarce resource, only a small number of issues can dominate the public agenda (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). And there is a close relationship between issue priority and public agenda: the public agenda actualises the hierarchy of problems. Thus, at this deeper and widely unexplored level, the political strive is not only about

being for or against an issue, but also about what — and whose! — few problems are the most important ones. The battle for the 'hearts and minds' is first about thematic relevance and then about value interpretation — first about whose issue dominates and then how the public is divided on that issue. (Needless to say that the first tacitly sets the pattern for the second.)

And this was a major obstacle before the refugee organisations: how to deal with the low priority of their issue? Resource-poor groups are too weak to elevate (frame) their problems to a higher level of significance. Environmentalist movements have managed that, but they have access to larger resources. In Australia, the major achievement of the ACTU campaign *Your Rights at Work* in 2005–2007, was not in turning the public opinion against the industrial relations reform of the neo-liberal government. Opinion, from the very beginning, was already negative and, startlingly, remained absolutely steady, even entrenched, until the end. The dramatic shift, however, was in the importance of the IR issue, which dashed from the bottom to the top of the priority ladder and in a way, co-determined the loss of power for the incumbent government in the 2007 elections (Bunn, 2008). The trade unions however, although in declining financial health, were able to spend \$30 million dollars over three years (Loughnane, 2007). For the fragmented and devoid of capital and infrastructure refugee movement, that kind of spending was just unthinkable.

Government has the highest accreditation

Having the government as a rival, the refugee advocacy organisations run into a double hurdle: the strength of the government and weakness of the groups as 'accredited' information sources. As a 'primary definer' (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts, 1978) the government has the highest legitimacy and authority in the eyes of public mediators (not only the media) for at least, two reasons: it is the only institution elected by all, and it disposes of information that no one else has. As a news source, it also has the highest 'bureaucratic affinity' with the media, due to its well-resourced communication infrastructure (Fishman, 1980; Sigal, 1973). Moreover, it has the unmatched capability to pressure, cajole and coerce the actors in the political public sphere (Davis, 2003b; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Rakow, 1989; Tiffen, 1989). Reporters experienced this personally when the Australian government banned them from entering the refugee detention centres. In addition, today's governments have adopted state of the art persuasion techniques, converting into 'public relations states' (Deacon & Golding, 1994; Ward, 2003). Governing has been transformed into permanent campaigning (Blumenthal, 1982; Kavanagh & Gosschalk, 1995; Newman, 1999).

The refugee rights groups were also caught in the conflict between 'commanding attention' and 'claiming legitimacy' which is inherent for any other protest movement (Crackenell, 1993). It is easy to wring out incidental media coverage, but it is hard to gain long-term acceptance and 'brand loyalty' with publics and mediators. Shocking, confronting forms of protest may elicit instant media coverage and, at the same time, bar the path of the organisation to a wider recognition as a public speaker. Protest is strategically ambiguous (Leitch & Davenport, 2002). Do we want *any* publicity or positive publicity? One of the internal divisions in the refugee movement has been about how useful is the 'policy of the bleeding hearts'— that is, 'shaming' the government from the position of the 'emotional truth' (Coombs, 2004, 1 September). It is also about the right proportion between direct and indirect lobbying: is proximity to the government — especially maintaining the dialogue — a must under any circumstances? And how far should public campaigns go in order to support — and not diminish — lobbying activities (Fitzgerald, 2006; Nimmo, 1989; Youngblood, 2006)?

Communication Capital

Against the odds, resource-poor and outsider groups sometimes succeed. From the position of democratic theory, this is encouraging. Theorists try to explain why. The rationale comes down to the shared belief that publicity and impact are not an axiomatic expression of structural inequality but are an *achievement* gained by strategic action (Davis, 2002; Deacon, 1996). The pluralist perspective, for example, explores cases of small and resource-poor pressure groups, which have managed to make their case. Their techniques include: the creation of news value events – especially by the use of drama, human stories and visualisation tools; strategic use of conflicts within ruling coalitions; reframing specific interests as general issues and values; subsidising news by capitalising on the communication skills of their volunteers; attaching to or even hiding behind (piggybacking) larger and more legitimate actors; anticipating the shifts in elite consensus before it hits the politics; and various other strategies and tactics (Anderson, 1993; Davis, 2003a; Jones, 1995; Schlesinger, 1990; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).

The resource mobilisation approach (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978) breaks with the socio-psychological notion of social movements as forms of deviance. It conceptualises them as networks of rational collective actors. Pressure groups interact strategically in an attempt to lower the mobilisation costs. Costs constantly oscillate upward (through repression) and downward (through facilitation). They force resource-sensitive groups to carefully pick their conflicts (costs up) and coalitions (costs down) to control the balance.

This theory offers one of the most powerful political-economical explanations of why exchange of resources, rational choice and historical creativity make possible pressure groups to succeed if they act strategically (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Critics however point to the failure of this school to model the changes that small and resource-poor groups bring about (Kendall, 2007). This is partly because the emphasis here is on economic and infrastructural, rather than cultural and symbolic, resources. Yet the latter are crucial to understanding the dynamics of the more intangible, but less important, resources such as legitimacy, identity and strategic positioning.

For this reason, Aeron Davis suggests the concept of *media capital* (2002) which is similar to Pierre Bourdieu's *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1979, 1992). An organisation's reputation, legitimacy and authority are linked to its credibility, reliability and productivity as a news source. Only strategic, long-term oriented communication may accumulate such symbolic capital that secures easy media access and favourable publicity. I prefer the concept *communication capital* to *media capital*, because mass *media publicity*, which Davis has in mind, is only one – relatively declining – form of publicity. The other major form – relatively on the rise – is *direct publicity* – the own in-house communication products and channels. In times of constantly specialising markets and publics and the Internet, the importance of direct – including specific, personalised and interactive – communication is growing (Bartlett, 2004; Parkinson & Ekachai, 2006). Communication capital depends on the economical and institutional, but not entirely. It comprises skills and strategies. It is a valuable organisational resource that can be learned – or discovered – in the qualifications of the middle-class volunteers.

