

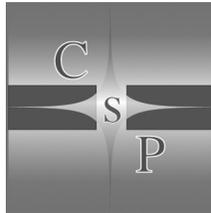
# Asylum Seekers



Asylum Seekers:  
International Perspectives on Interdiction  
and Deterrence

Edited by

Alperhan Babacan and Linda Briskman



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Asylum Seekers: International Perspectives on Interdiction and Deterrence,  
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This book first published 2008 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-84718-491-X, ISBN (13): 9781847184917

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank our universities for their financial support in making this publication possible. The Centre for Applied Social Research at RMIT University provided a grant for a conference from which the vision for the book emerged. The Division of Humanities at Curtin University gave a publication grant and the Curtin Centre for Advanced Studies in Australia, Asia and the Pacific supported attendance at an international refugee conference in the United Kingdom. Thank you to Mar Bucknell for his fine editing. We wish to also acknowledge the role of the many academics and advocates who are working tirelessly to expose unjust policies and who are involved in global and national dialogue in order to create a just system for asylum seekers.

Alperhan Babacan and Linda Briskman



# CHAPTER ONE

## TURNING AWAY THY NEIGHBOUR

LINDA BRISKMAN AND ALPERHAN BABACAN

### **Introduction**

Enshrined in the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees is the right of people with a well-founded fear of persecution to seek asylum. Despite this imperative, many countries are increasingly finding means to push away asylum seekers from their national borders. A fear engendered of invasion by strangers permeates countries that have signed up to the refugee convention under a range of guises including the sacrosanct nature of the nation state, fear of disruption of monocultural interests, the so-called war on terror and a socially engineered immigration regime based on the myth of consummate order and control. Presented is a visual display that each state retains control of the “illegal” movement of people and people smuggling (Babacan 2007, 179). The various attempts at deterrence by western countries in particular reveal capricious and cruel policies that not only flout international conventions, but defy commonly accepted standards of tolerance, humanity and decency. The national measures that are now enshrined in laws, policies and practices obfuscate the quest by many for a common humanity (Briskman 2007a, 164).

Refugees are manifestly a product of our world, “of the modern system of states and its technologies of government, geopolitics, citizenship, border control and exclusion” (Burke 2002, 22). Regrettably, the general public in refugee-deterring countries has been duped by a range of unifying forces that border on what McGhee (2005) refers to as asylum hysteria. These include governments and their propaganda-generating machinery, with which refugee scholars and advocates cannot compete due to the massive resources needed to counter the dominant discourse. Sections of the media collude with governments to paint a fear-producing depiction of asylum seekers. This results in the community at large readily

adopting the terminology of “illegals”, “queue jumpers”, “economic migrants” and “bogus claimants”, language that reconstructs social reality.

In the current world order, the fear of Islam combines with the fear of asylum seekers. As Kundnani (2007, 2) explains, we are confronted by a dichotomy of Islamic extremism and its supposed envy and hatred of the West on one side and, on the other, the “liberating” forces of the United States, Britain and their allies. Underpinning this discourse is a belief in the incapacity of “the other” to be absorbed into Western societies as their value base is seen to be at odds with Western value systems. These factors deny the reality that many refugees have no choice but to put their lives, and often entire family savings, into the hands of people smugglers in order to escape from persecution and serious human rights violations (UNHCR 2007).

### **The politics of governments and community**

With nationalism becoming a major world force, Delanty (2000, 96–7), argues that this is a product of the internal crisis of the state in the age of globalisation, with the “new nationalism” directed at immigrants rather than towards competing nation states. With the decline in the multicultural project in Australia and elsewhere, the competing discourses of assimilation and exclusion, thought to be shed in the annals of history, are now thematically unified by restriction of refugee rights. This is further shrouded in what McGhee (2005, 1) sees as the common place in the world of “hatred, prejudice, intolerance and antagonism”, positing that hatred embodies a set of fears about difference forming around the “unknown”. This is underpinned by fears about loss of identity and security, which are at the root of conflict within and between societies, and are manifest at a micro level by taunts at people with dark skin, non-Anglo names and “strange” food in their lunchboxes (Lawrence 2006, 28; 30). Translating this into broader political behaviour, Alan Touraine (2000), in his aptly named book, *Can We Live Together?*, speaks of how the ideal of the nation state has degenerated into an aggressive nationalism. The unfinished project for the west is to critically interrogate the pervading nationalism in order to move policy and political consciousness into an ethical realm.

A content analysis of tabloid newspapers illuminates the extent of the ignorance, fear and support for policies underpinned by both xenophobia and a racism or its extension into the blurred boundaries of culture and religion. Race thinking still dominates the way contemporary society views human difference (Ratcliffe 2004, 16) and such thinking is readily

transferable to refugees as a site of exclusion, dehumanisation and denigration. The views expressed contrast starkly with post-colonial propositions that transnational communities have multiple loyalties that are likely to be more negotiable than those of the majority culture (Delanty 2000, 64). According to McGhee (2005, 90), there are a number of threats, risks and sources of anxiety that are associated with fear that a country will be engulfed by strangers who will bring their crime, their neediness and their sinister anti-western malcontent. The following examples documented by Iain Lygo (2004, 1–3) in the Australian context are transferable to populist views that are increasingly expressed in other parts of the world.

