Crises in international education, and government responses: a comparative analysis of racial discrimination and violence towards international students

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Accepted: 12 January 2021 / Published online: 18 January 2021

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Abstract

Crises affect international students' overseas experiences, but crisis theory is rarely considered in international education studies. This article provides a comparative study of two countries, using a 'most similar cases' research design, to analyse host-nation government responses to crisis situations. The two countries are Australia and New Zealand. The crisis in each case relates to racial discrimination and violence against international students. The article finds that Australia and New Zealand each had a 'long-shadow crisis'. Yet, Australia's governmental response was more systematic and comprehensive, mainly because of the formation of a pro-action 'advocacy coalition' which was formed in the context of a federal political system. The article discusses key implications for international education studies, highlighting that governmental structures matter in crisis response, and that crisis theory is important to interpreting policy challenges, especially in the era of COVID-19.

Keywords International education · International student mobility · Australia and New Zealand · Crises · Governmental response to crises

Introduction

Crises in host countries can affect the quality of international students' overseas experiences. Yet, crises are rarely systematically considered in international education studies. This article provides a comparative study of two countries, using a 'most similar cases' research design (Lijphart, 1971), to analyse the implications of crises on student mobility decisions. The two countries are Australia and New Zealand. The crisis in each case relates to racial discrimination and violence against international students. The Australian case focuses on events affecting Indian students, especially in 2009 to 2010, and the New Zealand case considers developments which affected Chinese students in the early to mid-2000s. The article addresses two central research questions: first, what are the

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similarities and differences between Australia and New Zealand in relation to government responses to racial discrimination and violence against Indian students in the former case, and Chinese students in the latter case? Second, what factors explain the similarities and differences?

Crises are ‘extraordinary episodes which disturb and threaten established patterns of working and dominant assumptions about the ways aspects of society operate’ (McConnell, 2010: 63). As McConnell (2010) argues, crises can affect lives, threaten property, markets, political careers, public services, and policy agendas. The article reviews the four main types of crisis identified within the policy studies literature: the ‘sudden’ or ‘fast-burning’ crisis; the ‘chronic’, ‘slow-burning’ or ‘long-shadow’ category; the ‘creeping’ crisis; and the ‘cathartic’ crisis (McConnell, 2003; t’Hart & Boin, 2001). This conceptual schema is used to identify the kind of crisis prevalent in each of the two case study countries. The manifestation of the crisis in each country is defined in terms of a sustained downturn in international student enrolments. This is particularly pertinent in countries where international education attracts full fees and is a major export, and where growth in student numbers is the predominant characteristic of the system. In policy terms the downturn represents a ‘focusing event’ for a government (Kingdon, 2014), causing a ‘punctuation’ in the ‘equilibrium’ (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) that is represented by the assumption of student safety. It is where drama or tragedy raises human interest in a policy issue because it disturbs the status quo.

The first section of the article examines the key types of crisis and the key generic responses by governments to crisis as identified in the policy studies literature. The second section reviews the small literature in international education which assists understanding of the connection between crises, racial discrimination and violence, and government responses. The third section discusses the research design. The fourth and fifth sections examine the Australian and New Zealand cases respectively. The sixth section offers a brief comparative discussion, and the paper finishes in the seventh section with the broader international implications of the analysis.

Crises and government responses

Crises are extraordinary events or episodes which cause societies to re-imagine their dominant assumptions and ‘ways of working’. They ‘shatter the peace and order of societies’ (Boin et al., 2016). There is ambiguity in conceptualising and naming them, and coming to terms with them politically (McConnell, 2020). As well as lives, crises can threaten property, markets, political careers, public services, and policy agendas (McConnell, 2003: 63). They are ‘periods of upheaval and collective stress, disturbing everyday patterns and threatening core values and structures of a social system in unexpected, often inconceivable ways’. Crises are not discrete events, but unfolding processes (Rosenthal et al, 2001: 6). Real-world examples of crises are plentiful. Recent and historical instances include climate change; terrorism; banking and sub-prime mortgages; the social and economic challenges of poverty, inequality and international development; and public health problems and challenges.