Multi-Pressure: Direct Versus Indirect Lobbying (Public Campaigning)

Modern lobbying is a multi-pressured campaign (Blumler, 1989; Nimmo, 1989). It has evolved from *direct lobbying* that includes proximity to powerbrokers, informal contacts with officials, consultancy, advice and testimony. Today, it is moving towards *indirect lobbying* – more public opinion and media-centred campaigns that organise additional, sometimes substantial, external

pressure on decision makers.

Although indirect lobbying is public campaigning, public campaigning is related not only to lobbying. There are many other uses of public campaigns. Charities raise money for the disadvantaged. Nonprofit services recruit new clients. Information campaigns educate the public. This analysis looks at the differences in lobbying and campaigning in relation to the refugee issue. Do organisations prefer the traditional way of quiet political advice, undisturbed by 'megaphone diplomacy'? Or do they prefer to confront the officials publicly and shame and scare them to change? There are degrees of indirect lobbying and degrees of public campaigning. A campaign reaches the frontier of successful pressure one way or another, but a skilful combination of many (multi-pressure) often has a synergetic effect: it produces greatest outcome with fewest resources.

Impact: Strategic Positioning Versus Operational Effectiveness

On the point of multi-pressure, *impact* will be the second descriptor. For its dimensions I will borrow Michael Porter's distinction between operational effectiveness versus strategic positioning (Porter, 1996). It was originally designed for corporate organisations, but third sector research has adopted the approach to underline the value-driven, mission-focused, competitive advantage of nonprofit social services (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000; Lewis, 2005). According to Porter, operational effectiveness comes down to performing similar activities *better* than do the rivals. Lowering the costs is achieved by perfecting the means: by introducing, for example, leaner organisation, smarter design, financial cuts, and higher productivity. There are entire schools, originally concerned with business effectiveness — such as those of 'reengineering', 'benchmarking' and 'total quality management' (Papas, 1995; Pynes & Schrader, 1997) — that turn to nonprofits to teach them how to increase their efficiency.

Translated into the language of lobbying and campaigning, those theories focus on more skilful tactics and techniques. If the rival is the incumbent government — as it was in this case — better, faster and more reliable information on refugee issues, for example, would possibly offset the government's advantage in information monopoly and relations with the press. Yet the problem with the operational effectiveness is that technology is easily imitated. Everyone can copy anyone else's tactics. Operative advantages melt quickly — especially if the competition is more resourceful.

Strategy however, is more than a package of tactics — it is qualitatively different from their sum (Bales, 1998; Butler & Collins, 1996; William A. Gamson, 1990; Hon, 1997; Wilson, 2001; Xavier, Johnston, & Patel, 2006). Strategic action and communication is about taking a position where the others have not been — choosing to perform activities *differently* — not better — than do rivals (Porter, 1996, p. 64). While tactics reduce the costs for the collective actor, strategies increase the value for the stakeholders. Strategies that discover and occupy niches do not necessarily require more and better tactics. With the right message and choice of media — two major elements of strategic communication (Heath & Heath, 2007; Smith, 2005; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2005) — an organisation could offset its lack of resources. Moreover, it could even benefit from the scarcity of its means by sticking to *the one* simple and striking message — by organising the whole campaign around the demonstration of its competitive advantage.

Strategy is closely related to symbolic capital. Reputation is distinction and distinction is differentiation. Publics and media judge an idea, issue or organisation, by the difference it makes. That is why acting strategically — accumulating communication capital through

creativity and learning — is the real chance for resource-poor groups to achieve a disproportionately higher impact. The inability to conceptualise the relatively independent role of symbolic capital, has been one of the weaknesses of the resource mobilisation theory. Its application recognises for example, coalition building or online networking, only as cost reduction measures in the technological, quantifiable dimension of operational efficiency. Yet even not more important is the other, qualitative dimension of strategic positioning. It requires, however, an additional battery of cultural-anthropological and sociological terms that take account of the intangible, symbolic nature of communication capital.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCA)

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCA) has been the national umbrella of over 120 organisations and individual members for more than 20 years. With a core staff of five people and a budget of approximately \$350,000 dollars, RCA is perhaps the best resourced of all five organisations discussed in this paper.

RCA does not see itself as a campaigning body. It uses its relative proximity to government to lobby on refugee issue by means of its established authority and expertise. Because government grants for nonprofit organisations in Australia are tied with lobbying restrictions, the policy of RCS is not to apply for core government funding. Instead, research, consultancy and services are the preferred revenue sources. Margaret Piper, executive director of RCA, says (Interview, 12 September 2006):

We do consultancies for the government or for government agencies. It means that we can choose what we want to do and also when it suits us. [The media] know they will not get sensation from us, but they do get some facts and also a reasoned opinion on things. We also maintain a pretty good relationship with the senior policy makers. If your objective is to make policy better for refugees, you need to have that contact. It has to be a respectful contact. We respect their role and what they do and they respect our role and what we do in representing our constituency.

RCA's main strategic advantage to other advocacy players is its proximity to the government ethics, the 'cool' language of bureaucratic-professional expertise, and its recognition as a trustworthy source both by the official authority and the media. This is partly based of the monopoly of peak body representation; it is the established channel through which refugee organisations contact and lobby the government.

RRC is aware of its competitive advantage. It maintains its reputation as competent and conservative — passionate but civilized — advisor of the government — whatever colour it has. The umbrella provides 'reasoned opinion' for the media and materials for political education of the community. Yet it does not go so far to mount information campaigns on refugee issues. 'Conservative' here means playing by the rules, not against them. And 'competent' is understood as being effective as an element of governance. Thus direct lobbying is not supported by public campaigns, although other organisations often base their campaigns on the information and analysis of RCA.

From 2001–2005, RCA distanced itself from the 'noisy' radical groups, which in their turn, questioned RCA's integrity. RCA stayed 'cool' in a rather old-fashioned way. It kept pushing relentlessly for concrete changes in 'politics of the small steps' that the radicals found rather insignificant, even distracting. According to Margaret Piper, RCA managed to facilitate in this fashion major improvements such as a larger size of the humanitarian program, pre-embarkation cultural orientation training for all refugees and government support in travel

loans.

Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA)

The Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA) is a loose coalition of refugee organisations that lobby direct to the United Nations in Geneva on behalf of the refugee cause in Australia. It demonstrates the enormous potential of public diplomacy, where a nonprofit organisation interacts directly with international public opinion leaders and decision makers. Again, this unique alliance is a lobbying rather than a campaigning organisation. Its strategic advantage is in the accreditation of its representatives with the UN that secures both access to research funds and worldwide influence in the form of political reports, analysis and advice.

Eileen Pittaway, director of the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research (CRR), is the person who made it possible. CRR and ARRA built an entity — the centre is the research body, the alliance is the advocacy arm. Pittaway has been an accredited lobbyist to the UN for a long time. She is the senior member of the Asian Women's Human Rights Council (AWHRC), based in Bangalore, India. As such she has the power to accredit other lobbyists to the UN. This small detail proved crucial for the formation of ARRA.

The alliance is considerably small. Yet the members bring in their networks — individuals, churches, human rights and legal centres. The major areas of ARRA's advocacy have been women refugees, refugees with disabilities or HIV, and the detention issue in Australia.

Critical months in the calendar of ARRA are February and September. In February, the members meet to discuss current top issues and decide whether there is a need to update their papers or write completely new ones. Then law interns, Masters students and academic supervisors at the UNSW, undertake research and writing. In September, it is time to go to Geneva for the Executive Committee Meeting of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

The delegation is known as 'the Australians'. About 15 people, including interns, turn up there. Eileen Pittaway explains (Interview, 10 November 2005):

We are given moderating spots. We are given speaking spots. We can go into the Palais and have a room or give a workshop any time we want during those two weeks, because we have built up a reputation for being academically sound in what we do. And because we have been going to Geneva and advocating so often, we have got to the point now where they have actually appointed us as technical consultants and provided funding for us to train their own staff. So that is a measure of success if you like.

Like RCA, ARRA is lobbying by means of research-based consultancy. What RCA does nationally, ARRA carries out internationally. Both speak the language of scientific argument, legal codification and expertise in governance. Groups like RCA and ARRA find themselves dealing with 'unqualified' opponents on two fronts: first, with an ideologically 'entrenched' government externally and, second, with 'dilettante' lobbying groups internally. Eileen Pittaway resents the help of the latter when they are:

[...] going around and saying things like 'detention is illegal in international law'. Its not; I wish it was, but it is not. They say temporary protection visas are against international law. They are not.

However important research had been to define and validate the position of the alliance, the delegation quickly learned the power of the new media. In one of her trips to a refugee camp, Eileen Pittaway happened to have a video camera. She took some video and showed it later in the Geneva Palais to the top of UN. Everyone was shocked, 'Oh my god, what should we do,

how can we change this? [...] The short video has done more in terms of advocacy than all the pages and books I've ever written.'

The unexpected success with a visual tool, that the researchers had previously considered a private rather than public account, prompted the delegation to reassess their arsenal. Research was expensive, took a lot of time and required specialised channels and publics. Yet video advocacy had an immediate impact. It did not cost much either. It provided visual evidence, testimony and moral story before the international human rights audience (S. Gregory, 2006). Even if shot by lay people and with an artless plot, a video is matchless when it comes to producing a powerful early 'rights imaginary': 'human rights claims, in which aesthetic strategies transform a vast and distant horror into sympathetic cause, and systems of exhibition channel sentiment into action' (Torchin, 2006, p. 214). It became a new habit of the members — most of them specialised in human science, not media production — always to take a camcorder when they visited places of refugee ordeal.

One cannot overestimate the exceptionality of such direct lobbying at UN and its significance for the third sector in Australia. Elsewhere the Commonwealth had been successful in silencing and uprooting international advocacy groups. The aboriginal office, which has been in Geneva since 1970, closed in 2003 as money dried up. In 2005, the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC)* was for the first time absent from the hearings at the *Palais des Nations*, because the government had slashed its funding (Marr, 2005).

A Just Australia (AJA)

A Just Australia (AJA) is perhaps the most ambitious attempt to unify and coordinate the post-Tampa refugee movement in Australia. As such it did not succeed, but its emergence demonstrated the necessity of a more versatile and aggressive lobbying and public campaigning, ways beyond the traditional — old-fashioned? — arsenal of RCA. According to its website, *AJA* brings together over 11,500 individual supporters, 120 non-governmental organisations and more than 70 prominent Australian patrons (A Just Australia, 2006).

The parallels to *RCA* are inevitable, because both bodies operate at national level. To a degree, they also represent the same organisations. The impressive list of Australian opinion leaders and celebrities, which includes John Menadue, Malcolm Fraser and Philip Adams, reflects the core mission of *AJA*: to be a public campaign body, which *RCA* is not.

The *strategic* difference between *AJA* and *RCA* however, is in relation to the welfare organisations which comprise the bulk of both bodies. Representing the welfare agencies, *RCA* is rather emanating, reproducing their relationship with the government. In contrast, *AJA* is a public advocacy voice — it says openly what the more conservative welfare organisations cannot say due to their contracts with the government and ever tightening financial restrictions on their political activities (see for many Maddison & Dennies, 2005; Sawyer, 2002).

AJA has established relationships with key politicians by direct visits in Canberra. Lobbying mainly took the form of subsidising sympathising politicians with specific information and research that would both improve their personal standing and strengthen the refugee cause. Kate Gauthier, the national director of *AJA*, gives a succinct outline of the nature of this process (Interview, 10 November 2005):

It is important not to give too much of your own opinion. What you do is find out what their opinion is, because that is the information that they need. You get to know what makes them tick. A politician wants to look good. How do they look good? By asking questions in Parliament that grab the media attention — that get airtime. What do they want? Give them something —

present it to them in such a way that, by doing what you want, they are going to get something out of it.

