

FEAR OF THE OTHER: ASYLUM SEEKERS, RELIGION AND CULTURE

Multi-Faith Centre, Griffith University

20 April 2011

Introduction

On 11 February 1947, the *Canberra Times* published an editorial headed 'Not the chosen people for Australia'. This polemic expressed misgivings about the entry of Jewish refugees into this country, not it said because of any lack of humanity or sympathy for European refugees but because the Australian experience of the flow of refugees prior to the outbreak of war 'had not been wholly happy' (*Canberra Times* 1947). The reasons advanced in the editorial centred on the following:

- Australians are brought to a state of economic servitude to Jewish interests;
- Jewish refugees are in plentiful evidence where black markets and illegalities flourish;
- Australians are being elbowed away by the money power which the refugee class exercises; and
- Australians are exploited in all manner of business tricks, which have been introduced to this country.

Fast forward to the current time and we can see a repeat of the same ideological pattern in a new guise. Just as in 1947, when the *Canberra Times* made no reference to the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust, the media today and the community at large barely acknowledges why refugee arrivals in Australia have fled from Saddam Hussein or the Taliban.

My presentation today will examine the ways in which asylum seekers and refugees have been shunned by the Australian populace and how a voracious media has reinforced stereotypes and prejudice. I will discuss this question not in terms of racism per se, although there's plenty to say about that, but will look at fear factors that shroud asylum seekers and the way their religious beliefs and cultural practices are seen as a threat to Australian society.

Some years ago I was sent a quiz devised by Australian writer and self-proclaimed polymath, David Horton, who came up with a test for how one recognises a 'civilised nation'. I prefer to replace the term 'civilised nation' with 'human rights nation' and in my responses to the quiz I'm afraid Australia fared quite badly. The ways in which we respond to the global issue of forced migration, the dodgy deals with neighbours in the Asia and Pacific regions to keep asylum seekers from our shores and the manner in which treat people at sea and on land is not how a human rights compliant nation should act.

The topic of asylum seekers is of deep concern to me and for the last decade I have pondered why we as a society not only shun boat arrivals, but banish them out of sight and out of mind in detention centres in remote places. Up until the last decade my main area of human rights work had concerned the rights of Indigenous peoples but increased personal and professional distress about how we treat people who exercise their right to seek asylum propelled me into exploring this issue. Aboriginal elder Lowitja O'Donohue (2003) raises the conundrum of:

How is it that this nation's First Peoples, and its last peoples, should suffer similar indignity.

I postulate that the way we treat both groups is embedded in fear of the Other- those who do not fit with the western world-view. With Indigenous people we have seen fear of a land grab and a non-capitalist approach that would, some commentators said, be the downfall of Western society. More so, we are so terrified of cultures and religions that do not fit the dominant group that we denigrate Aboriginal traditional law, child rearing practices and spiritual beliefs. With asylum seekers the fear of invasion especially since the events of September 11th 2001 in New York has ramped up the condemnation of people who do not subscribe to a set of ill-defined Australian values.

Differential treatment

In 2005 Australian resident Cornelia Rau was 'discovered' in the Baxter Immigration Detention Facility in Port Augusta. The situation leading to her wrongful detention was indeed tragic, but her case is illuminating in setting the scene about the influence of religion and culture on the way asylum seeker fear is evoked. As many of you may recall Cornelia, who was suffering from a severe mental illness and identifying herself as a German national named 'Anna', slipped through the net of the missing person's system, and was initially imprisoned in a Queensland gaol before being transferred to immigration detention. Once she was released the relentless media attention on 'one of us' being detained resulted in the establishment of an inquiry by former police chief, Mick Palmer, into the circumstances of her detention. Advocates pushed hard for the terms of reference to be extended to all people in Australian immigration detention centres. Asylum seekers inside Baxter wrote the following statement:

God sent Cornelia here to send our cry to all Australian people. We are all happy that she be free from such a terrible place. We all pray that she will get well. She remains in our hearts as a heroine forever and ever.

But the cry to the Australian people went unheeded prompting her sister, Chris Rau to ask:

While she was an unnamed illegal immigrant, the only treatment she got for her mental illness was longer periods in lock-up a punishment for bad behaviour...As soon as she became an Australian resident, she was whisked away to a teaching hospital to be seen by

consultant psychiatrists and medicated. During which leg of her flight from Baxter to Adelaide did she suddenly gain the basic human right to medical treatment? Over the years we have heard of immigration detainees denied access to psychiatric care (Rau and McDonald 2005).