*So how do we educate Islamic asylum seekers who are clearly opposed to all things Western? How do we educate a group of people who uphold the beliefs of barbaric human rights abuses?*

*It would be better for all concerned, if asylum seekers were refused entry ...as the mix will never work as long as Middle Eastern boat people refuse to assimilate...*

*Boat people are illegal refugees, a majority are fraudulent rabble who come here illegally on illegal boats.*

*Most of us don't want liars, cheats, frauds, criminals, terrorists and all-round losers coming here in rusty boats.*

*Islam is a religion still rooted in the Dark Ages and has no place in a modern, democratic society like ours.*

### **Ethics, the strangers and the other**

Stratton and McCann (2002) ask what kind of ethics are being deployed to legitimise existing policies and how might an alternative ethical lens refocus the policies. They suggest that the current guiding ethic is utilitarian and majoritarian, steered by a principle of the greatest good for the greatest number and in line with public opinion. How might things look if we were to adopt an ethics of responsibility proposed by Levinas, which is a way of locating ourselves in relation to other people, including strangers; what he calls an ethics of alterity (Stratton and McCann 2002).

A song titled *Anytime the Wind Can Change*<sup>1</sup> depicts the story of the kind deeds of the townsfolk of Zakynthos, a neighbouring island of Ithaca in the Ionian Sea. In November 2001, the townsfolk extended helping hands to more than 700 refugees who were rescued offshore by the Greek coastguard. “Seven hundred rolls did the baker bake today/Seven hundred guests did the town receive today” are among the inspiring words written by Kavisha Mazella and Arnold Zable (Boite 2003).

Why is it that such welcoming of stranger is not the norm? What is it that makes nations repel strangers and summons a politics of fear to support inhumane policies? As UK Prison Ombudsman Stephen Shaw says “the strength of a liberal democracy is measured not by how it treats the majority but how it cares for minorities and those at the margins of society” (Medical Justice Network 2007).

The landmark work of Palestinian writer, Edward Said (1995), offers leads on how society misrepresents non-Western cultures. The notion of postcolonial societies is far from realised and empire, history and current politics all converge in Said’s construction of those represented and pathologised in their “otherness” from accepted norms. Barthes uses the term inoculation to emphasise a desire to immunise society against difference (cited in Sandoval 1997, 88), something that is clearly evident in the way many societies and political structures reinforce the power hierarchy that characterises relationships with those “othered” in the discourse of the desired citizen (Briskman 2007b), including refugees. The values, beliefs, meanings and practices from the dominant culture become the benchmarks against which other values and meanings are measured and those outside the mainstream are deemed inferior (Quinn 2003). For Burke (2002, 25), what is required is a new kind of encounter with “otherness”, which seeks neither to fix “others” onto a plane of sameness nor prevents them from entering a nation’s physical, economic and existential space.

## The book

Our treatise examines the themes and trends apparent in refugee treatment today. It is problematic to dismiss the trends as mere cause and effect rather than recognising that how we have reached this exclusionary state of existence is in fact multi-faceted with both over-arching themes and contextual layers. Within the unifying theme of deterrence and

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<sup>1</sup> This song was first performed in the play *Kan Yama Kan*, in which refugees from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan told their stories to Australian audiences.

interdiction, each author contributes to providing understandings of the underpinnings of the policies using specific and timely examples. These cohere with what Peter Ratcliffe (2004, ix) sees as societal divisions rooted in forms of difference that are conceptualised in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, religion and nation and which are mediated by issues of class, status, power and gender. His conjecture is that none of these factors have a reality independent of history and an appreciation is needed of the impact of colonialism, imperialism and slavery. Although it is beyond the scope of the book to examine all these elements in detail, they need to be kept in mind as we ponder how we came to be politically entrapped in this parlous state of exclusion, globally and nationally.

The book begins by delving into the heart of the global issues that represent the push factors that are refugee creating in a “world turned upside down” as Paul Battersby proclaims. Here we are exposed to the reality of the mass movement of people as migrants, guest workers and refugees, which is a globalising phenomenon to which governments in the developed world have reacted with tightened border controls, a fortress mentality and selective immigration. Rights of passage are today determined substantially by wealth and educational attainment. Reactions against a parallel trend towards greater global openness reflect “national security” concerns framed negatively as the protection of domestic living standards or the defence of the majority against subterranean challenges to national identity and “social cohesion”. Millions of people in developing and less developed countries cope daily with major economic, political and environmental stresses without any hope of immediate relief. A fraction of these arrive as asylum seekers or illegal migrants in Western countries and present at worst a negligible security burden to recipient countries. A much greater security challenge arises from the failure of the international community and the developed world in particular to alleviate the social, economic and political conditions that provoke social dislocation in many parts of the world. This chapter sets the scene for those that follow.