Solid research is the currency for reciprocal relationships in lobbying. *AJA* has initiated and, basically, subsidised many MP appearances in Parliament, particularly during time for questions 'on' and 'without notice'. Especially 'questions on notice' and estimates are popular with the lobbyists. If they need government information that they cannot get anywhere else, they research for one of their friendly politicians to ask a question on notice. The question itself is a very good research tool, for it is often the only way to make the government disclose information, which it would under other circumstances pass over in silence.

Subsidising publicity works with politicians and journalists. It also works with legal representatives. Often barristers, QCs, high-profile lawyers refuse to help detained asylum seekers with their appeal. They usually have a few minutes, if any time at all, to look at the papers, and would not see anything there. A thorough reading would require not five minutes but fifty hours. For this reason, *AJA* set up a project that trains law students in refugee solicitors' work. Learning by doing, the students took up real cases. Working from 50 to 100 hours on a personal file, they went through each case with a fine-toothed comb, found errors that could be appealed, and wrote them up. With such documentation almost complete, *AJA* called prominent lawyers. 'Look at this, all you have to do is turn up in court and present. There have already been many hours invested in the papers'. And this time lawyers could not resist this lucrative offer — 'lucrative' in the sense of subsidised time and expertise plus the reputation of working pro bono for the community.

As with the next group, *Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR)*, *AJA* has the characteristics of a virtual organisation. Email lists have replaced membership. An electronic newsletter informs and mobilises the supporters. *AJA's* web site has an online program helping the reader to compose and send letters to MPs and sign petitions to the Parliament. It is also linked to the *GetUp* campaigning site.

Electronic campaigning increased the operational efficiency of the organisation. For example, with the Senate enquiry to the operation of the *Migration Act*, *AJA* sent information to all members, encouraging them to write short letters. A ready text body was also available online. 'You do not have to write some lengthy legalistic submission; you can rely on the experts to do that. This is your government, your opportunity to give them your opinion. Just write them a letter! Everyone just send in your stories.' Each letter is a submission. Even when politicians do not read contents, they do count numbers. And electronic campaigning has multiplied the numbers.

Another example for the power of online mobilisation was the case of Virginia Leong, the mother of the two-year-old daughter Naomi. Locked in Villawood detention centre since her birth in April 2002, Naomi exhibited some very disturbing behaviours, including banging her head against the wall. One day in 2005, Virginia was put 'for bad behaviour' in the isolation unit away from her child (Sutherland, 2005). *AJA* sent an email around to all 'subscribers' with the phone number of the Canberra manager for detention. 'Call this person.' Hundreds — maybe thousands — kept calling. And the phone just rang off the hook until *GSL (Global Solutions Ltd)*, which runs the detention centre) let the mother out after 12 hours.

AJA positioned itself strategically as national coalition that, in contrast to *RCA*, was openly and more aggressively pressuring the government on behalf of the refugee movement. At a certain stage it also adopted the message of organisations such as *ChilOut*: 'Detention of children is statutory child abuse'. (I will discuss this message later.) Subsidising question hours in

parliament and prominent layers also proved very effective. Those are single tactics. But the idea behind them — using volunteers, students and academic programs to offer 'free', yet solid, research to members of parliament and layers and subsidise that way their actions — is a modern public relations strategy.

Except for the particularity of the Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) case, I consider electronic campaigning a tactical rather than strategic resource. It minimises costs and increases the dissemination of information. Yet it does not necessarily break new grounds. E-activism provides more — or better — of the same but not an essentially different way of campaigning (Dahlberg, 2007; Dahlgren, 2005). Constituencies often prefer leaflets and brochures on paper to websites and electronic newsletters (J. Gregory, 2000). And, as Joanne Lebert (2003) assesses in relation to the challenges of informational technology to the campaigns of Amnesty International, a pile of 'snail mail' on the desk is still heavier than an inundated inbox.

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR)

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) came to life in early October 2001 in Bowral, NSW (Coombs, 2004). 'Cells' quickly spread throughout the nation. Its coordination has moved geographically along the line of 'hot' detention centres and refugee settlements: From NSW (Villawood) it transferred to Victoria (Maribyrnong). Today, it is coordinated from Port Pirie (Baxter), South Australia

Three women started the venture: Anne Coombs and Susan Varga are writers and journalists. Helen McCue has also had some communications background as a manager. The idea was to establish a common space for people from rural areas who were not happy with the government's refugee policy. The activists were sure they could debunk the myth of rural Australia as no-go zone for refugees.

The strategy of recruitment was to make visible that there were many more people in the country thinking differently from 'virtually everyone'. They wanted to promote the idea that the countryside *has already been* a welcoming refuge. The more ordinary people 'outed' themselves as 'Australians for refugees', the more it became obvious that they were not an insignificant part of the community. Helen McCue reflects (Interview, 21 November 2005):

It took off in a way that we were not expecting, I can tell you. We tapped into a sense in the bush — there was a strong sense of social justice in the bush, which arises from the agrarian socialism of the Australian bush life and church people and Amnesty people.

A strategy to boost the courage of local people was to demonstrate — even parade — the high status of key supporters and leaders. 'The authority is with us' is an argument that still makes a big deal of difference — I wonder if only in the country. A retired brigadier was one of the prominent speakers at the first meeting. A local National Party member was among the founders of RAR in Bowral. The mayor of Young, NSW, where about 80 Afghani worked in the abattoir, was another outspoken advocate of the refugees' settlement in the country.

The core public relations activity was in liaising personal relationships between refugees and politicians, especially local members of parliament. To cite Helen McCue one more time:

What was probably the most successful thing was really the work of the people in Baxter and Port Augusta and these frontline RAR's in getting MP's to go inside. Once you have got people to put themselves inside that situation and talk to people and realise how awful it was, they felt first a degree of shame.

Some backbenchers developed bonds of conviction and friendships with asylum seekers. As a result of such 'frontline work', the National representative John Forrest, Member for Mallee, Victoria, has become one of most ardent advocates of the refugees in the Australian parliament.