There are various classifications of crises (Boin et al., 2016; Drenna et al., 2015; McConnell, 2003; Preston, 2008; t’Hart & Boin, 2001). Two authors offer the clearest definitions: McConnell (2003) t’Hart and Boin (2001). McConnell identifies three main types. The first is a ‘sudden crisis’, such as a terrorist attack, which is typically an

unexpected and fast-developing event. The second is a ‘chronic crisis’, which in contrast to a sudden crisis, is ongoing and often long-term, with no obvious solution. Poverty, inequality and international development are inter-related examples. The third is a ‘creeping crisis’ (McConnell, 2003), which builds up over a protracted period, often over many years or decades, and causes mistrust of public institutions. Human-induced climate change serves as a suitable example.

t’Hart and Boin (2001: 31–35) provide a similar classification, though theirs is based mainly on speed of onset and termination. For them crises are generally either ‘fast-burning’, ‘cathartic’, ‘slow-burning’ or ‘long-shadow’. The fast-burning type, like McConnell’s (2003) ‘sudden crisis’, is one which begins and ends quickly and decisively, even if sometimes tragically. Plane hijacks and hostage situations are typical examples. The cathartic crisis, like McConnell’s ‘creeping crisis’, builds up slowly, but the additional condition is that it ends abruptly. This means that climate change is not a cathartic crisis, given that it is ongoing. Instead, conflicts between public authorities and extremist groups such as vigilantes or organised white supremacists may be classified as cathartic crises. Finally, the slow-burning crisis, which aligns with McConnell’s ‘chronic crisis’, is slow both in onset and development, more often fading away than terminating. Long wars, like those in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, serve as examples.

As the examples discussed above demonstrate, crises can be either or both internal and external to particular nation-states. They can be trans-national (Rosenthal et al., 2001: 11), or as crisis theorists typically call them, ‘transboundary’ (Boin et al., 2014). International education crises typically cross borders, given that they engage home and host countries. As seen in the two national case studies in the current article, the role and influence of the media and other political and economic interests, both in the home and the host (Boin et al., 2008: 21), are crucial determinants of how a government handles a crisis and how a public perceives it.

Government reactions to crises vary on a case-by-case basis, but there are generic responses. Typical examples include strategic evasion or crisis non-recognition; laying blame partially or fully on non-government interests; actions to symbolise crisis control; the establishment of public inquiries; attempts to isolate the voices of interests critical to government; creating a new government agency specifically to deal with the problem; using or mis-using evidence, especially through government-controlled statistics; and attempting to either centralise or decentralise the handling of the crisis (McConnell, 2003: 366–406). As demonstrated below, in the current article’s case studies, (de-)centralisation levels can differ depending on the structure of the state and the interests represented at each level of government.

Student safety, racial discrimination and violence, and government responses

It is rare to find treatments of crisis theory in the international education literature. There are analyses of actual crises, however, including the impact of 9/11 in the USA in relation to student immigration and visa issuance (Urias & Yeakey, 2009). The implications of Brexit for international education in the UK has featured (Marginson, 2017; Mayhew, 2017). There are recent expert commentaries and scholarly analyses of the implications of the novel coronavirus (Marinoni et al., 2020; PIE News, 2020; Thatcher et al., 2020). One analysis represents a plea to a particular national government, that of Australia, to

respond with greater generosity in financial assistance to international students affected by COVID-19 lockdowns (Nguyen and Balakrishnan (2020). Another is an interpretation of government responses to the pandemic by a 'regulatory state' (Jayasuriya, 2020). Despite the value of these analyses in understanding the COVID-19 crisis, however, they do not deal generically or theoretically with government responses to crises.