From Battersby’s chapter, Alperhan Babacan moves on to some specifics of tightened border controls. Through an analysis of interdiction and deterrence in Australia and Canada, Babacan explicates how in recent decades Western industrial states have increasingly resorted to the use of interdiction and deterrence to “combat” the arrival of asylum seekers. It argues that the harsh measures adopted by Australia and Canada are contrary to the fundamental principles of justice and the spirit of the refugee convention and are bound to fail as they reinforce the political and economic divide across the world.

Moving to Europe, Madeleine Byrne examines the harshness of immigration detention and “juxtaposed controls”. Despite a dramatic fall in asylum applications across Europe, immigration detention is on the increase. Tens of thousands of asylum seekers are detained in airport holding centres, detention facilities and prisons while their claims are processed, or before deportation. The chapter investigates the diverse range of immigration detention facilities in European nations and analyses why detention is seen as an effective way of controlling the “disorderly” movement of people across borders. It also explores recent controversies about immigration detention in Europe, including concerns about substandard conditions and inhumane treatment.

Savitri Taylor’s chapter discusses how Australia and other developed countries regard irregular immigration as a threat to national security against which defence is required. One defensive strategy which Australia has in common with other developed countries is that of attempting to create an “offshore” border for itself in the countries of origin and the transit of potential irregular entrants including asylum seekers. This chapter presents the findings of a preliminary investigation into Australia’s border control and refugee protection capacity building cooperation with countries such as Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, and considers the implications of those activities for asylum seekers. Concern is expressed that Australia puts more effort into border control rather than taking responsibility for those affected by its actions.

Shifting focus to the country of Nauru, Azadeh Dastyari contemplates the question of accountability. Immigration detainees held in the offshore processing centre in Nauru are caught within a complex arrangement between the Australian government, the International Organization for Migration, private contractors and the government of Nauru. Recent compensation cases in Australia suggest that the Australian government must accept ultimate responsibility for detainees who are physically or psychologically harmed in immigration detention centres run by private contractors in Australia. However, the complicated arrangement for the detention facility in Nauru makes it more difficult for detainees to seek compensation for physical or psychological damage caused by their incarceration in Nauru. This chapter explores the question of who can be held accountable for detainees who are harmed in Nauru and how detainees may achieve redress for their suffering.

The use and abuse of health care as a deterrent tool, and the associated ethics of the practices, are critically examined by Deborah Zion and Bebe Loff. Both medical ethics and human rights literature stress the importance of the primary duty of healthcare workers to their patients, rather than to

the states in which they reside or the employers who provide remuneration for them. Inadequate healthcare provision for asylum seekers has been used as a form of deterrence in Australia and elsewhere. This chapter examines the ethical issues that this raises for healthcare professionals, and some solutions based upon a human rights approach to health.

The manner in which refugees have been constructed is subject to analysis by Jude McCulloch. In her chapter “Enemies Everywhere” that focuses on Australia but has broad application elsewhere, she looks at the politics of fear and the way that fear of asylum seekers is manufactured and manipulated to further a range of vested interests. The chapter seeks to describe the dynamics of (in)security politics in Australia and places the manufacture of the threat of asylum seekers in a broader context of fear and moral panic attending to “dangerous others”, in the “war on crime” and the “war on terror”. The chapter argues that the politics of fear, while extracting a high cost in terms of human security, yields benefits in terms of neo-liberal political agendas and the expansion of state’s coercive capacities.

Also on Australia, Linda Briskman expands on how the type of politics outlined by McCulloch, are played out in the flawed policy of using immigration detention for the purposes of deterrence. The employment of immigration detention to deter other asylum seekers from arriving by boat is lauded by the Australian government and critiqued by academics, advocates, lawyers and human rights bodies. The policy is flawed because evidence suggests that it does not work as intended and, more importantly, because of the manner in which this policy breaches international human rights obligations.

The role of the new racisms permeates asylum seeker policy, with Hurriyet Babacan and Narayan Gopalkrishnan exploring how these are played out in policy and practice. After outlining the characteristics of the new racisms in Australia, the authors argue that the negative portrayal of asylum seekers to justify the Australian government’s policies relating to the war on terror and border control has resulted in the racialisation of the asylum seeker issue in Australia and the criminalisation and marginalisation of asylum seekers .

The chapters should be read against an ever-changing global order where the refugee “crisis” and the responses of governments are continually re-worked according to perceived opportunities and threats. The book is a contribution to academic, political and community debates through its exposure and analysis of the illegality and immorality of deterrence and interdiction that permeates industrialised countries.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: RISK, REFUGEES AND GLOBAL SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

PAUL BATTERSBY

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the twenty-first century military affairs returned to the top of the international agenda. This triumphal resurgence is buttressed by the enduring assumption that “hard security,” relating to power balances, military strategy and the like, outweighs the supposed “soft security” concerns of poverty, environmental degradation and human rights in the calculation of national interests. Yet, if security in its broadest sense means the maintenance or restoration of social, economic and cultural conditions that restrain resort to political violence, then there is an urgent need for governments to adequately address the human dimension to “global security”. Not least, the plight of the world’s refugees should be recognised as a major global security concern rather than an irksome immigration burden for recipient countries in the developed world.

