

What is the Problem Represented to Be: A Research Methodology for Analysing Australias Skilled Migration Policy

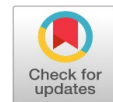
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Abstract: Most discourse theories contain no suggestion of a methodology to conduct policy analysis. The view that a prescribed methodology is a restriction on interpretation may account for why specific methodologies are few in policy (and discourse) analysis. However, Fairclough (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) demonstrates that a prescribed methodology in discourse analysis can coexist with abstract discourse analysis. Extending Faircloughs argument for prescribed methodology, Bacchi (2009) What is the problem represented to be? What is the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) uses a series of questions to assist in uncovering problem representation within policy settings. This paper applies the WPR approach to an analysis of the 2010 reform of the Australian skilled migration policy. This reform was a watershed in Australian immigration policy in terms of who may immigrate to Australia and on what conditions. The skilled migration program focus shifted from supply to demand driven migration. The WPR approach is applied to determine the motivation behind the policy shift through a series of six questions that uncover the ineffectiveness of human capital theory assumptions that drive the rationale for supply driven migration as the problem representation but fail to address the real and unrepresented problems. The paper demonstrates the effectiveness of the WPR approach as a research methodology in critical policy analysis.

Keywords: Policy discourse, Discourse analysis, Skilled migration, Human capital, Research methodology

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INTRODUCTION

Policy analysis is a “process of multidisciplinary enquiry aiming at the creation, critical assessment, and communication of policy relevant information” (Dunn, 2015). There are three main traditions in policy analysis: traditionalist, critical and interpretive. Evolution of the traditions has seen a shift, albeit not unanimous, from one that views policy analysis as an instrument of social justice to one that views it as social control. The concept of government as a provider and protector of public goods is a contested concept and forms the fundamental premises of later approaches to policy analysis. The government, as an active actor within the policy setting sphere interacts, competes and negotiates with other actors in the process of policy setting, to produce outcomes that should be questioned and interrogated. What is missing from most approaches to policy analysis is a guide to reflect differences in approach. An exception is Bacchi (2009) which, within a critical tradition, views policy discourse as a framework for problematisation, from which a prescribed solution is offered. The proposed method or set of questions, WPR, interrogates the premise of the policy that creates the problem represented rather than accepting it at face value. The paper demonstrates the application of the WPR approach to a specific area of the Australian skilled migration policy. The first part of the paper reviews the various traditions in policy analysis, followed by a discussion of discourse analysis as a common methodological approach to critical analysis. The second part of the paper contains a brief introduction to the WPR approach in discourse analysis before applying it to analysis of Australias skilled migration policy reform.

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TRADITIONS IN POLICY ANALYSIS

Each tradition differs in its definition of policy analysis. For example, the traditionalist approach which, “draws on social science methods, theories and substantive findings to solve practical problems” (Dunn, 2015), exemplifies an applied social science approach with underlying assumptions of logic, rationality and objectivity. Under this approach, policy analysis is a tool to provide objective, value free solutions to problems that benefit the general population (Goodwin, 2011) and acts as a platform to legitimise the policy (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005).

Critics of the traditionalist or rationalist tradition of policy analysis question the foundational premises, objectivity and generalisation of the traditionalist approach (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005). The critical approach argues against the value neutrality and social justice perspectives of the traditionalist approach arguing instead for a social control perspective (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005; Goodwin, 2011). The social control perspective views policy as a tool used by government to exert influence and control and is a result of “contested and negotiated interest amongst stakeholders with unequal power relations” (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005). Interest in the critical approach to policy analysis is consistent with the rise of inequality within social class, gender and ethnicity (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005). Based on the assumption that government is only one of potentially multiple stakeholders, and one with an interest in pursuing its own political agenda, the critical approach interrogates the role and interest of government in policy (Dunn, 2015).