As the following sections of this article emphasise, crises can affect student mobility decisions, though the mobility literature is yet to meaningfully include crises as choice factors. Li and Bray's (2007) important interrogation of 'push–pull factors' among international students from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau stands as a noteworthy exception. It considers the role of 'restrictive policies' on the part of host governments. These include problems with visa approvals, immigration-related policies and discrimination against international students stemming from the 'political and religious circumstances' prevailing in the host country (Li & Bray, 2007: 795). In an often-cited analysis of push–pull factors, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) find that the general 'environment' in the host country is significant in shaping student mobility decisions. That category can include safety and security in the host country, as Ben-Tsur (2009) argues in the case of Israel as a host. Others explore personal safety issues, arising principally from racial discrimination and violence, within the overseas experience of international students. These relate principally to the two case study countries, Australia (Dunn et al., 2011; Forbes-Mewett et al., 2015; Jakubowicz & Monani, 2010; Marginson et al., 2010; Mason, 2012; Nyland et al., 2010) and New Zealand (Collins, 2006; Li, 2007). These analyses are fully utilised below, in detailing the respective country sections.

The literature cited is extremely valuable in understanding particular crises, but in general, it does not theorise about generic government responses, and it does not identify or link responses to *types* of crises in international education. Instead, it tends to focus on identifying government response failures. Mason (2012), for example, draws on literature on racism and seeks to understand government failures in terms of political 'denial'. Similarly, Dunn et al. (2011) focuses on racial violence, and links government failures to 'the commerce of denial'. In grappling with the question of racial discrimination and violence in Australia, Ramia (2018) is an exception, specifically in relating such developments to crisis types. Importantly, however, Ramia does not deal with New Zealand, and with noteworthy exceptions (Forbes-Mewett, 2015; Nyland et al., 2010), the literature at large is rarely comparative in approach. It is thus not able to offer broader international lessons based on comparative research.

Research design

This article is a comparative analysis of Australia and New Zealand with respect to government responses to crises of racial discrimination and violence towards international students. The comparison relates to Indian students in the case of Australia, and Chinese students in the case of New Zealand. No primary data was collected. Instead, policy decisions are reviewed, analysing and summarising government documentation from public inquiries as well as secondary scholarly literature. The analysis compares societal developments in relation to racial discrimination and violence, and governmental activities in response. The comparison takes place between two countries which allow the utilisation of a 'most similar case' research design (Lijphart, 1971). Such a design is possible where the similarities between the comparators are many, and the differences are therefore

particularly compelling. In the purest form, most similar cases are similar in respect of all independent variables, but they have different dependent variables (Seawright & Gerring, 2008: 304). In this article, the respective handling of an international education crisis is the independent variable. The two cases provide only an approximation of the pure model.

The main disadvantage of a most similar case design is that it is not possible to keep constant all or even the vast majority of variables. Its main advantage is that it offers the researcher the ability to interrogate the most important variables of relevance to a case (Ragin, 2000). This facilitates a focus on one central phenomenon. Australia and New Zealand are natural comparators, in that they constitute a textbook example of ‘most similar’ cases (Wailles, 1999). Their historical traditions and contemporary institutions are highly similar, especially when viewed in wider international context (Wailles, 1999; Castles et al., 1996). They were both British colonies. Their societies inherited mainly British cultural, economic and governmental institutions, which were forced upon their respective Indigenous populations. The two countries also have similar policy traditions, particularly relating to how they cater for the welfare of citizens (Castles, 1985). Yet, the governmental structures which regulated welfare provision were different, with New Zealand governments having more policy freedom due to the absence of (sub-national) State governments, and the unicameral parliament, where there is no Upper House or house of legislative review (Ramia, 2020).

The New Zealand and Australian approaches to the welfare of international students specifically were and remain similar. Both have university systems in the British tradition. Both charge differential fees to domestic and international students, with internationals being required to pay full fees and to commercially ‘purchase’ their living standards, given that they are not in any meaningful sense subjects of the welfare state (Ramia et al., 2013). After World War II, international education in both countries was small-scale and based mainly on development aid to developing countries in the Asia Pacific region, with international students allowed in under the Colombo Plan (Oakman, 2004). The aid emphasis shifted to commercial and export revenue after the introduction of full-fee programs in the late 1980s; 1987 in Australia and 1989 in New Zealand. Since then, both countries have sought systematically and strategically to maximise the economic and trade benefits of international education while offering a modicum of mandated welfare. It is this common system that sets the analytical context for the article, and in reality, provides the context within which international students enter and study in the two countries.