Prominent QC and refugee advocate Julian Burnside said:

The only feature of the Rau case is that she is uncomfortably like us. She looks like a typical Aussie girl. We are shocked at her treatment, but she received the same careless, cruel indifference that most asylum seekers receive. Why is it acceptable to treat asylum seeker this way, but shocking when it is done to one of us? (Burnside 2005).

This case scenario is one among many that prompts the question as to why we are so intent on deterring those designated as the Other, unlawful non-citizens, and so determined to shield their humanity from the view of the community, that we treat them outside the norms that prevail in our society – human rights, dignity, fairness. This leads onto the fear question, what many people refer to as the Politics of Fear.

The politics of fear

We have always been a frightened nation. The foundation of fear formally emerged after Federation with the introduction of The White Australia Policy. Although this policy is now formally banished to the annals of history, the ideologies behind it creep up where and when we least expect.

The attacks in New York in 2001 reinforced the politics of fear that became so enmeshed in our psyche that there was little challenge to the erosion of civil liberties that followed through the introduction of anti-terrorism legislation. We can see the September 11th influence in the trajectory of policy measures that have crept upon us for a decade besides the more overt anti-terror provisions. In 2008 then Immigration Minister Evans announced a set of *Key Detention Values* with its first plank announcing that 'Mandatory detention is an essential component of border control' (Evans 2008). As recently as the 2010/2011 federal budget component on Border Protection, an additional \$1.2billion was allocated in response to the spike in asylum seeker boat arrivals - 4,700 people in 100 boats between July 2009 and May 2010 - (Parliament of Australia 2010), small numbers on the world stage.

We can readily see how fear has been shrouded in a security discourse that positions asylum seekers as potential terrorists. This has been particularly manifest in the 'Middle Eastern Muslim asylum seeker' and more recently Sri Lankan Tamils with concern that they were linked to the Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Eelan (LTTE) movement. The apprehension has at times reached alarmist proportions. In 1999 then Immigration Minister Ruddock captured news headlines saying that Australia faced a national emergency because whole villages were packing up in the Middle East to flood into Australia, representing something like ten points on the Richter scale (cited in Burke

2001). Robert Manne asks how would the Australian public react if those coming by boat were white Zimbabwean farmers who faced the threat of persecution. If the Australian government locked them, their wives and children away in remote detention centres, Manne said, there would be 'overwhelming national outcry' about treating 'Rhodesian kith and kin' in this manner (2005, p. 390).

A problem in Australia throughout the history of white Australia and now settling on asylum seekers is according to Anthony Burke (2001, p. xxiv) that the 'imagined community' is one that is 'bounded by a power which seeks to enforce sameness, repress diversity and diminish the rights...of those who are thrust outside its protective embrace'.

Australian mainstream society rarely questions the ideologies, the policies and the practices as anxiety about security is fully vested in states of emergency manufactured around both asylum seekers and terrorists (McCulloch 2008) and justifies the detention camps (Perera 2002). Once we establish political fear says academic Anne Aly (2011), then governments can manipulate the fear to achieve political aims. They will often use propaganda and the media to communicate risk to their populations in order to gain public support for policies by appealing to public fears she argues.

So what are the instruments by which this fear has taken hold and how is it related to religions and cultures? What other factors play a part?

The manifestation of fear

The question of belonging is one that is central to understanding how fear is cultivated. University of Canberra academic, Tahmina Rashid (2010) says how, in order to illustrate boundaries for inclusion and exclusion, reference is made to belonging in an array of contexts including sports, historical character, imagined sense of community and ambiguous values referred to as 'our values'. She argues that the rules of engagement constantly change and participation from outside to the periphery to an eventual inside position may never be achieved, and many migrants express this.

The area of particular interest to me is constructed around the concept of banishment and how we exclude groups we fear from the polis. We do this with asylum seekers in a number of ways – through banishment to sites of exclusion (detention camps in remote places) and through denial of normative state rights, evident for example in excision legislation that is still operational, introduced to exclude boat arrivals from accessing legal channels available to others, and the Temporary Protection Visa that was in place from 1999 until 2008 and gave a signal that holders of such a visa may not be 'genuine refugees'.

But what is particularly relevant to tonight's talk is the endeavour to banish people from their 'identity' which is evident in what are now subtle rather than overt assimilation discourses that are manifest in a singular notion of national identity (Stratton 1998) and

enacted in a number of ways including the values component of the citizenship test that until recently was based on principles of Britishness. In this emphasis on 'our values' there is a sub-text. Waleed Aly suggests that that a view exists that if migrants are left to their own devices they will proceed with disastrous consequences, as they will inflict their backward cultures on the majority (Aly 2011). The potency of the limits to national identity is apparent most obviously (but not only) in the security discourse that provides a rationale for racialised immigration policies (Burke 2001) which in recent times have been particularly evident in statements coming from the Prime Minister of Britain. *Guardian* writer Stavoj Zizek (2010, p. 19) suggests that anti-immigration policy that was once connected with far-right fringe parties has now gone mainstream.