The interpretive tradition of policy analysis focuses on the meaning of the texts and language used in a policy. This approach is based on the “presupposition that we live in a social world characterised by the possibility of multiple interpretations” (Yanow, 1999). The interpretive approach views policy as a manifestation of stakeholders motives (Ball, 1993) where the language and text within a policy allow for meanings to be read and motives to be uncovered. Not only is policy never free of interpretations and representations of the policy maker, it is also subject to different interpretations by the reader of the policy based on the readers social class and power relations (Ball, 1993). Hence, the impact of policy on the reader varies and, importantly, is likely “not to be constructed in circumstances of their own marking” (Ball, 1993). While the policy interpretation allows for individualistic and independent narration of the problem, the ability of the reader to offer an (alternative) solution to the problem is necessarily constrained by the construct or framework established by the policy maker. Policy analysis is thus limited by dictated constraints, frameworks and boundaries that are predetermined by the way the problem is framed and represented by the policy maker. Such constraints are demonstrations of inequality of power relations in policy setting (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005).

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Within the critical and interpretive approach, discourse analysis is commonly employed to interrogate and interpret policy texts. Based on Foucaults theories of discourse, a policy is a product of constructed meaning and knowledge that subjectifies the actors within a web of power relations that, not only determines “what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, where and with what authority” (Ball, 1993). Each actor within a discourse has been set a role to play with predetermined outcomes within the context of the policy. Discourse analyses, especially critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Schiffrin, 2005; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) question the premises of policy frameworks to understand the logic behind the policy and to visualise it from unrepresented alternatives. In other words, discourse analysis views aspects, thoughts or perspectives not considered in the policy framework, to be equally as important as those that are visible. The way in which meaning or knowledge is constructed forms the basis on how discourse analysis works, and interrogation of the construction provides insight into how the discourse is produced (Ball, 1993; Goodwin, 2011). This allows for the analysis of “what ought to be, in contrast to what is” (Dunn, 2015) and creates opportunities to consider alternative frameworks for the problem. Within discourse analysis, a policy is no longer perceived as a solution developed to address a specific problem. Rather, policy is perceived as having a role in creating the problem (Goodwin, 2011). The construct of the discourse involves various actors with unequal power relations whose selfinterests compete, influence, and negotiate with each other for relevance. Each actor possesses unique social, po-

litical, economic and historical perspectives and these perspectives influence the framing of the problem (and consequentially, the solution) within the policy. The problem articulated in a policy, as a result, is no longer innocent (Goodwin, 2011) as it closes off the space for normative debate by enforcing the impression that the best solution has been provided (Baachi, 1999). The shift of policy analysis from accepting a given problem at face value towards analysing problem representation allows discourse analysis to challenge and question the assumptions used to frame the policy discourse (Baachi, 1999; Bacchi, 2000, 2009; Goodwin, 2011). Discourse analysis, as a result, robustly examines policy to reveal aspects of the problem representation that are excluded from the policy discourse.

As part of the poststructuralist movements, discourse analysis places an emphasis on the production of meaning within a discourse rather than on the emphasis on value in policy making (Baachi, 1999). Some of the more significant social constructionist approaches include Foucault's Theory of Discourse, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory and the Discursive Psychology movement (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). These frameworks share the same view of language as the vehicle for the production of meaning in a discourse in addition to the role that actors, with unequal power relations, play in constructing and changing the social and political landscapes (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). While there are differences in these approaches in the underlying philosophy and theoretical foundations, aims and methods (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002), they share similar premises on which the analysis is based on.

Knowledge, as a product of a discourse, is naturally suspect and must be interrogated (Ball, 1993). Knowledge is bound by the construction of language (or social psychology in the case of discursive psychology) and as such, imposes limits on thoughts, speeches and considerations for other possibilities. Additionally, meaning derived from knowledge in a discourse arises not only from language, but from institutional practises, from power relations, from social positions (Ball, 1993). Power relations and social positions are derived from historical and cultural perspectives and ironically, social identities created within social positions are shaped discursively through the production and ownership of knowledge (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Hence, there is a link between knowledge acquisition and the processes of social constructions. In short, discourse is "socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned - it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people" (Wodak & Fairclough, 2013). The linkage is exemplified in Ball (1993) description of discourse as "what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, where and with what authority". Discourse, as such, focuses on problematisation (Goodwin, 2011) where "people do not discover problems; (but) they create them" (Baachi, 1999). As public policy is an aspect of governance, discourse within a public policy framework provides legitimacy for government ideology (Goodwin, 2011). As a result, discourse analysis is appropriate as a policy analysis tool as it allows for the discourse within a policy to be challenged and contested.