Indian students in Australia

National context

International students are extremely valuable to Australia economically and socially. The nation has the world’s second-highest ratio of international to domestic students and it is third in the world in terms of absolute numbers of international students, after the US and the UK (OECD, 2019). Before the coronavirus crisis struck, international students contributed \$35 billion to the economy, supporting 240,000 jobs (Universities Australia, 2019). International education has been increasingly lucrative since the 1990s, being the third largest source of export revenues.

On the other hand, the long-term growth in international education has been sufficiently strong that some have warned of over-reliance by educational institutions on the revenues

generated by international students (Maslen, 2020). There have also been concerns relating to the quality of some vocational education and training (VET) sector programs. Leading up to the crisis dealt with in this section, the attractiveness of migration to Australia encouraged some unscrupulous providers to set up courses specifically to lure international students to seek education for migration purposes (Australian Government, 2010; Knight, 2011). International students can fall victim to education providers who cut corners on quality in maximising market share.

The welfare of international students in Australia has loomed large in scholarly and public debate, with concerns having been highlighted in relation to the full range of life-domains, including housing, social networks and loneliness, personal safety, racism, personal finances, and exploitation and underpayment in employment (Marginson et al., 2010; Ramia et al., 2013). It was student safety (Nyland et al., 2010) which was to prompt substantive government action. Developments in 2009 and 2010 piqued government interest in responding to international student needs. At the time, Australia was able to boast the status of being one of the very few countries that had avoided technical recession after the Global Financial Crisis. Swift economic stimulus cushioned the decline in employment (OECD, 2009). International student numbers had been increasing year-to-year in the preceding decade (DESE, 2020), and the tertiary education sector was already one of the nation's top exports. In 2009 international student fees were a major component of university revenues, constituting more than 20 percent of income in eight universities, with the top rate being 35.8% at one university (DEEWR, 2011).

Crisis and government response

In the same year, there was a spate of violent physical attacks on Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney. The attacks attracted intensive media coverage and a series of protests against perceived racist motivations. State and federal governments were impelled to acknowledge that there was a student safety crisis. As Singh (2016) argues in his narrative analysis on Indian student migrants, this impacted upon a student community which staked a great deal on being in Australia. Within Indian families the decision to send one member was often made collectively. The quest for a middle class life and improved wellbeing was embedded in the experience of migration to countries like Australia. The student would often be sending remittances back to the source country in order to assist their family in the construction of a safer, more secure existence. Life in Australia for students from India is part of a necessarily mobile, trans-national way of life, but one which is distinct from a more middle class and privileged, trans-national forms of mobility. It was different also to the many other migrant communities which more often sought permanent settlement in Australia (Baas, 2016), including non-student Indians who had migrated in previous eras.

The period with the highest frequency of attacks was the beginning of May to the end of June 2009. There were 14 separate incidents in that time, including: students being verbally abused, beaten in groups and individually; others being robbed, stabbed, and one slashed with a box-cutter knife; and one male student having his vehicle deliberately burned (Dunn et al., 2011). It was these attacks which eventually prompted police force leaders in Victoria, and the Victorian and federal governments to admit that there was racial targeting in at least some cases (Mason, 2012). By that stage the downturn in international students coming to Australia was beginning, and was to last another 3 years. As demonstrated

in retrospective data from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, total enrolments decreased year-on-year from a total of 491,336 in 2009 to a low of 401, 726 in 2012. In the same period, total enrolments among students from India decreased from 89,427 to 36, 901, which represents the highest rate of decrease from among the important source countries (DESE, 2020).