As the world becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, so people choose in ever-increasing numbers to relocate to new countries. Right of movement around a rapidly shrinking globe is, however, constrained by the capacity and willingness of receiving countries to absorb new arrivals. While tourists, business travellers, highly qualified professionals, even guest workers, are welcomed by countries eager to attract foreign exchange, capital and expertise, refugees are greeted with at best suspicion and at worst resentment. For the millions that travel as voluntary migrants there are millions more who move not by choice but at best out of necessity; to escape war, famine, or fear of persecution or at worst tricked or sold into varying forms of slavery, or forcibly removed from their homes and villages by agents of the state or their opponents.

Endemic instability in the Middle East, East Africa and Central and South Asia,<sup>1</sup> exacerbated by external military interventions, is largely responsible for the current flows of persons seeking asylum. While responsibility for such human suffering is popularly sheeted home to military dictators and their corrupt regimes, modern mass refugee movements highlight significant structural weaknesses in the evolving global system which governments in the developed world and global institutions are best placed but reluctant to tackle.

### **The global wrap**

Human mobility is synonymous with contemporary globalisation. Industrialisation brought rapid demographic change to Western Europe with far reaching consequences for the rest of humankind. In 1750 at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution estimated world population was 700 million rising to 900 million by 1800. Over the next 200 years, world population rose by more than five times to 6 billion people, with the most rapid increase occurring after 1950 and mainly outside the industrialised or developed world. This global population explosion coincided with increased population transfers from Europe to the Americas, and from China to European colonies in Southeast Asia. From 1840 to 1940 some 56 million Europeans migrated with more than two-thirds bound for North America aided by relaxation of emigration restrictions by Western European governments to ease their domestic population pressures (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton 2000, 292–3). Over that hundred-year period more than 140 million people moved around the world as migrants travelling in the wake of European and American expansion (Manning 2005, 146). By comparison, in 2005 alone, some 191 million people were classed as international migrants by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (UNPD 2005). Contemporary migration patterns, however, display a South–North bias, mirroring a major shift in global economic prosperity.

Global travel pre-dates the dawn of the industrial era but the laying down of a new global communications infrastructure in the nineteenth century gave fresh impetus to the human propensity to move and greater opportunity to cross entire continents and oceans in rapid time. The

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan sits astride the boundaries of the Middle East and South Asia. In this paper it is treated as a part of the modern Middle East but with due weight and attention given to the humanitarian and military implications of the country's ongoing civil war for neighbouring Pakistan.

“speed,” “intensity,” “rapidity” and “range of repercussion” of nineteenth-century international economic exchange, writes historian Eric Hobsbawm, brought about a world “transformed from a geographical expression into a constant operational reality” (Hobsbawm 1985, 63, 78). Advances in transport technologies and electronic communication contributed to world economic expansion but also hastened the catastrophic displacement of indigenous peoples in the Americas and Australasia.

The spread of this European-centred world system across the Americas, Africa and Asia disrupted long-established political traditions and economic patterns. Historical wealth distribution data from Maddison (2003) for the period 1500–2001 highlights the shuddering impact of globalisation upon Asian productivity relative to Western Europe and North America (261). Accounting for nearly two-thirds of global GDP at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Asia’s share fell below one-quarter by 1913. Productivity climbed back above one-third in the late twentieth century led by Japan, but in Africa, however, the share of global GDP remained virtually stagnant throughout with, as of 2001, a paltry 3.3 per cent for a continent of 1.2 billion people and rising (259).

Two world wars caused the fatal haemorrhaging of the European imperial order. In its place the United States and the former Soviet Union engaged in “hegemonic competition” across the globe. For the next four decades a tense nuclear balance of terror maintained relative peace and stability in the geographical heartlands of the West and the former Soviet Bloc. But while prosperity rose and wars declined in frequency in the West and East Asia, violent conflict became endemic elsewhere. European colonialism facilitated economic and cultural globalisation but also introduced new social stresses into colonised worlds, between coloniser and colonised, immigrant and “indigenous” and between ethno-linguistic communities thrown together by unwelcome colonial state formations.

Since 1945 an estimated 41 million people, civilians and combatants, have died as a result of interstate conflict and bitter civil wars fought across the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Africa, in the name of nationalism and anti-colonialism, socialism or purely for private gain (Leitenberg 2006). Superpower rivalry turned civil wars into proxy wars prolonging armed conflicts to the greater emiseration of those caught in the crossfire. It is no coincidence that, acknowledging the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the frequency of intra-state conflicts declined appreciably over the 1990s as the Soviet system crumbled. But, at the start of the twenty-first century, conflicts in

Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan and state repression such as is occurring in Zimbabwe, create new global security challenges and new refugee crises.