Government as policy maker

Policy setting is a political process and a fundamental tool for governance. Policy discourse analysis creates a robust debate on policy settings and evaluates the role of the government in influencing the political, social, cultural and economic shifts in a society as an active one and not removed from the process of policy setting itself (Bacchi, 2000; Fawcett & Goodwin, 2010). Thus, government, in the process of policy setting, pursues an agenda and actively negotiates outcomes with other actors in the policy setting. The competing interests and the resulting outcomes frame the solution inherent in the policy. Unlike the public choice approach to policy analysis in which public policy is a tool used to maintain institutional authority, discourse analysis uncovers "more complex motivation behind agendas" and investigates government as an actor with political self-interest that goes beyond maintaining institutional authority (Baachi, 1999). Discourse analysis is thus well suited to assess the role of the government in the production of policy discourse.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: WPR

Clarity around methods on conducting discourse analysis is lacking. Foucault's Discourse theories contain no suggestion of a method for discourse analysis (Graham, 2005). Nor is there a specific methodology in Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). As an approach that focuses on the construction of language or text analysis as an element of a discourse, Fairclough (2001) CDA employs a multimodal approach combining textual analysis and social analysis (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Fairclough (2001) CDA thus analyses "the linguistic feature of the text, the processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice) and the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice)" (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). For some, the suggestion that a prescribed method would "inhibit and constrain thoughts" is an affront (Graham, 2005) to the social constructionist movement. This may account for why specific methods are few in discourse analysis. Although Fairclough (2001) demonstrates that a prescribed methodology in discourse analysis can coexist with abstract discourse analysis, such guided approaches within discourse analysis are rare (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002).

To address this deficiency, Bacchi (2009) proposes a set of questions to guide the analysis of policy discourse. WPR, falls within the critical tradition of discourse analysis. The following quotation summarises WPR (Baachi, 1999).

WPR provides a way of studying policy which opens up a range of questions that are seldom addressed in other approaches: how every proposal necessarily offers a representation of the problem to be addressed, how these representations contain presuppositions and assumptions which often go unanalysed, how these representations shape an issue in ways which limit possibilities for change. It also offers a framework for examining gaps and silences in policy debate by asking what remains unproblematised in certain representations.

Under WPR, the interrogation of problem representations aims to "create space for reflecting more broadly on how we are governed" rather than to help "policy analysts to offer useful advice" (Bacchi, 2009). It assumes that all actors within a web of power relations are policy subjects and are involved in a heavily contested process of policy making. Such underpinnings and effect of policymaking "need to be challenged rather than simply accepted" (Bacchi, 2009). In a departure from the abstractions of general discourse analyses, Baachi (1999), Bacchi (2000) offers a series of six questions (refer to Table 1) to analyse problem representation in the WPR framework. The simplicity of WPR means that its application is widespread and without the need to "immerse oneself in complicated theory" (Bacchi, 2009). Even though WPR employs a methodology to analyse problem representation, Bacchi (2009) is cautious of the prescriptive and restrictive nature of a methodology and of applying one in discourse analysis. The methods are not prescriptive proposals but rather a series of questions that encourage critical analysis of policy that are consistent with the critical discourse movement (Bacchi, 2009). The series of set questions in the WPR framework are meant to be inquisitive and reflective because policy is underpinned by deep-seated assumptions and effects that require interrogation. The application of WPR potentially results in a multitude of layers of analysis and with seemingly endless possibilities to such analysis, it is often finalised once a new paradigm is produced from the interrogation (Goodwin, 2011).

Table 1: The WPR framework Bacchi (2009)

Questions	Objectives
1. What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy?	To identify implied problem representations in specific policies or policy proposals.
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?	To identify and analyse the conceptual logics that underpin specific problem representations.
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to take shape and to assume dominance.

Table 1: Continue....

Questions	Objectives
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?	To raise for reflection and consideration issues and perspectives silenced in identified problem representations
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?	To identify the effects of specific problem representations so that they can be critically assessed.
6. How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?	To pay attention both to the means through which some problem representations become dominant, and to the possibility of challenging problem representations that are judged to be harmful.