The downturn constituted what Kingdon (2014) referred to as a ‘focusing event’. The government response to it was enmeshed within an ‘advocacy coalition’ (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). As discussed further in the comparative section of the article, the coalition incorporated government agencies at the federal, State and local levels, as well as other interests. Together these included: the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development; the City of Melbourne; Victoria Police; taskforces and expert advisers to governments; student movements; and academics and university sector representative organisations (Paltridge et al., 2010). In recognising the reputational damage to international education being caused by the attacks, government responses involved officials at the highest political levels, including key federal and State Ministers, the Prime Minister, and the Premier of Victoria, each of whom took diplomatic trips to India in attempts to assure its authorities and its media that Australia was still a safe destination and that Australians in general were not racist.

After initially denying that there was a crisis, both the Education Minister Julia Gillard and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd travelled to India, publicly acknowledging and condemning the attacks. Other officials at the federal and State levels were also sent to India, including the Victorian Premier John Brumby (Dunn et al., 2011). Denial had turned into acknowledgement of problems and assurances that Australians in general were not racist and that the problems were being effectively dealt with. In addition, Australian government-sponsored inquiries at the State and federal levels were established and high-profile reports were written. The broader international student experience had been on the government’s radar prior to the height of attention on the attacks (Victorian Government, 2008; NSW Government, 2012).

In 2009, there was a Review of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (Australian Government, 2010). ESOS is the central legislative instrument covering international student rights and institutional responsibilities. Among the welfare-related issues dealt with, the Review recommended the introduction of an international student ombudsman (Kamvounias, 2015). On the wider question of international students’ rights and welfare, though particularly in response to the attacks against Indian students, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) developed an ‘International Student Strategy’ (COAG, 2009). Three years later the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) launched its ‘Principles to Promote and Protect the Human Rights of International Students’. The same issues were tackled in workshops and reports by academics, representative body Universities Australia and the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia (Graycar, 2010; Jakubowicz & Monani, 2010). In 2009 an Australian and New Zealand Race Relations Roundtable was convened (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011) which included the urging of governments to accept and act on the principle that ‘the treatment of international students’ and ‘racism’ are human rights issues. International students themselves have complemented such efforts through their own political activism (Sebastian, 2009).

The Victorian Government introduced an ‘International Student Welfare Program’, through which international student groups and the State’s businesses could partner to introduce programs for student benefit. StudyNSW, an entity within the Department of Industry, operated on a similar basis in that State. At the national level, mainly in

response to the ESOS Review, the government stipulated that all educational institutions must undergo re-registration by the end of the calendar year 2010, after proving that their primary purpose was education, that they could provide high-quality education, and that their agents were operating ethically. Finally, in response to special taskforces, limited transport concessions with conditions less generous than those for domestic students were provided to international students for the first time in New South Wales in 2012 (Ross, 2012). Victoria's concessions, also more limited than those for domestic students, were first offered in 2015 (Leow, 2014). Concessions were seen as important because, as the Australian Institute of Criminology reported (Larsen et al., 2011), some violent crimes committed against Indian students during the crisis period were purportedly made easier, or more 'convenient', by virtue of the locations that some students lived.

Chinese students in New Zealand

National context

International students are worth \$5 billion to the New Zealand economy. The nation has long been a high-growth international education provider by world standards and its ratio of international to domestic students is the third highest globally, after Luxembourg and Australia (OECD, 2019). Before the current coronavirus crisis, the country's educational institutions enrolled 117,000 students, and in 2018, education was its fourth largest export, worth \$5.1 billion (Education New Zealand, 2018). After New Zealand's educational institutions were freed up to charge fees for international students in 1989, the country was seen, and marketed, as a safe society in a clean and green environment. It was relatively affordable, racially tolerant and had an education system in the British tradition.

As in Australia, international education in New Zealand has been focused on market growth, often at the expense of international student welfare (Collins, 2006; Li, 2007; 2008; Ramia et al., 2013; Ramia, 2018). Following the Asian Financial Crisis, the country went into recession between 1997 and 1999, but by 2000, economic growth was underway again (Reddell & Sleeman, 2008). Education New Zealand, the international education marketing organisation, was set up in 1998. International student numbers began to rise sharply, such that between 2000 and 2008, total enrolments grew sevenfold (OECD, 2011: 36).