It was the idea of working locally that opened new perspectives. Networks close to the detention centres in Villawood, NSW, Maribyrnong, Victoria and Woomera and Baxter in South Australia, organised programs visiting the refugees and welcome town campaigns after their release. RAR even brought this idea back to the city. Activists re-discovered suburbs as localities. Anne Coombs remembers:

This idea that you could actually just do something in your local suburb started to take off [in cities like Sydney]. And I do think that the example of RAR was one of the reasons for that. That people realised, 'Well, heavens, if they can have a meeting in West Wyalong, why cannot we have one in Balmain?' And so you got 'Balmain for Refugees', and then 'Northern Beaches for Refugees'.

Children Out of Detention (ChilOut)

ChilOut was born in 2001 from a media event of video advocacy. In August that year, the ABC's Four Corners program showed the peril of an Iranian boy in the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney. He had become mute and was refusing to eat. He was dying because he could not cope as a witness to the brutal reality of the detention centre, such as outbreaks of violence and self-harm.

The group was relatively small. Its core included a group of 100 volunteers from the affluent suburbs of Sydney who regularly visited the detainees in Villawood. Because many of the coordinators — diplomats, managers, lawyers, doctors and writers — had a professional communications background, their concern from the very beginning has been to position themselves strategically in the market place. They deliberately called themselves 'middle Australians'. Junie Ong, the first national coordinator of ChilOut, recalls (interview, 22 February 2006):

We needed to position ourselves in such a way that they cannot just be dismissive of us. [...] Because, if we positioned ourselves [for example] as left-wing radicals, politicians will say, 'Oh, it is another Rent-a-Crowd', and ignore us. The key word is that they are middle-class conservatives, right? But it does not mean that they are not decent people. Now, we need to find a position amongst them. So that when we are lobbying, when we are making a loud noise, the politicians can look at these people and say, 'Hey... they are some of the people who probably voted us in'.

The group made sure that they talked to everyone and networked with 'small-l liberals' who did not approve of some policies of the ruling coalition such as the war in Iraq and refugee detention. This led the activists to another preference that also was in the media strategy of AJA. They sought and — surprisingly or not — found their mouthpiece in the commercial and tabloid media. Many activists confuse media with audiences. The public broadcast media for example, are indeed often more sympathetic with the refugee cause, but the commercial ones had the readers who were the primary target of ChilOut. The tabloids for example, are not necessarily more conservative on the issue, but they would rather avoid it because of its low news value. The best way of courting such media is to know how supply to them riveting narratives and visuals. Doing that, ChilOut got some important new friends, such as Rupert Murdoch's *Daily Telegraph* — the newspaper with the largest circulation in NSW.

A first move was to organise 'information nights' — just to talk about the reality in the detention centres that had not been shown in the media. The government had banned journalists from entering the centre at that time. This tactic became quickly a success; even the largest theatres the organisers could hire, were fully packed after only a couple of nights. The media-savvy coordinators also managed to organise spectacular protest-happenings in Sydney and Melbourne, projecting visuals onto giant screens or strewing children shoes in front of the office of the Department of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs that run the detention centres (Dimitrov, 2007).

The most important visual however, that ChilOut — and the whole refugee movement — managed to produce were the photos of children in detention copied from their smuggled detention ID cards. Those were in many cases the only portraits the children ever had. The *Sydney Morning Herald* got the exclusive and printed them on the cover page (Glendinning & Dodson, 2005). Those pictures became famous as the 'barcode kids'. Like video advocacy, unique visuals are rather a tactic, but — with some luck and creativity — extremely powerful ones (Bonk, Griggs, & Tynes, 1999). New technologies have facilitated the transition from the (verbal) public sphere to the public screen (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002) where images prove decisive for the outcomes of any campaign (Kingsley, Harmon, Pomeranz, & Guinane, 2005; Newman, 1999; Scammell, 1999).

A tactic that combined lobbying and public campaigning way, was ChilOut's initiative to send children as refugee ambassadors to Canberra. In early 2004, the organisation called for young people under eighteen — the definition a child under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child — to go to the Australian capital and ask politicians, including the Minister for Immigration, Senator Amanda Vanstone, to release all children from immigration detention.

Children were selected according to their ability to tell what they had done or gone through — not by what they believed in or wanted to do. Typical responses that secured candidates the trip to Canberra were: 'I've been writing to a friend in Woomera and Baxter for the last two years'; or, 'I feel very passionate about this because I was detained in Port Headland myself for seven months.'

The activists instructed the selected ambassadors about how to talk to politicians and journalists. Alanna Sherry the then coordinator recalls (interview, 19 December 2005):

You will have a minute or so for your spiel to each politician, so make sure you say personally what you have done, not why 'this policy sucks'. Conversation should be reduced to a very simple message, be based on an individual narrative, not a political judgement. You have a friend in detention who is such-and-such, and this is why you feel that politicians should do something to help people like him. This 'portable' PR format — short message, personal story, and call for action — enabled the young ambassadors to press their case as they went through corridors and galleries, negotiating the impasses of busyness and impatience.

On 11 March 2004, eight teenage ambassadors for ChilOut arrived at Parliament House and met first with the Immigration Minister and then, other politicians.

The major event that day was the ambassadors' press conference in the House of Representatives hosted by MPs Tanya Plibersek and Andrew Bartlett. A huge pile of petitions was put on the table in front of the children. As a backdrop especially arranged for TV there was a large banner with 'Children don't belong in detention' — ChilOut's brand mark. It was the same slogan, white on black, which the little envoys wore on their t-shirts. Journalists showed vivid interest, plying the children with questions.

Three Afghan children sat in the centre. Most questions were directed to them. In the evening before, the delegation had had a lengthy discussion about how to speak in front of microphones and cameras. The coordinators were concerned about the Middle Eastern custom of evasive politeness. In this high-contextual culture of indirect narration (Hall, 1984), the Afghan teens would avoid telling the public the whole truth about their ordeal, saving the media from exactly what it was after — the news value of clinically outlined drama.