Text selection

Policy is wide in its scope and could be “a text, a process, a discourse, a political decision, a programme” (Blackmore & Lauder, 2005). Consequentially, policy analysis refers to the analysis of text, process, decisions, statements, speeches, interviews, statistical data and “even the interactions between the institutional actors” (Goodwin, 2011). The WPR commences with the selection of a policy text which is a broad based document, contextual in nature and open to interpretation and debate (Goodwin, 2011). Deciding what to analyse is an interpretive act, in which the “policy analyst is embroiled in a process of marking off and marking out territory for analysis” Goodwin (2011). Selecting policy text for analysis is a subjective exercise reflecting on the analysts research interest and intent (Bacchi, 2009). The policy text is chosen “to develop a particular argument” within an existing analysis (Bacchi, 2009). Because the chosen policy text is in the public domain, it provokes debate or contest amongst the actors with inherent interest in the policy discourse. Bacchi (2009) provides the following guide on policy aspects requiring further attention:

- Dividing practices that operate in current dominant modes of governance.
- Subjectification processes within current modes of governance that produce particular kinds of subjects.
- Lived effects that harm some and benefit others.

WPR APPLICATION TO AUSTRALIA’S IMMIGRATION POLICY

This section demonstrates the application of the WPR method in analysing immigration policy as a discourse. This approach is used to deconstruct the skilled migration policy discourse by interrogating the foundations that provide validity to the discourse: human capital theory, concepts of immigration, skills shortage and human capital, and migrants as the subject of the discourse. Through such interrogation, the discourse is challenged by alternative perspectives of the problem representation: ranging from viewing the problem from the labour market demand to (the lack of) education funding by the government to produce the required human capital.

Selection of policy text

This paper is one of a series of papers on the employment paradox for Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) graduates from Australian universities. In certain professions, these graduates face an over supplied labour market while immigration policy supports excess demand for labour in the same professions. The policy text chosen for analysis is a press release entitled “Migration reform to deliver Australias skills need” (dated 8 February 2010) issued by the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship (Evans & Kelley, 1991). The policy reform represents a watershed moment in the skilled migration history, is situated in an immigration discourse that attracts public interest and debate, and is an important election issue (Ludlow, 2016; Tavan, 2016). Immigration policy fits within Bacchi (2009) three descriptive aspects of a policy to be interrogated: First, the immigration debate is often politicised and divisive as it creates a us vs them mentality (dividing practices). Second, the debate always produces winners and losers (subjectification), and third, the winners and losers are often stereotyped in this de-

bate such that they live the stereotypical lives (lived effects). A policy text can be selected to represent a moment of crisis (Goodwin, 2011). In this case, the text reflects the exact point in the history of Australian skilled migration where, for the first time, demand driven migration (employer nominated) is given priority over supply driven migration (general skills). This represents a major shift from the 2008 policy reform that gave equal status to demand driven migration alongside supply driven migration.

Question one: Whats the problem represented to be in the policy?

The immigration reform announced in the press release or policy document, is underpinned by the Long Term Migration Planning Framework (LTMPF). The LTMPF has the following objective: “To ensure that immigration contributes to an optimal balance between Australias population, labour market, economic, sustainable environmental and urban and regional development outcomes over the period to 2050” (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010). Underlying the LTMPF is the use of human capital in supporting Australias future growth. The government defines human capital as “the stock of skills and knowledge embodied in the ability to perform labour so as to produce economic value. It is the skills and knowledge gained by a worker through education and experience.” (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2010). Hence the problem is broadly represented to be an inability of the existing skilled migration policy to meet the LTMPFs objective.

The WPR approach posits that a problem is implicitly constructed within the policy text itself and the problem can be identified by working backwards (Bacchi, 2009). Hence, the reform articulated in the chosen text is framed as a solution to meet the LTMPFs objective. The reform shifts the skilled migration program from a supply driven to a demand driven system as it is “more responsive to the needs of industry and employers and better addresses the nations future skill needs” (Evans & Kelley, 1991). By shifting to a demand driven system, the policy document specifically implies that the human capital provided through the supply driven system fails to meet the needs of the labour market.