Crisis and government response

There was a story to be told behind the scenes. In the years leading up to 2002, amid financial failures among prominent colleges, English language schools in particular were being inaugurated and approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority at an alarming rate. Increasing demand, particularly the growing middle class in China, needed to be met. However, the quality of programs in some colleges was questionable. A minority of them were fraudulent, and student poaching was evident (Li, 2007: 4). Some colleges closed, including the high-profile language school, the Modern Age Institute, in 2002. Carich, a prominent computer training provider, failed in the following year (Perrott et al., 2003). The Chinese government established a national warning system for Chinese parents and students about education quality and the overseas experiences of its students, including in New Zealand. The concerns of Chinese authorities were well-founded, with New

Zealand research revealing that Chinese students were less satisfied with their overseas experience than were students from other communities (Ho et al., 2007). Many students had chosen New Zealand because of favourable cost of study and living in comparison with other English-speaking countries. However, there were major socio-cultural challenges among Chinese students, including financial problems, loneliness, depression, discrimination, language difficulties and major challenges in integrating within the host society (Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Differences in learning styles and traditions between Chinese and New Zealand educational institutions exacerbated these problems.

A crisis ensued, of which race and violent crime were at the centre. The *China Daily* newspaper reported in 2005 that twenty international students had been murdered within a six-month period (Li, 2007: 7). Kidnappings were purportedly happening weekly in 2003, with perpetrators often being Chinese co-nationals and others from East and South-East Asia with links to organised crime. Students were rarely themselves perpetrators (Li, 2007: 6). The most prominent killing, however, occurred in 2006, when a student was murdered and his body mutilated, put in a suitcase and dumped in Auckland harbour by four Chinese co-nationals. This was after unsuccessful attempts to extort a large sum of money from his parents. Other student welfare issues facing Chinese students were common during the period, most prominently involving crime, as documented in two books published in Chinese in 2004 and 2006 (Li, 2007: 7–8).

Problems were also experienced by Chinese students stemming from prostitution and gambling. Students were almost always the victims, but the New Zealand media often painted a different picture, where the local society was purportedly falling victim to the foreign behaviours and customs of students from Asia. Perceptions of international students became racialised (Collins, 2006). Chinese students were portrayed as bad drivers who caused accidents. They were chimney smokers, disturbers of the peace and disruptors of the home culture. They were living in squalid, smelly housing, which was essentially a reference to the preparation of food with distinct aromas. In addition, in classic crisis-management attempts by the home government to shift blame (McConnell, 2003) from the regulation of quality assurance in the education system, Chinese students themselves were thought to be lowering educational standards. As Collins' (2006) demonstrates in his analysis of the New Zealand media's treatment of Asian students during the early to mid 2000s, the students were comprehensively 'Othered'. They were 'economic objects', important revenue sources rather than human agents in need of care. They were portrayed as 'exotic', further compromising their voices in public discourse on their own welfare. Asian students constituted a 'social problem', and the host society largely blamed them for their own misadventures.

In the midst of the crisis in 2003, as part of the Chinese government's 'warning system', its Ministry of Education referenced New Zealand's lack of preparedness for a mass model of international education and expressed doubts on educational quality and levels of pastoral care for students. The Ministry acted to discourage parents from sending their daughters and sons to New Zealand:

In recent years, the number of Chinese full fee-paying students studying in New Zealand is increasing rapidly. The number reached over 30,000 by the end of 2002. New Zealand's limited number of tertiary institutions, its inadequate transport and infrastructure do not have capacity to accommodate such a large number of international students. Most Chinese students are very young and study low-level subjects and courses. They do not have a sense of self-control and self-protection. Therefore, there are many problems with these Chinese students, such as tension

with homestay families, traffic offences, violence, prostitution, gambling, crimes, fraudulence, drugs, kidnapping, and murdering (Chinese Ministry of Education, translated and quoted by: Li, 2007).