The instructions were: do not be afraid to say what you think. You are selected because you have something to tell. Speak out, do not be so modest, and do not just say 'it was terrible'. Tell the public what you mean by 'terrible'. Tell them exactly how it was. The short course in Western media perception helped the Afghan children to get their message across. Their stories appeared repeatedly in the media for the next days and weeks. What mostly impressed the gallery, was the rise in stature of juveniles speaking up in Aussie accent on behalf of their adult ethnic community. As newly arrived refugees, most parents did not speak English — some are even illiterate. Their children do all the writing for them: filling out all the forms, translating documents for Centrelink and so on. High-school students have learned English in an *Intensive English Centre, IEC* during the first year of attending school in Australia. Some, like the Afghan children, had not attended any school before — maybe a madrassa, but only for the boys and — only Qu'ran.

And there they were: the same children giving a press conference who were 'of Middle Eastern appearance' — the girls were also sporting headscarves: this was in odd contrast to their flowing mainstream vernacular. This tangle of audible and visual, accent and attire perplexed, fascinated, enchanted the journalists. The elusive sign of multiculturalism seemed to materialize in the reconciliation between ears and eyes. If the ambassadors' story did not take off as it was set to do, this was because another bomb, more precisely bombs, that exploded on the same day — the terrorist bombings that occurred in Madrid. Nonetheless, the political and journalistic elite in Canberra did recognise ChilOut as a legitimate player. Through their stories, its ambassadors spread and reinforced the message that they wore on their T-shirts.

Close to the cultural elites, ChilOut could count on the support of many Australian celebrities. The most prominent have included the television presenter Andrew Denton, singers Missy Higgins and John Butler, actor Heath Ledger, retired Supreme Court judge Marcus Einfeld, former Liberal party president John Valder, James Mathison, *Australian Idol* host, and Merlin Luck, a *Big Brother* contestant. A big name was often enough to stop the passers-by and start the cameras rolling.

The most important role of ChilOut however was in framing and reinforcing — even through its name — the new strategic message of the refugee movement: 'Children don't belong in detention centres'. And: 'Detaining kids is statutory child abuse'. Championed by *ChilOut*, *AJA*, *RAR* and some other groups, this message stuck with the Australian public for two major reasons. First, it resonated better with the values and issue preferences of the public. It helped to re-frame the refugee issue from a 'human rights' issue, unpopular with the public, to the high-preference issue of 'health, family and child protection'.

And second, this message de-ideologised the debate, detached it from the government propaganda on 'border protection', 'Australian values' and 'war on terror' — and put a professional spin on it. *AJA*, *RAR* and *ChilOut* often invited leading experts like the child psychiatrists Dr Louise Newman, director of the *New South Wales Institute of Psychiatry* and Dr Michael Dudley at *Sydney Children's Hospital*, to speak at their events and present new scientific evidence of the traumatising effects of immigration detention on children.

Conclusions 1: Lobbying and Public Campaigning

A comparison between the selected refugee organisations is not representative for the whole refugee rights movement, but is at least indicative of the ability of the groups to adjust to a rapidly changing communication environment. Traditionally, lobbying on refugee issues is a centralised activity. In Australia, refugee policies are shaped at federal level. Thus the centre is the Australian capital Canberra. Advocacy organisations that work the system on national (RCA) and international level (ARRA) are focussed on 'classic' lobbying that presupposes a certain degree of common language (bureaucratic expertise) and mutual trust. Confidentiality and access to official bodies go hand and hand. Important tools are consultancy, submissions and other forms of political expertise.

Research appears the leading component here, equally important for both lobbying and campaigning organisations (Youngblood, 2006). Despite the difference in the methods, research demonstrates the highest persuasive power. It provides rational arguments for policy makers. It also delivers the news value for media coverage. The communication capital of each refugee group — its standing with publics, journalists and politicians — depends on the novelty and reliability of the information, with which the organisation supplies the political public sphere. Not only ARRA but also AJA and ChilOut used research as subsidy. They learned quickly and seemed comfortable with this modern application of public relations. Thanks to qualified volunteers and community engagement academic programs, the more openly effective lobbying groups managed to subsidise news, politicians and lawyers.

The big difference between the 'classic' lobbyists, RCA and ARRA, was not between the national and international level. ARRA found a new way of competing with the diplomatic channels and representing the refugee network directly before the UN. ARRA however remained connected with the Australian officials, sharing the same professional ethos and often the same definition of national interest ARRA. This presented a chance for the government to slot in this nonprofit organisation and its activities for its purposes. It failed to do that.

Nowadays, the concept of public diplomacy as international public relations is framed in the context of the 'war on terror' (Hersh, 2005; Wolf & Rosen, 2004). There is a debate in the US for example, about how to improve the international image of America, especially in the Middle East (C. Ross, 2002). Often however, nonprofit organisations are more credible and trusted representatives of democratic values and human rights than national governments. Yet the Australian government missed this opportunity to seize and work with ARRA in Geneva.

Table 1: Lobbying and public campaigning

Closer to (Direct) Lobbying	
Activity	Organisation
Political advice and consultancy	RCA, ARRA
Lobbying	RCA, ARRA, AJA, RAR, ChilOut

Training authorities and staff	ARRA
Research as political subsidy	ARRA, AJA, RCA
Expertise and professional ethos	RCA, ARRA
Submissions (incl. electronic ones)	RCA, ARRA, AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Petitioning	AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Children as ambassadors	ChilOut
Targeting opinion leaders	AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Presentations to conferences	RCA, ARRA, RAR, AJA, ChilOut
Reasoned opinion to the media	RCA
Celebrities as endorsers	AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Joining other campaign networks	RAR, ChilOut
E-activism	AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Welcome town campaigns	RAR
Local forums and media	RAR, ChilOut
Staging protest and happenings	AJA, ChilOut
Activity	Organisation
Closer to Public Campaigning (Indirect Lobbying)	

Table 1 above, summarises the types of lobbying activities of the various groups discussed so far. When ARRA 'discovered' the power of video advocacy, it inevitably moved towards an indirect, more public form of lobbying. The 'novices' such as AJA, RAR and ChilOut did not see a contradiction between lobbying and a more open, publicly visible, and even more aggressive mode of campaigning. They perhaps understood better that politicians need the public pressure to become palpable — both to them and to the publics — in order to justify their own decisions. As the US President Franklin Roosevelt once told lobbyists, 'You've convinced me, now go out and force me' (Grefe, 2003).