Question two: What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

The second question concerns “identifying and analysing the conceptual logic that underpins problem representation” (Bacchi, 2009). Conceptual logic provides validity to the problem representation and explains how the problem representation comes about (Bacchi, 2009). Applying question two to the policy text, it identifies the logic of Human Capital Theory (HCT) as the underlying conceptual logic of the problem representation. The theory frames an individuals knowledge and skills acquired through education investment as objective factors of production that yield results both for the individual and the labour market (Becker, 1975; Laroche, Mérette, & Ruggeri, 1999; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961; Wasike, 2017). Consistent with this theory, the government identifies human capital from the demand driven system as the key driver for future economic growth.

To further uncover the conceptual logic, Bacchi (2009) recommends analysing the “binaries, concepts and categories” within the policy text.

Binary

A binary assumes a position where two sides oppose each other. For example, in the problem representation, the supply and demand driven migration systems are examples of a binary. Because the problem representation is shaped as a supply driven problem, the reform focuses on correcting the imperfections on the supply side. The simplistic nature of the binary constraints the understanding of the problem by drawing the attention away from examining the demand side of the problem. The unrepresented demand side is an example of silences that are interrogated in question four.

Concepts

The key concept in the policy text is immigration. Immigration is a concept deeply rooted in Australian history. An examination of the historical narrative of Australian immigration provides a clear understanding of the immigration discourse. The political dimensions of the discourse also require scrutiny.

Because immigration policy results in benefits and burdens, it is highly political so that the political dimension helps shape the immigration discourse. The historical narrative of immigration and its role in politics are examined in question three. Other concepts that require interrogation are the concepts of human capital and skill shortages. Both human capital and skill shortages are socially constructed to validate the problem representation thus, under WPR, they require attention.

Category

People category is significant in public policy as it is central to the process of government (Bacchi, 2009). Within the chosen policy text, migrants are the main people category. Migrant is an identity constructed by government and made distinguishable by factors relating to the ownership of human, economic, and cultural capitals. Migrant identity and human capitals, in an immigration context, are inseparable. The rejection of the embodied human capital would necessitate the rejection of the migrants. As an identity within an immigration discourse, the migrant is constructed to be discriminated against. As a constructed identity, it is open to interrogation in question three.

The immigration policy text is largely constituted under the assumptions of a perfect labour market where consideration of human capital is limited to skills and knowledge, and a demand driven migration system yields superior results to the supply driven migration system.

Question three: How has this representation of the problem come about?

Question three determines how the problem representation is formed (Bacchi, 2009). The interrogation of HCT, concepts and category as identified in question two provides an understanding on the construct of the problem representation. In this discussion, the problem representation resides in three broad areas: human capital theory (the conceptual logic); Australian immigration discourse (the concept); and the migrants (the people category).

Human capital theory

The use of the supply and demand binary implies that human capital acquired through a demand system is superior to that acquired through a supply system. This challenges the conceptual logic underlying HCT because if the theory is inadequate in explaining labour market outcomes, a new framework is required. A policy discourse has deepseated cultural and social values that shape the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009). As such, the conceptual logic must consider the impact of cultural and social values. Building on the notion that human capital is an important factor in future economic growth, Bourdieus Theory of Capital (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977) is presented as an alternative to HCT as a framework for the conceptual logic. Bourdieus theory highlights the shortcomings of HCT by addressing its inability to consider an individuals innate attributes other than those related to skills and knowledge acquired through formal education. Similarly, Bourdieu addresses the failure of HCT to consider class structure and social inequality as explanations for poor labour market outcomes (Beach, 2009; Bowles & Gintis, 1975). The versatility of Bourdieus capital theory is demonstrated by the inclusion of cultural and social capitals in addition to economic capital. Bourdieus theory acknowledges unequal power distribution as a result of capital ownerships so this results in a hierarchy of power relations, with the capital rich dominating and the capital poor, dominated (Bourdieu & Nice, 1977; Richardson, 1986). Bourdieus theory is useful in explaining the mechanisms behind labour market preferences for human capital based on a demand driven system over the supply driven system. The demand system promotes selective, prejudicial and/or discriminatory labour market practices (Evans & Kelley, 1991).