As a slight aside the emphasis on 'values' must be puzzling to many migrants and refugees who have suffered the consequences of colonial exploitation of their countries. On this, Raymond Gaita (2011, p. 15) says:

We (the citizens of western nations often understandably look like hypocrites, that we have been selective in the peoples to whom we apply those values and that sometimes we did not even see the victims of colonial exploitation as fully human and therefore as fit to be treated in accord with those values.

There has been much theoretical work done in Australia and elsewhere on the social construction of whiteness and in Australia Aboriginal scholars have taken the lead. But the concept of whiteness resonates with the treatment of asylum seeker and explains the dominance of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) refers to the invisible omnipresent norm. This construct demonstrates how 'whiteness' or the 'dominant culture' is unquestioned in the way the Other is positioned and treated and how the ensuing practices that discriminate and exclude become accepted and normalised. It has recently come to light that when Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews was at the helm, he instructed immigration personnel to favour Christian refugees and immigrants from the Middle East in preference to Muslims – this was given credence by the theory of a 'clash of civilisations' (Marcus et al. 2009, p. 99).

Let me turn to the example of multicultural policy that has had its ups and downs since its introduction in the Australian context. In recent months Immigration Minister Bowen demonstrated some political courage in announcing that the policy of multiculturalism would be revived and that a consultation process would ensure. This however, should not be seen as a radical concept as at first glance it merely reflects the diverse composition of the Australian society that is no longer simply white, Christian and British. Regrettably however, it has become a divisive concept and some media commentators in particular have caused great harm to the idealism espoused by the initial architects of the policy.

If any of you read Greg Sheridan's very long article in *The Australian* a few weeks ago you can see how irrational opposition can be, in this case drawing on his selective personal experiences and observations. His article was sensationally headlined with a

story about two men of Middle Eastern appearance taunting a middle-aged white woman at a railway station by spitting in her face. It has been heartening to see some sensible responses including from the Chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA), Pino Migliorino, (2011) who condemned Sheridan's anti-Muslim tirade. He aptly pointed out that there is violence in Australia against women by non-Muslim Australians and also referred to the misguided Christian pastor in the United States who burned the Koran. He sees the master narrative sweeping the world as one of the failure of multiculturalism with Islam blamed for this failure. Chris Bowen also responded in last weekend's *Australian* ingeniously citing the case of deranged gunman Henry O'Farrell who shot Prince Alfred on Sydney's Clontarf beach in 1868, resulting in a meeting to denounce Catholics as being Papists devoted to undoing the empire and the Australian way of life (Bowen 2011).

Back to the policy of multiculturalism. When we dig deep into Bowen's policy speech that accompanied the announcement of the political revival of multiculturalism, 'The Genius of Multiculturalism' we find some flaws. In speaking of challenges for the future the warm and fuzzy components of his speech diminish and he warns of terrorism, extreme Islam and Sharia law. Although couched cautiously so as not to provoke widespread labelling, I ask why was it necessary I ask to demean his speech by this inclusion if not to play to populist sentiment and to allow the question of fear to remain paramount in policy deliberation.

There is another factor that shapes our fear of asylum seekers – crime -which extends from Sheridan's position. Michael Grewcock, in his excellent book *Border Crimes: Australia's war on illicit immigration* (2009), says that one we criminalise asylum seekers we can do what we like especially in the interests of national security. When a criminalising discourse is set in place for what is in fact a legal activity, the corollary is to treat people like criminals. So how do we do this? We detain, we deport, we brutalise to such an extent that we violate core tenets of such UN instruments as the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But more than this we denigrate cultures and for the Middle-Eastern asylum seeker, the mantra of the criminal, terrorist Muslim who hates our values and wants to overthrow the Australian way of life is pervasive. Alongside this, British scholar Sara Ahmed (2000) has stretched the phenomena of 'Stranger Danger' to speak of immigrants as outsiders in the nation space and where cultural difference becomes the text upon which fear of crime is written.

The criminal label combines with other means of denigration and one that has a stronghold for asylum seekers is another fear, the fear of disease. So asylum seekers are not only extremists, terrorists, criminals and may even throw their children overboard as we were once told, but these dark and dangerous people also bring disease to our sanitised nation. On one of my trips to Christmas Island, I was shocked to see a hand-written sign outside an Immigration Department office:

Had contact with clients? Please use hand sanitiser on your way in (on the fridge).