The emergence of the new public campaign groups coincided with the rapid spread of online advocacy groups. Those organisations do not have members and mobilise their supporters through websites, electronic newsletters and, most importantly, mailing lists (Gilbert, 2005; Hart, Greenfield, & Johnston, 2005). Electronic activism however, turns out to be a tactical rather than strategic innovation. It reduces the costs of mobilisation, but does not necessarily engage the hitherto excluded (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). The Internet facilitates both increased giving of money and decreased physical volunteering (Lyons & Passey, 2005). Some critics say that online groups are a pure affair of the already privileged: through the Internet middle-class activists mainly reach other middle-class activists (Skocpol, 1999). It proves a good means to activate the 'converted'. Yet traditional media and direct communication do still a better job when it comes to 'converting the unconverted' (Lytel, 2002).

As we saw in the example of RAR, wider publicity in lobbying lead to the re-discovery of the *locality*. Suddenly it made sense to extend indirect lobbying to rural areas and city suburbs. As lobbying is not only private huddling in the centre, so campaigning is not only public protest. Campaigning, including that which occurs online, may be radical as a communication form, but not necessarily as political content.

An unintended effect of the RAR online advocacy in the country was that electronic messages easily, and somewhat unexpectedly, crossed class boundaries, boosting catch-up processes of modernisation. Electronic networking proved good at denting the barriers of traditional 'symbolic reproduction' (Habermas, 1981). The customary etiquette of inherited inequality could not stop the 'trespassing' of online content. This informational invasion of private spaces contributed to the replacement of some 'normatively secured contexts by communicatively achieved ones' (Ray, 1993, p. 62). Issue-oriented communication shattered 'normatively secured contexts' by both depersonalising political relations (the anti-paternalist effect of the communication discourse) and personalising institutionally and ideologically alien connections (de-dehumanisation of the refugees). Freeing refugees helped people free themselves.

What the refugee movement learned in the first five years of the millennium, was that public campaigning could not only be the last resort for outsider groups to get the attention of the public — even if in an confrontational way. Because of their lack of other resources such as access to policymaking and favourable media coverage, they stage street protest to express their frustration — the 'politics of the bleeding hearts' — and with the ultimate goal to scandalise the public — if they were not able to hold sway over it. The raising of the professionalism and middle-class self-esteem of the activists led them to a more consensual, majority-building potential of their public campaigns. They better understood the role of campaigning as indirect lobbying — the extension of lobbying with other means. They also clearly saw that public campaigning was not all about lobbying — not only its 'extension' — and fixation on how the state should rule and legislate. It also was about advocacy of behalf of the voiceless, constituency and coalition building, self-education and self-empowerment of the publics.

In 2005, many organisations such as AJA and ChilOut even temporarily suspended all their public campaigning to allow the dissidents in the Liberal Party around the backbencher Petro Georgiou, to quietly persuade the adamant John Howard to change his mind on the refugee issue. The self-imposed silence helped the internal talks in the party, encapsulating them with an atmosphere of ‘coolness’ and attentive serenity. And this ‘lack of action’ assisted the breakthrough. The activist groups proved mature enough to understand that public campaigning is about the right mix and timing of both voice and silence (Clair, 1993).

Conclusions 2: Acting Strategically

The refugee movement tapped into the reservoir of its highly qualified activists. Many middle-class professions require communication literacy and professionalism. It is no surprise that the new grassroots groups felt home in the modern kitchen of public relations techniques. They were effortlessly churning out everything that the craftsmen of persuasion know of — from media kits, visual and videos to websites, electronic newsletters and mailing lists.

Their relations with the media did also markedly improve. One can characterise the old relations as ones as ‘mutual suspicion’. The big media often treated the groups as bunches of left-wing bookish radicals. The activists disdained the media as repressive tools of the authoritarian government and their capitalist owners (Anderson, 1993; Davis, 2003b; Stanton, 2007). All five organisations for example, managed to accrue media capital (legitimacy, reputation) as news sources. RCA, ARRA and, partly, AJA produced research that subsidised many news reports. AJA, RAR and ChilOut used the vacuum, caused by the blackout of the government on the situation inside the refugee centres. Through their visitor programs, the groups had access to all detainees and more importantly, their trust. That helped the grassroots organisations to transform into unique, reliable and regular news sources for basically all media whose reporters had been banned by the government from entering the places of detention.

Despite of their tactical efficiency, some of the groups gained most though their lateral, counterintuitive strategic positioning. Acting differently — not only better — than others act, ARRA, for example, filled the exclusive niche of an UN-accredited advocate. From this position it secured UN-sponsored research that in turn, allowed ARRA to subsidise UN decisions through scientific reports, professional consultancy and staff training.

Table 2: Strategies and tactics

Closer to Strategy (Strategic positioning)	
Activity	Organisation
Message: ‘Statutory child abuse’	ARRA, AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Message: ‘Economic benefits’	RAR
Message: ‘Middle Australians’	AJA, ChilOut

Quasi-monopoly of representation	RCA, AJA
Proximity to national government	RCA, ARRA
UN-accredited advocacy	ARRA
Working with National and Liberal MPs	AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Liaising between MPs and refugees	RCA
Capacity building in the sector	RCA
Message: 'The authority is with us'	RAR
Consultancy and advice	RCA, ARRA
Visitor programs	RCA, ARRA, RAR, ChilOut
Coalition networking	RCA, AJA, ARRA (partly)
Research and analysis in general	RCA, ARRA, AJA
Visuals and video advocacy	ARRA, ChilOut
Courting commercial and tabloid media	AJA, ChilOut
Subsidising MPs in question time	AJA
Subsidising lawyers in review process	AJA
Online activism (E-advocacy)	AJA, RAR, ChilOut