The developments onshore in New Zealand combined with statements like this to discourage some students from seriously considering the country as a study destination. A downturn in international student numbers ensued. There was a year-on-year decline in total enrolments from a high of 126,919 in 2002 to a low of 93,421 in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2007). Chinese student enrolments between financial years 2003/04 and 2006/7 dropped from a high of 66,093 to 37,231 (Li, 2007: 2).

Upon attending to numerous concerns from Chinese students, including those relating to the quality of education in English language colleges (Quirke, 2002), the Chinese Embassy complained to the New Zealand government about its student nationals not being safe, and recommended diversifying the international student base so as to avoid ‘over-reliance on Chinese students’ (Chinese Embassy, 2003). The New Zealand government’s response was relatively low-key, but it did display elements of generic crisis response. Triggered by the failure of the colleges—but more generally to allay fears among Chinese parents and students about safety and discrimination—Education Minister Trevor Mallard travelled to China in 2003 on a ‘trade mission’ (New Zealand Herald, 2003). The larger objective was trade in general, but the education-specific objective was to repair the damage to the reputation of New Zealand as an accepting society, and to provide reassurance to Chinese parents and prospective students and to the wider international education marketplace.

This combined in the following year with high-profile university visits to China. On the basis of its own research, the New Zealand Ministry of Education recommended and implemented the stepping-up of its regulatory oversight making the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students, the central legal instrument governing the experiences of international students, compulsory (Auckland Uniservices, 2003). A version of the Code had been in place since 1995, but importantly, compliance with it was voluntary before 2001. A compulsory student levy was also imposed on all international education providers (Butcher & McGrath, 2011; Ho et al., 2007). This would assist in funding the work of the Code office, quality assurance measures, and the promotion of New Zealand as a safe and welcoming destination with a high-quality education system.

Comparing the two national crises responses

The responses to crisis in both national cases were consistent with generic approaches identified in the crisis literature reviewed above. Both countries experienced, not a single ‘focusing event’ (Kingdon, 2014) as a means to inspire government responses, but a series of events. Both the Australian and the New Zealand responses used ameliorative international diplomacy. Both involved re-regulation as means to attend to concerns raised by developments in the crisis situation.

Importantly, however, the differences between the two responses are more marked than are the similarities. The challenge in a most similar case design is to explain the differences when there are two national regimes which were otherwise similar. Australia was more systematic in its approach than was New Zealand. This had its source in the strategically created ‘advocacy coalition’ (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999). The coalition arose across the federal and State-level governments to address the problems experienced by international students. The coalition involved a set of activities which, taken together, constituted co-ordinated efforts to improve

the personal safety of international students, including government, police, industry bodies and educational institutions. In their analysis of ‘the contribution of university accommodation to international student security’ in Australia, Paltridge et al. (2010) argue that there is a connection between the provision of secure housing and the personal security. Initiatives taken to try to ensure security included ‘a 24-h care line for international students, increased police patrols around trouble spots and transport centres, and holding seminars for prospective students in India on street safety, public transport safety and fire safety in Australia.’ In addition, ‘intergovernmental strategies’ were initiated in the hope of increasing affordable student housing (Paltridge et al., 2010: 355). According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), coalitions which come together in this way can effectively create or constitute ‘policy monopolies’, which can (re-) shape predominant public images. The predominant image in this case reflected the perception that international students could be safe from discrimination and violence. It will be recalled from the Australian pattern that both the diplomatic and the public inquiry dimensions of the response involved the two most important levels of government. This effectively constituted a partial decentralisation strategy.

The number of diplomatic visits from Australian officials to India, and Australia’s suite of diplomacy-related activities was larger. The strategic use of re-regulation activities by its government was also greater, as revealed in the number of formal Taskforces, and the public inquiries and the government agencies involved crossed the two levels. The response was effectively doubled by that measure alone, when compared with New Zealand’s approach, given that the latter is a unitary state. In contrast to Australia, therefore, New Zealand had to take a more centralised strategy.