How is then that migrants become the human face of the feared and vilified and are accused of not just importing themselves but also disease, crime and societal breakdown in countries of destination (Oberoi 2010). Tabloid media depiction particularly aggravates perceptions. A 2003 *Daily Telegraph* article depicted refugees as violent, threatening, ungrateful, inhuman, disgusting and likely terrorists. Edward Said's seminal analysis in his book *Orientalism* (1995, p. 205) explains this phenomena in laying out a set of nineteenth century images of 'the Orient' – its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness'.

The assimilationist discourse pervades, disguised in terms such as 'integration' and 'upholding Australia's way of life, 'respect', and 'tolerance'. But as we have seen in this country and Europe there are limitations to acceptance and the upholding of one's own identity, religion and cultural practices. I turn now to the question of how the denigration of Middle Eastern Muslim asylum seeker has taken hold. Before so doing I ask whether we have yet transcended the view that South Australian Governor Gawler conveyed to Aboriginal people under his authority in 1838:

Black men, we wish to make you happy. But you cannot be happy unless you imitate good white men. Build huts, wear clothes, work and be useful. Above all things you cannot be happy unless you love God who made heaven and earth and men and all things.

The Middle Eastern Muslim asylum seeker

The term Middle Eastern Muslim asylum seeker has irrationally entered the Australian lexicon. I say irrational for a number of reasons but mainly as it equates to decrying Islam as being incompatible with 'modern Australia'. In its denunciation of Islam, Australia is somewhat polarised between two competing hegemonies: the importance of maintaining dominant Christian identity and a vision of a secular society (Briskman and Dimasi under review). Almost half of the world's 16 million refugees come from Muslim countries and some are now resident in Australia. Yet even though Muslims are less than 2% of the Australian population and come from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds, as Poynting and Noble (2004) point out being Muslim is seen as a singular category by the mainstream.

The prevalence of the Middle Eastern Muslim in populist-speak is an indication that some cultures are more valued than others (Wise and Ali 2008). Writer and commentator Hanifa Deen, of Pakistani-Muslim ancestry, points out that Muslim identities, like others in the polity are not shaped by religious factors alone, but also by secular and political concerns. Australian Muslims however, feel constantly under siege, forever obliged to explain the criminal actions of others and defend Islam while assuring their interrogators of their loyalty to Australia (Deen 2010).

Ghassan Hage (2003, p. 67) suggests that September 11 'sealed the position of the Muslim as the unquestionable Other in Australia today'. As western countries such as Australia tightened border security the asylum seeker became caught in the interface of terrorism and national sovereignty while Muslims in Australia quickly became victims of racial discrimination, vilification and verbal and physical assaults. You may recall how in Camden near Sydney in 2007 pig's heads adorned with the Australian flag were placed at the site proposed for an Islamic school (Kruger 2007).

Mainstream Australians struggle with how Islam is expressed 'outwardly' in the public sphere – through dress (particularly head covering), halal food or the building of mosques. It is the public display of religious beliefs that seems to unsettle many Australians who relegate religious practice to the private sphere. Yet what are in my view unappealing public displays of secular Australianism are tolerated and even expected in the public domain. Not wishing to stereotype (but I will), these include drinking to excess, wrapping the national flag around one's body on the 26th January each year to signify 'belonging' and excessive worship of Australian Rules Football. I recall seeing a representative of the Institute of Public Affairs (John Roskam) on the 7.30 report back in February in a debate on multiculturalism. He said on the question of screens at public bathing pools to segregate men and women 'that is not the Australian way' (Roskam 2011). Now this may offend the sensibilities of some hot blooded Australian males, but I fail to understand how it threatens the national interest.

The media is a source of information for the majority of the population and can whip up fear of those depicted as Other. Iain Lygo (2004, pp. 1-2) in his analysis of the media race, politics and Islam in Australia, presents examples he has drawn from reader's comments about Muslim asylum seekers in the tabloids:

...how do we educate Muslim asylum seekers to accept and respect the Western word, or at least not to intend destroying the West, due to constant comments of intense hatred towards everything Western?

Australia was once a beautiful country when we were all from a European background.

Personally I don't want Muslim asylum seekers in this country. I would rather see other religious denominations, except Muslim.

