

# THE REFUGEES PARADOX

## Is higher education possible in protracted refugee settings?

**CENTRE  
FOR  
APPLIED  
YOUTH  
RESEARCH**

**Dr Jen Couch | Public lecture**  
**5.30 pm for 6 pm, 29 June 2017**  
**Stanley Burbury Theatre**  
**Sandy Bay Campus, University of Tasmania**

Higher education in protracted refugee situations might appear like a series of paradoxes, contradictions in terms, or situations which seem impossible or extremely difficult to achieve for they contain two opposite characteristics or social meanings. The most obvious might be that universities are generally associated with freedom, be it academic freedom or freedom of thought and speech more broadly. Refugees, however, are deemed to be 'unfree', for many spend much of their time in exile in camps where restrictions are placed on their basic rights and freedoms. Moreover, higher education institutes are considered long-term, sustainable institutions, whereas refugee camps, although having in many cases existed for several decades, still carry a connotation of temporariness. Higher education, and schooling in general, are often believed to be dependent on the existence of a nation-state, and this assumption makes higher education in refugee settings an impossible endeavour as refugees are 'nation-state-less' people who find themselves in liminality: having left one nation state, they are not (yet) accepted by another. On the other hand, what universities and refugee camps have in common is how they have become increasingly ubiquitous aspects of the modern world, albeit with wholly differing implications.

The last century saw a dramatic expansion of higher education, allowing more young people than ever before to access higher learning opportunities and foreshadowing the possibility of universal higher education. Over the past decade alone, protracted refugee situations have increased as a total of all refugee situations from 45 to 90 per cent so that they are now the norm. The average protracted refugee situation lasts an estimated 17 years, up from only nine years in 1993. There are currently some ten million refugees trapped in protracted situations for whom there is limited hope of finding a solution in the near future.

Drawing on the experience of teaching and working in several protracted refugee situations, Jen Couch will explore the question of whether these paradoxes can be resolved. Is higher education without a nation-state possible at all, and can higher education be provided within the temporariness and restrictedness of a protracted refugee situation and, more particularly, with the case of young Burmese camp refugees in Thailand?

---

Dr Couch is a senior lecturer in youth work at the Australian Catholic University (ACU). She has established a national reputation for her work in the area of refugee young people and resettlement, and is one of the few academics to undertake research on young people from refugee backgrounds and homelessness. Before beginning at ACU 10 years ago, she worked extensively in the youth and community sectors in Australia and South Asia.

---

Please book for the lecture at: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/the-refugees-paradox-tickets-34496862043>

Sponsored by **Asia Institute Tasmania (AIT)**  **UNIVERSITY of  
TASMANIA**

---

✉: [info@cayr.info](mailto:info@cayr.info)  
🌐: <http://cayr.info/>

📮: Centre for Applied Youth Research Inc.  
PO Box 5011, UTAS LPO, Sandy Bay  
Tasmania 7005 Australia