Australian immigration narrative

Foucaults genealogy framework deduces that “cultural practices are instituted historically” and are therefore contingent on “historically instituted practices” (Fraser, 1981) and it is this genealogy frame work that provides the framework for the Australian immigration narrative. Australia as a British colony has a history of convict settlement. Early settlers were predominantly British and Europeans. Non-European migrants were brought in as economic labour in times of labour shortages. Attempts to replace settlers

with non-European labour led to protests and riots against non-European migrants and triggered the White Australia policy in 1901 (Clark, 1992). From 1901, the flow and the acceptance of migrants into Australia were encountered along racial and ethnic lines (Clark, 1992; McNamara, 2009). The second trigger point in the history of Australian immigration is the abolishment of the White Australia policy in the early 1970s. Both these events significantly influenced subsequent immigration discourse in Australia.

Migrants and human capital

The history of the White Australia immigration policy and attempts to preserve a European culture and identity through immigration policies suggest Australian immigration policies have followed a communitarian approach where histories, cultures and the interests of its citizen contribute significantly to the shaping of immigration policies (Seglow, 2005). Communitarian philosophy expects individuals within a web of relations in the community to uphold the moral, social and political values of the community through the subscription to “a set of shared values, norms and meanings, and a shared history in short, a shared culture” (Etzioni, 1996) based on law and order, and the achievement for the common good (Foley, 1995). Expectations conveyed by the communitarian philosophy produce two outcomes: one, it constructs the identity of the individuals who subscribe to the philosophy; and two, it defines the relationships among individuals in the community. The construction of the identity of desirable individuals within a community precludes individuals who do not conform to the prescribed identity. Applying this communitarian construct to the immigration discourse, desirable migrants are those with desirable human capital (qualifications and skills), and shared similar cultural identity with Australia.

The problem representation is deeply rooted in cultural and social traditions. Historical immigration narratives highlight the events that significantly shaped the immigration discourse and in turn, the immigration discourse shapes the identity of the migrant, the subject of the problem representation.

Question Four: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

The problem in this policy text discourse is framed as a problem with supply side migration and hence, demand side reforms are offered as a remedy. This implies an unproblematic demand system. The use of the supply and demand binary distorts the policy setting process by ignoring the demand system, ignoring other stakeholders and ignoring alternative analyses of the problem. The aim of question four is to “bring into discussion, issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representations” (Bacchi, 2009).

Demand migration system

Skill shortages are as much a demand side as a supply side issue. Skill shortages drive skilled migration programs through industry contribution in identifying skill shortages. For example, the industry and university sector claim labour shortages in the accounting profession through the annual submission for Skilled Occupation List (SOL). In 2015, despite the governments own recommendation that a skill shortage did not exist in this profession (Department of Employment, 2014, 2015), the profession of accountant was added to the SOL. The question of whether a skill shortage in the accounting profession exists is subject to public debate. However, the fact that there are competing claims suggests that the skills shortage is a constructed, and political, concept requiring further investigation.

Stakeholders

Professional associations and universities actively lobby government to include their nominated occupations on the SOL (Birrell, 2003). In the accounting profession for example, the Certified Practising Accountants of Australia (CPA) and Chartered Accountants of Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) are interested in increasing membership revenue, and possibly suppressing wages growth through over supply (Annisette & Trivedi, 2011). It is difficult, if not impossible to practice as an accountant in Australia without membership to a professional association. Similarly, constant reductions in public expenditure on higher education means universities have a vested interest in growing and protecting their

revenues from international students. Many international students are attracted to study in Australian universities based on the professions listed on the SOL.

Alternative analyses

A further demand side issue that is silenced in immigration debates is employer recruitment practices. Discrimination in recruitment is not uncommonly directed toward ethnic and religion minorities (Booth, Leigh, & Varganova, 2012; James & Otsuka, 2009; Lovat et al., 2013). Likewise firm size (Bui & Porter, 2010) and general economic prosperity (Baert, Cockx, Gheyle, & Vandamme, 2015) influence recruitment decisions. Although recruitment bias and discrimination exist (Schiffirin, 2005), they may be motivated by profit and other commercial concerns (Baert et al., 2015; Booth et al., 2012) aside from cultural considerations (James & Otsuka, 2009). As a silent issue in the debate, this issue warrants further investigation. Yet another silent issue is the declining public investment in education and training required to meet the LTMPFs objectives. By reducing public investment in education (Anderson, 2015; Riddle, 2015), the government risks not meeting its long term growth targets whereby immigration becomes a solution. The investment in tertiary education in Australia, at less than one percent of GDP (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015) compared with the OECD average of 1.5 percent, is clearly lacking and the prospect of delivering human capital to support future growth is questionable. The WPR approach renders the silences visible and provides a context for critical analysis of the policy to occur. The silences allow dominant stakeholders to influence the discourse based on self interest. As the government is one of many powerful actors within the immigration discourse, it is necessary to question whether the skilled migration program is a substitute for inadequate government investment in human capital.