### **Suffering by numbers**

Refugee flows can be read as indices of the intensity of conflict or political oppression. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees documented 8.5 million refugees and asylum seekers at the end of 2005; 2.5 million in Africa, and a further 2.45 million in Central Asia, North Africa and Middle East (UNHCR 2006, 2). UNHCR refugee statistics recognise both internationally and internally displaced persons (IDPs) including stateless peoples and returned refugees. The UNHCR recorded 19.2 million such “persons of concern” in 2005 of which only 5.6 million IDPs were under UNHCR protection out of an estimated global total of 25 million. By the beginning of 2006 there were fewer still refugees but the total number of persons under UNHCR protection reached 20.8 million; a rise of 1.2 million almost entirely attributable to the escalating counter-insurgency in Iraq (UNHCR 2006). More alarming are estimates that undocumented and unregulated population movements could range from 45 to 65 million persons globally (UNFPA 2006; CHS 2003, 41). These statistics represent an unacceptable social, and for the most part hidden, cost of power politics at the local and global level.

Unregulated population movements constitute the underside side of globalisation. The promise of better living standards draws thousands of illegal migrants from North Africa into Spain from where they disperse throughout Europe. This clandestine migration creates friction at the interstate level between Spain and Morocco, especially given the latter’s proximity to the Iberian Peninsula (Driessen 1998, 100–2). More subtle forms of displacement render people vulnerable to kidnapping and trafficking. Searching for higher wages to supplement meagre agricultural earnings or compensate for the lack of economic opportunity at home, seasonal urban workers are vulnerable to exploitation. In Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, the capital cities have attracted masses of rural people who congregate around the city centres and on the city outskirts in slum areas—living in appalling squalor. Young village girls sold by their parents or kidnapped into the commercial sex industry swell the ranks of the estimated 700,000 persons trafficked internationally each year (Shifman 2003, 126–7). Because they are not in imminent danger of being killed, people trapped in these patterns of displacement lie outside the scope of the present global refugee regime.

Created to protect people displaced by war, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the UNHCR confront escalating responsibilities in an increasingly volatile global system. According to Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore (2004) the global policy balance has, over the course of the last sixty years, tilted against resettlement towards “voluntary” repatriation of refugees (93). This shift in emphasis, they argue, is due to increased reluctance of developed countries to accommodate refugees following the mass exodus from Indochina after 1975 (94–103). Indeed repatriation is celebrated by the UNHCR as a “durable solution” to refugee crises and the measure most responsible for a decline in refugee numbers in recent years (UNHCR 2005; 2006)

Globally, as many as 6 million refugees returned home during 2002–05, of which 4.6 million Afghans now confront a resurgence of violence and renewed persecution, as the Taliban intensifies its campaign against Kabul and international forces stationed in Afghanistan (UNHCR 2006). The plight of refugees is not helped by the narrow framing of national political debates around immigration and humanitarian assistance.

### **Globalisation and identity**

Globalisation is miscast by its critics as a challenge to the security of national communities and by liberal advocates who portray it as a linear process leading to the creation of a “global village” where cultural differences are diluted by a common propensity to consume. Instead, globalisation displays both centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. Many people in Western societies affected by the rapid internationalisation of national economies, opened to the vicissitudes of unpredictable and volatile global markets, sense globalisation as an assault on their national identity (Ruggie 2003, 102–3). Technological innovations and deepening economic interconnectedness bring people into closer proximity but few are prepared intellectually for the cultural challenges posed by these globalising trends. The reassertion of religious identity across the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia is a reaction to the pervasiveness of Western culture and the implications of this “cultural imperialism” for traditional values and beliefs (Giddens 2000; Gray 2002).

In the West, public perceptions of risk associated with refugee and minority migrant groups are easily manipulated by extremists in receiving states who imply that each new arrival poses a threat to “national cohesion”. Anti-cosmopolitans, from white supremacists to Al-Qaeda, welcome any hardening of identities wrought by fear and revulsion of

cultural or religious difference in a world of seeming chaos and deepening insecurity.

Immigration is bound tightly to concerns about national identity. All states bear the imprint of human migrations, forced and free, making cultural diversity the international norm rather than the exception. And yet, today, the prevailing cultural reflex is to assert singular and exclusive identities. A fraction of the world's vulnerable or "at risk" persons arrive as asylum seekers or illegal migrants in Western countries, four per cent in 2005, and present at worst a negligible economic burden to the receiver (Costello 2002, 197; UNHCR 2005). Australia's record on asylum seekers is poor by world and regional standards, both in terms of absolute numbers accepted, as well as per capita refugee resettlement overall (Singer and Gregg 2004, 72–5). In Australia at the end of 2005 there were 1,822 asylum seekers awaiting the outcome of applications for refugee status compared to 40,710 in Austria, 71,624 in Germany and 20,552 in Canada (UNHCR 2006).

Stigmatised as "queue jumpers" by a bellicose Australian government, "boatpeople" from the Middle East passing through the Indonesian archipelago were intercepted and either sent to remote detention centres in Australia or shipped off to neighbouring Pacific island states where hundreds languished, in some case for several years, before their refugee status was confirmed. Denying displaced peoples from the Middle East any shred of legitimacy the Howard government chose instead to heighten public anxiety with allegations that those cast adrift along Australia's extensive northern maritime border might harbour terrorists in their midst; an argument that struck deep into the Australian psyche following the events of September 11, 2001.