In addition, the policy language behind the central regulatory instrument in each country was, and remains, different. This is highlighted in Ramia, Marginson and Sawir’s (2013) analysis of regulatory differences between Australia and New Zealand. As they make clear, the New Zealand regulatory language, of pastoral care, is more directly student pastoral care-oriented, as opposed to the Australian language of ‘services’. This suggests that New Zealand’s may have been the more appropriate response. However, as Ramia et al. demonstrate using data from 300 in-depth interviews with international students in Australia and New Zealand, self-perceived student welfare outcomes were highly similar in both countries. This was mainly due to low levels, in both, of student knowledge of their rights under the relevant legal instruments. Also, as made clear above, in 2003, New Zealand made its Code mandatory, with ‘pastoral care’ in the title. A compulsory levy was also placed on all providers before they could enrol international students. Yet, a commissioned review of the implementation of the mandatory Code placed pastoral care as only one of six areas for investigation, though ‘homestay/accommodation’ was another. The other four were as follows: marketing, student orientation, ‘programming/teaching–learning’, and ‘other factors’; and the report is replete with references to education as an ‘export’ (Auckland Uniservices, 2003). In its 2010 review of the ESOS Act the Australian government used ‘education services’ as its central concept (Australian Government, 2010), and on its website, Australian Education International (AEI, 2011) emphasised student ‘safety’, education ‘quality’, and ‘the responsibility of education institutions towards overseas students’.

Implications for other countries and conclusions

The first implication of this article is that crisis theory matters to international education, particularly at the time of writing as the COVID-19 situation continues. Like COVID-19, the crises discussed in this article cast a ‘long shadow’. They were both of the

‘long-shadow’ or ‘slow-burning’ variety (t’Hart & Boin, 2001), which McConnell (2003) labels a ‘chronic’ crisis. Such a crisis is typically long-term, implying that its protagonists do not foresee a solution while the crisis is still ongoing. Indeed, like a ‘creeping’ crisis, it may not have an easily identifiable end-point. It may end with further developments that merely signify its end, as happened in both cases here. Unlike the ‘cathartic’ and ‘sudden’ crisis types, it does not need to resolve itself in actuality. A long-shadow crisis is not like a hostage situation or a terrorist attack, in that it is slow to develop. Though racial discrimination and violence may arrive and fade from popular view—as the extensive writings cited above in relation to Australia and New Zealand demonstrate—the problems they encountered remain challenges to be addressed. Brexit has similar long-shadow characteristics for higher education in the UK. Whether it represents a crisis is a matter for debate, even if scholars may agree that it is. Brexit has arguably encouraged racism amongst a minority, and it has posed threats to market share which have existed since the 2016 referendum (Mayhew, 2017); though at the time of writing it has yet to cause a downturn in student numbers independent of the COVID-19 situation.

The second implication, following on from the first, is that governments must prioritise and systematise time-management in their crisis responses; given that crises fade from view over time. As Downs (1972) argued as long ago as the 1970s—in relation to environmental policy—the problems addressed by governments need not occupy the interest of people for long periods. This is because many issues are subject to the ‘issue attention cycle’; where society is at first attentive to a problem and to possible solutions, but then over time interest wanes ‘as more and more people realize how difficult, and how costly to themselves, a solution to the problem would be’ (Downs, 1972: 40). The end result is that the problem is replaced by other problems which better capture the popular imagination. Applying this to the current article, racial discrimination and violence do not simply disappear; even if there are periods where they are more or less prominent. Perpetrators are racist and violent against international students even as the sense of crisis eases (Ramia, 2018). This implies that governments ought to be more preventative rather than ameliorative in their approach.

The third implication of the analysis is that, like any lens used to view complex social phenomena, crisis theory is limited in how much light it can shine on crises in international education. As the preceding sections of this article demonstrate, theory can only address popular perceptions of crisis, rather than its objective reality (McConnell, 2003). As Brändström and Kuipers (2003) argue, crises are ‘selectively’ politicised. Governments choose their timing to admit mistakes, and to assert control over crises. There can be overlap between the admission of mistakes and the assertion of control, but as the Australian case in particular demonstrated, governments can choose the combination of the two.

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