Question Five: What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

By framing the problem as one of supply side, blame is conferred on the skilled migrants themselves, and the ability for the policy reform to consider alternative solutions is severely compromised. Thus, the problem representation not only affects the subjects of the policy (migrants) but also affects those who are silenced by the framing of the problem representation. For example, recruitment bias in the labour market based on racial discrimination affects both non-European skilled migrants and Australian citizens with non-European backgrounds. A recent initiative by the Victorian State Government to trial blind recruitment practices for public service positions (Wahlquist, 2016) is evidence of racial discrimination in recruitment. Similarly, public discussions over the lack of diversity amongst business leaders reflects inherent biases in the labour market (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016).

The effect of the discourse extends to the skilled migrants. Within the discourse, the migrants are positioned low in the power hierarchy. Being dominated, the relationship migrants have with the other actors in the discourse, is one of inequality. The construct of their identity enables the immigration issue and the skilled migrants themselves to be politicised. The politics of immigration create an “us versus them” debate with skilled migrants receiving the them identity. Migrants are often accused by the media of stealing local jobs, being dependent on social welfare and participating in criminal activities (Collins, 2005). Politicians exploit these arguments for political gain and so, negative migrant images gains momentum particularly during elections (Keany & Anderson, 2016).

Restricting the ability of the policy to consider other issues and perspectives relevant to the problem representation is significant and the impact severe. In this discussion, the discourse has the effect of maintaining the status quo and as a result, the real and uninterrogated problems remain unresolved.

Question Six: How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

The final question examines how the assumptions and presuppositions are “produced, disseminated and defended” (Bacchi, 2009). Because immigration discourse exists within broader political discourses, meanings constructed within the immigration discourse are given legitimacy by political authorities. The machinery of the political system perpetuates the immigration discourse through using propaganda based

on protection (think border security) or fear (think migrant unemployment, burden on social services, threats of domestic terrorism). The discourse creates subjects and methods of governance consistent with Foucault's theory of governmentality (Lemke, 2002). Government and governance are vehicles for the problem representation to be produced, disseminated and defended. The media is another platform to validate and perpetuate the problem representation. However, media can work both ways in either defending or challenging the problem representation. Similar to other stakeholders, the media pursues its own self interest which in turn determines what it decides to do on any given policy issue. Although journalistic standards require balanced reporting, personal agendas often introduce bias in reporting (Gans & Leigh, 2012; Hanusch, 2013). While the media platform is a medium for producing, disseminating and defending the problem representation, paradoxically, it is also a platform for questioning, disrupting and replacing the problem representation with another knowledge discourse.

Validation or distortion may also come from the migrant themselves. In the 2014 to 2015 period, a total of 136,572 residents became Australian citizens (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2016). The conversion of residency status to citizenships signals a willingness to engage in the political process by having access to voting rights. Rather than being a dominated political subject, becoming an Australian citizen allows them to improve their position in the discourse and engage in debates to either question or defend the discourse.

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates how WPR can be applied to the analysis of immigration policy in Australia. The approach provides a guide unconcerned with "factfinding, but rather with the nature of facts and how they are brought into being" (Goodwin, 2011). The WPR process of policy analysis presents an understanding of how policy is set and with this understanding comes the ability to question the premises on which policies and their solutions are constructed. In line with critical and interpretivist traditions, the approach is inherently a subjective process from selection of the policy text, interpretation of the policy's words and language, and selection of the perspectives from which to analyse the policy. Similar to the concept of discourse itself, the decisions on the what, which, who and how are subjected to personal interpretation which in turn is influenced by the analyst's political, social and cultural background and even the depth of knowledge of the issue. However, critical theorists argue that all discourse analysis is inherently subjective, the key point is making the analytical processes transparent. Baachis questions for policy analysis through the WPR methodology is a powerful tool for interrogation in critical discourse analysis.

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