Both the policies and the rhetoric deployed by Western governments against asylum seekers are designed to dampen public sympathy for genuine and extreme human suffering. The chaotic nature of refugee dispersal and the geographical location of refugee camps mean that the resettlement process does not function according to developed country notions of efficient social service, thus rendering as absurd the notion of an orderly "queue" of refugees waiting patiently to be called forward. "Frontline" camps in countries bordering on to "hot" combat zones countries can be extremely unsanitary and dangerous; doubly so if the receiving country adopts a hostile attitude and uses force to expel or deter refugees, as often happens in the early stages of a refugee crisis.

More than half of all refugees are women who, along with children, bear the greatest burden of forced migration. Violence against women, including rape, is commonplace in central African camps and those in

Central and West Asia, meaning that women are exposed to severe risks ranging from physical harm to contracting sexually transmitted diseases (UNFPA 2006). Unsurprisingly, people with sufficient economic means will take extraordinary steps to ensure that they and their families find safe haven. Were governments to focus on the reasons why people risk all to escape war and its consequences, they might create broader public support for more effective and more expensive forms of intervention.

## **Displacement effects**

### **Cambodia**

Refugee emergencies capture public attention for barely a moment and yet the conditions that generate each new displacement can endure for decades. There is no single explanation for Cambodia's descent into darkness in the 1970s. Politically and culturally the country made sense as a nation state. A Cambodian state preceded the imposition of French colonial rule. A common language, Khmer, and a common historical tradition dating back to the time of Angkor, complemented the relative prosperity which the country enjoyed following independence in 1953. Yet Asian Cold War politics played out in the domestic sphere with tragic consequences. A coup by General Lon Nol in 1970 transformed the government into a US-subsidised military dictatorship allowing a small group of insurgents, the Khmer Rouge, to gather revolutionary momentum (Evans and Rowley 1990). An urban-rural divide caused resentment but of insufficient intensity to ignite a general insurgency. Rather, as David Chandler writes, the central government collapsed under the weight of its own incompetence (Chandler 1991).

Cambodia was caught in the updraught of war in Vietnam and the strategic rivalry between China, the former Soviet Union and the United States. Out of a population of roughly 7 million when Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975, it is conservatively estimated that at least 1.7 million perished during three and a half years of Communist rule. Under the direction of the notorious Pol Pot, the Party announced a new beginning for the Khmer nation, Year Zero. Their aim: to turn Cambodia into a modern agrarian society by first purging the country of all corrupting outside influences. Cities were depopulated as millions were forced to endure, on pain of death, the purifying experience of hard physical work in the countryside. As many as one million Cambodians failed to meet the exacting demands of Party overseers and were murdered in the Killing Fields or tortured to death. As many as half a million died

from starvation or disease.

The end to the holocaust came with the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978 which ended the Pol Pot era but led to a humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Thailand, to which the international community was slow to respond. In response to the influx of Cambodian refugees, Thailand temporarily closed its border with Cambodia. An experience repeated in many refugee emergencies across the Third World, Cambodian asylum seekers were met at gunpoint by Thai border guards and forced to return across open minefields or face being shot (Seng 2005, 162–6).

Civil war between the Vietnamese-backed Cambodian government and nationalist groups aligned with remnants of the Khmer Rouge forced hundreds of thousands more to flee to Thailand where camps were reluctantly established. The Thai government baulked at the costs of assistance, which included damage to agricultural and forest resources near to the refugee camps and the inflationary effect on local village economies caused by the increased demand for supplies (Monhathai 1999). Further, government obstruction of international agencies, which included denial of access to some camps, occasioned major logistical breakdowns in the provision of relief (Nattinee 1999). Over 200,000 Cambodian refugees were resettled in third countries from camps in Thailand which remained active well into the 1990s despite the 1992 Paris peace accords which opened the way for Cambodia's rehabilitation.

The ironies of the Cambodian refugee crisis are manifold. Cambodia's civil war was prolonged by Beijing's support for the Khmer Rouge and Washington's hostility towards the Vietnamese-backed government of Heng Samrin. It took more than thirty years to bring internal conflict to an end and to re-establish a working political equilibrium in Cambodia. The deeper the fault lines within a state, however, the more protracted and brutal civil or secessionist wars become thus prolonging the displacement effect of armed conflict. This is evident in protracted intra-state conflicts in Myanmar, Indonesia, and Afghanistan while in Iraq, the country's descent into internal chaos highlights the limits of intervention, humanitarian or otherwise.

## **Myanmar**

European colonialism left behind multiethnic states saddled with deep ethnic rivalries across Asia and the Middle East. The presence of ethnically diverse populations is not in itself a weakness of these states; rather, former colonial authorities and independence governments failed to adequately address the demands of those opposed to new state formations.

Claiming a right to self-determination, the Christian Karen have fought against central authority since the formation of the Federation of Burma in 1948. The Karen National Union (KNU) continues its armed resistance, but the fall of the Karen National Union's stronghold of Mannerplaw in 1995 allowed the Burmese army to penetrate deeply into the Karen homeland pinning down KNU forces along the Thai–Burma border. Repeated Burmese dry-season offensives drove Karen refugees into Thailand where they comprise the vast majority of Thailand's 149,351 refugee population (UNHCR 2006).