Expertise and professional ethos	RCA, ARRA, AJA, ChilOut
Training	RCA, ARRA
University engagement	ARRA, AJA
Courting local media	RAR
Information nights	ChilOut
Courting public media	RCA, RAR
PR kits: posters, brochures, fact sheets, press releases, news conferences, etc.	RCA, ARRA, AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Street events	AJA, RAR, ChilOut
Activity	Organisation
Closer to Tactics (Organisational effectiveness)	

Table 2 summarises the various PR activities undertaken by the different groups. RAR in particular, also situated itself in an unoccupied and fertile field. Speaking on behalf of rural Australians, its messages revolutionised the hitherto urban-narrowed platform of the refugee movement. First, it demonstrated that the country was not the most conservative and refugee-alooft place. RAR caused a remarkable chain reaction. Once publicity appeared in places usually reserved for private talks, public opinion formed, in some instances, for the first time. And it turned out exactly the same as the talks were — only freed from the suppression of ‘one does not say that before others’.

Second, RAR demonstrated the economic benefits of settling refugees in rural areas — both as working hand and consumers — and gained to its site many mayors and some National MPs. This was a convincing message. It did not need any educational campaign; it hit straight, being the closest to the self-interests of the economically embattled rural areas. More tactical here was the self-legitimation with ‘the (local) authority is with us’. Piggybacking is a common PR tool. It was not necessary for those who were all right with outing themselves as refugee supporters. It did however work well with those for whom conforming to the norms still had priority to what they were actually thinking.

And a third strategic advantage of RAR appeared in the geographical closeness of its networks — and even headquarters — to the detention centres. The government had deliberately built them in the most remote areas all over the country. Activists, lawyers and journalists from the big city agencies had to incur considerable costs and spent a lot of time to overcome the

'tyranny of the distance', visiting the detainees. This was true for the urban yet not for the rural networks. RAR established its bases in the neighbourhood of the centres. There was no coincidence that the coordination of the group spontaneously migrated first from NSW to Victoria and then farther to South Australia, following the impulsive path of waxing and veining detention centres.

New and strategic was also the positioning of ARRA, AJA, RAR and ChilOut as 'middle Australians'. All four groups consists well-off volunteers and professionals, who, in the paradigm of the New Social Movements, considered themselves not left and not right, but rather bipartisan and outside the traditional political spectrum (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). All demonstrated the ability to speak the language of conservative voters and build alliance Liberal backbenchers and National MPs.

For reasons already discussed above, the one message that represented best the new strategies of the refugee movement was ChilOut's 'Children don't belong in detention centres' and 'Detaining kids is statutory child abuse'. It reframed the refugee problem from the low relevant 'human rights' issue to the high-priority 'health and family' concerns of the Australia public. It also relocated the attention from all detained refugees to the most vulnerable among them — the children.

This was not a retreat but a strategic choice. In the past companies that were not aware of the power of strategic communication used to tout separately each of their products or services. They also were putting almost all advertising money into those that did not sell well. Today, strategic marketing stresses the importance of promoting the whole brand or issue rather than single items. And the bulk of campaign resources are often spent on the bestseller — because it best represents the entire brand or issue (Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Harris, 1998; Schultz & Schultz, 2004). This is what is done by organisations like Apple Computers who have plenty of promotional resources. And this is even more suitable for others — including the refugee advocacy groups — who have little or no means at all (Jenkinson, Sain, & Bishop, 2005; Novelli, 1990).

In 2005 Apple put almost all its advertising money into one single product, the iPod, which accounted for only 39 percent of Apple's merchandise. As a result, the sales of iPod jumped significantly, but so did the sales of all other products, including the Macintosh computers, which were not advertised at all. Marketing psychologists call it the 'halo effect': 'The first brand in a new category will imprint itself in human minds as the original, the authentic, the real thing. Kleenex in tissue. Hertz in rent-a-cars. Heinz in ketchup. Starbucks in coffee shops' (Ries, 2006).

In Australia, the public opinion was more ready to see the children, rather than all detained refugees, go free (Miskin & Baker, 2003). Once this happened in 2005, it triggered an irreversible chain reaction. First released were the children, followed by their families and 'accompanying adults', and then by the rest of the 'boat people' (Dimitrov, 2007).

Universities proved strategic allies in this new development. University-based research (ARRA and the Refugee Research Centre at the UNSW for the UN) and training grants (the AJA appeal applications project), open opportunities for the resource-poor third sector organisations. It helps them to subsidise news and influence policy processes. That way, universities' community engagement directly strengthens the communication capacity of resource-poor nonprofit organisations.

Third sector research is a form of advocacy. It is research by participation and participation by

research. Research constructs the movement by rationalising it. The cases from the refugee movement explored in this paper shed light on the huge and largely untested potential of highly qualified activists and volunteers as well as engaged community programs academics to develop both high-impact communication strategies and efficient organisational tactics of advocacy mobilisation.

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Footnotes

I have interviewed Margaret Piper [12 September 2005], executive director of the *Refugee*

Council of Australia (RCA); Dr Eileen Pittaway [10 November 2005], head of the *Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA)* and director of the *UNSW Centre for Refugee Research*; Kate Gauthier [10 November 2005], national director of *A Just Australia (AJA)*; Anne Coombs and Susan Varga [25 November 2005] as well as Dr Helen McCue [21 November 2005], founders and first coordinators of *Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR)*; and Junie Ong [22 February 2006] fonder and first coordinator, Alanna Sherry (Hector) [19 December 2005], coordinator, and Fiona Walkerden [6 March 2006], web designer of *Children Out of Detention (ChilOut)*, and Ngareta Russell, women advocate and writer [3 March 2006]. Back

Dr. Roumen Dimitrov is Lecturer in Public Relations at the School of Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney. His recent books include *Scandalless, Tribunal or Forum, and NomenCulture*. His research is focussed on media publicity and communication capacity of third sector organisations.

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