The presence in Thailand of Karen and other refugee groups from Myanmar exposed the Thai government to allegations from Burma's military junta that it is harbouring KNU insurgents at a time when Thai business interests are pursuing legal access to Burmese timber and energy resources. Denied even basic services by the Thai state and subject to periodic shelling and guerrilla incursions from across the border, the Karen, like Cambodians before them, are regarded as an unwelcome security burden.

## West Papua

Even minuscule numbers of refugees can generate political friction between neighbouring countries. In 2006, 42 asylum seekers from the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, also known as West Papua, made landfall on Australian territory sparking a diplomatic dispute between Canberra and Jakarta, which withdrew its ambassador in protest at the Howard government's swift decision to accord the new arrivals refugee status amid claims of Indonesian human rights abuses. The Australian government's decision fuelled Indonesian suspicions that some influential sections of Australian society favour the break-up of Indonesia. At the end of 2005 there were 9,991 "Indonesian" refugees in Papua New Guinea, the majority of which undoubtedly originated from West Papua where a low-level secessionist insurgency has simmered for the last forty years (UNHCR 2006).

The Free Papua Movement, *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM) grew out of the popular movement for West Papuan independence that emerged under Dutch rule but which was ignored by the international community and Indonesia after the former colony was incorporated into the Indonesian state in 1962 (King 2004, 20–25, 27–51). Australia's tightening of immigration laws to deflect future West Papuan asylum seekers was widely interpreted as a capitulation to Indonesian diplomatic pressure and reaffirmed the

salience of geo-strategic priorities relative to humanitarian values in Australian foreign policy.

## Afghanistan

In the Middle East, from Iraq to Afghanistan, ethnic and sectarian violence appears intractable. A Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century and survived as a buffer state between British India and the Russian Empire becoming a British protectorate in 1907. From gaining its political independence little over a decade later until the Soviet invasion of 1979, the country's ethnic divisions and tribal loyalties were subordinated to the idea of a modernising Afghan state. Afghanistan was all but a Soviet satellite state in 1979 when Soviet troops moved in to prop up the country's increasingly unpopular communist government.

Muslim resistance to secular socialism escalated into all-out civil war driving millions to seek refuge in neighbouring Pakistan where Islamabad nurtured the Taliban and then turned it against Soviet troops (Schmeidl 2002, 25–6). Covert United States assistance for the Muslim *mujaheddin* fighting the Soviet invasion was predicated on the notion that Islam could be mobilised to counter the appeal of Marxist ideology and arrest communist expansion. Washington determined to turn Afghanistan into a quagmire; a Soviet Vietnam that would further degrade Moscow's capability to challenge US interests elsewhere (Coll 2005).

Anarchy ensued after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Diminishing and selective US assistance to the *mujaheddin* factions encouraged those out of favour in Washington to turn to the illegal opium trade to fund their struggle for control of the state, feeding a cycle of violence and corruption that engulfed neighbouring Pakistan (Rasanayagam 2005, 138–41, 184–8). American and Pakistani strategic interventions simply exacerbated the political crisis in Afghanistan and the Afghan refugee crisis along Pakistan's Northwest Frontier which remains a seedbed for Islamic radicalism. Focused upon ejecting the Soviets, US strategists misread the dynamics of instability in South Asia and the catastrophic consequences this would have for US and global security. Backed by Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Taliban gained the ascendancy and imposed a harsh Islamic regime over much of the country, including the capital, Kabul, which fell in 1996. Genocidal acts against minorities like the Hazara and continued fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance sustained a cycle of population displacement that only ended when the Taliban capitulated to the Alliance and a US-led international

coalition in late 2001 (157).

The risk of fragmentation in Afghanistan remains high as an elected government has so far failed to earn political legitimacy or create a sense of national unity. Persisting ideological, factional and economic divisions and a resurgent Taliban suggest the reconstruction of Afghanistan is a substantial and long-term challenge (Maley 2006).

## Iraq

Armed interventions, humanitarian or strategic, do not in themselves end conflicts or resolve conflict dynamics. The US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 has so far displaced at least 1.2 million Iraqis into neighbouring countries with a further 700,000 displaced internally by rising sectarian violence (Pollack and Byman 2006; UNHCR 2007). Iraq, formerly Mesopotamia, is one of Britain's more enduring colonial legacies. Split into three distinct regions, dominated by Kurds to the north, Sunni Muslims in the centre around Baghdad and Shi'ite Muslims to the south, the former British protectorate was predominantly tribal. The rationale for the creation of an Iraqi state was undoubtedly influenced by the presence of substantial oil reserves which Britain hoped to secure for British oil interests.

The country was born out of and into violence. Britain used military force to compel warring factions to accept their incorporation into the Iraqi state in 1920 (Fromkin 449–54). Aided by the former Soviet Union, the Baath Party regime of Saddam Hussein proved to be particularly brutal. Iraq made extensive use of chemical weapons against Iranian forces during Iran–Iraq war (1980–88) with full knowledge of Moscow, London and Washington. Both the US and Britain subscribed financially and politically to the Iraqi war effort in a vain attempt to bring down the Islamic theocracy of the Ayatollah Khomeini (Hiro 2003).

This First Gulf War writes Dilip Hiro, turned Iraq into a heavily militarised country which both enabled and emboldened Hussein to invade neighbouring Kuwait in 1990 to expropriate additional oil revenues with which to settle war debts and maintain a large standing army. Defeated by a US-led international coalition in the 43-day Second Gulf War (1991), Iraq's independence was preserved because neighbouring Arab states feared a popular backlash were the US to occupy the country. The Bush administration failed to support popular uprisings in the north and south of Iraq that might have eliminated Saddam Hussein (Galbraith 2007, 56–60). Instead the US, acting through the UN, sought to bring Saddam down with the imposition of sanctions and through clandestine moves to foment first

rebellion and then a coup; measures which failed utterly (Hiro 2003, 71–94).

Responding to public outcry over the plight of ordinary Iraqis dying for lack of medical treatment, medicines and food, the UN allowed limited sales of Iraqi oil, the proceeds of which could be used to purchase food and essential medical supplies. The Oil for Food Scheme was, however, widely abused. For geo-strategic reasons, the US tolerated sanction-busting by Iraq's neighbours and much illegally purchased Iraqi oil found its way to the West. Sanctions were designed to bring down Hussein without recourse to armed intervention, which, when it eventuated in 2003, precipitated a major humanitarian and geo-political crisis (Meyer and Califano 2006, 74–5; 120–34).

### **Realising global security**

The application of force to fashion a solution to endemic instability in the Middle East and South Asia did not yield anticipated results. Insurgent groups in Iraq and Afghanistan proved adept at using violence to block essential political reconciliations. As the international community struggles to come to terms with the sharp transition to a volatile post-Cold War world, questions must be asked about the serviceability of *Realpolitik*. By seeking to understand how and why countries lapse into chaos forcing people to relocate, we can gain insights into the dynamics of refugee crises. Two-thirds of the world's population live outside the industrialised world in countries where political, social, economic and environmental stresses are becoming more acute (Maddison 2003, 259). As this proportion rises over the next half century the displacement effects of new and unresolved intra-societal conflicts are likely to be greater in scope and impact.

In the logic of traditional security studies, peace is interpreted as the absence of armed conflict or war, which can only be sustained if states maintain sufficient armed force to deter or repulse an attack by one or more hostile powers. The international environment is therefore cast negatively as a source of potential harm against which states must frame their security policies and act individually or through strategic alliances to reduce the risk of attack through diplomacy or, paradoxically, the use of force. According to this crude logic, security is gained through strength measured in tangible military assets and the less tangible national unity of purpose, with varying degrees of importance attached a nation's economic base. Perversely, as discussed above, balance of power principles promote tolerance for civilian casualties and the traumatising of whole

populations as unavoidable “collateral damage” in the great game of power politics.

By categorising security crises as either “hard” or “soft”, policy makers, researchers and development practitioners alike ensure that war and human development remain conceptually detached. From different starting points, security analysts and economists identify a series of conditions or “risk factors” that lead, in combination, to a breakdown in government and of law and order, ranging from extreme disparities in wealth, the economic and political marginalisation of ethnic or religious minorities, to low levels of educational attainment, poor nutrition and high maternal and infant mortality rates (Goldstone et al. 2000, 17; Sachs 2005). Feminist writers foreground a gender dimension of security and emphasise the greater exposure of women to security risks ranging from systematic political violence, systemic oppression and sexual exploitation (McKay 2004, 155–7). There is an urgent need to reconceptualise security and to re-tool or re-calibrate the apparatus of national and global security to accommodate the proliferation of global security risks.

Human security is a concept framed as much in opposition to traditionalist or Realist ideas as it is defined to establish a new cognitive map for security analysts to follow. Human security risks are “polymorphous” in that they are many-sided and can quickly change in shape, scope and trajectory. The United Nations Commission on Human Security, handing down its report, *Human Security Now* (2003), detailed the interrelated global challenges of endemic poverty, disease, illiteracy, degraded natural environments and poor nutrition and their correlations with the incidence of armed conflict and societal collapse (CHS 2003, 6). Rejecting the UN’s holistic approach to global problem solving, critics argue the sheer breadth of issues encompassed by the UN’s broad conception of human security carries the risk of being too cumbersome to serve as an operational definition (Paris 2004, 254–5). Researchers at the Canadian Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia in their *Human Security Report 2006* limit the scope of human security to the study of the “incidence, severity, causes and consequences of global violence” (HSC 2006, 18–20). Placing human security squarely within the orbit of conflict studies, their approach attaches greatest importance to humanitarian assistance for victims of war and to the conditions that promote peace within and between states. But narrowing our focus to the immediate causes and consequences of conflict we lose sight of the long-term trajectories of risk that can culminate in societal breakdown and humanitarian crises.