Support for asylum seekers by faith groups can be powerful as I will discuss later. But let's not be coy about the fact that some religious groups and individuals do more harm than good by uncritically playing into prejudices by selective examples. In *The Age* newspaper on 25 March 2011, Anglican vicar Mark Durie wrote an opinion piece headed: 'Muslim violence a fact, not prejudice'. He went on to say:

Violence in the name of Islam is well-attested in nations in which Muslims are dominant, and it is non-Muslim minorities that suffer the exclusion. It does not do to argue that religion has no relevance to such events.

He said a religion will be judged on the actions of its adherents and goes on to detail brutal acts by a few Muslims in Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia. He says nothing of opposition to them within those countries, leading the reader to believe they enjoy wide support.

His article unleashed a robust critique by Susie Latham (2010), co-author of *Human Rights Overboard* in the online *Drum*, expressing concern that his piece would help perpetuate human rights abuses against Muslim Australians. She wrote this as an Anglo-Australian who married into a loving Muslim family and she has two boys who will be brought up as Muslims in Australia. She wrote in the article that she has lost count of the times her husband has come home from work or study to tell her that his peers have called him a terrorist or told him to blow up things.

In March I was on Christmas Island and the detained Afghan Hazara asylum seekers had a ceremony to commemorate the 16th year since the passing of their hero Mazari, to which I was invited. At their request I brought some of the props with me including large posters lovingly donated by members of the Perth Hazara community. When I went to drop them off at the Construction Camp detention facility, the guard said in front of the young Hazara boys: 'I'm not going to take these – they may be pictures of terrorists'.

This sort of humiliation is commonplace. From 2005 to 2008 I was involved in convening the People's Inquiry into Detention and many people came forward to tell stories of racism, ignorance and denigration of cultures and religions. A nurse who had worked in detention said she felt distress about the ignorance and inappropriateness of some of the formal behaviours, with the female staff, detention officers and nurses, being issued with and wearing shorts. This caused some problems with some of the young males and, for example, one young Afghani male who reported a nurse 'coming on to him' because she sat beside him on a bench in her bare leg had touched his leg. We also heard the story of a prayer mat thrown carelessly on the dirty ground outside a donga by a guard. And if you are not convinced of the systemic problem, there is this one taken from an extract of an interview from the Refugee Review Tribunal (cited in Briskman et al 2008)

Member: Okay, you said that you're a Hazara. Do you think you look like a Hazara person

Applicant: Yes, I'm Hazara and I look like a Hazara.

Member: And what is it about you that looks Hazara?

Applicant:: From my cheeks, from my nose, from my eyes.

Member: Well what about them?

Applicant: Hazara people have got small eyes as well as flat nose.

Member: But you don't seem to have a flat nose

The ignorance continues. Detention centre staff, particularly those employed by the private operators of the facilities, have little grounding in cultural awareness. People living in locations where detention centres are located or proposed have often risen up in protest about having 'the stranger' in their midst, with the crime narrative at the heart of their fears. I have been four times to Christmas Island, which is an interesting case study in itself. The small population of the Island is mainly Chinese and Malay. Up until the time of the *Tampa* incident, residents were much more sympathetic to asylum seekers than mainlanders and proclaimed (in the light of the history of many being brought to Australia as indentured workers for the phosphate industry) 'We are all refugee'. As detention took increasing hold on Christmas Island and the detention industry became more evident through the presence of immigration, Serco, Customs, Australian Federal Police and Naval personnel, attitudes hardened especially as rents and food prices soared as a consequence. When the boat tragedy occurred on the Island in December last year and around 50 asylum seekers died, the hearts of the Islanders opened again as they witnessed the grief of survivors. And then recently there were incidents – escapes and fires – and the outraged Islanders held meetings to vehemently protest the asylum seeker presence on their island. Safety was their concern and the image presented to the media was again of dangerous strangers from other places who were likely to cause harm to innocent Australians.

The counter-narrative has been less strong and is one conveyed by asylum seeker advocates who have less traction with the media and less credibility in the mainstream and are often pejoratively labelled as 'bleeding hearts' or members of the 'loony left'. Little attention is given to why five people have committed suicide in recent times in detention and why despair is so high. In the local communities where detention centres are now located like Christmas Island and Derby, few people visit the detainees. Is this fear, is it apathy or something more insidious about fear about people from backgrounds we do not understand or do not care about? To find out the answers needs more work.

Moving beyond fear

Tahmina Rashid (2010) speaks about walking home when a man said: Go back to India. 'Why should I? I was born here. So was my father, my mother. Where do I go? I don't understand'.

How do we respond to such incidents that are all too commonplace?

For me the starting point – perhaps a cynical one - is not to trust government. Last year in England I saw how asylum seeker support groups were buoyed by an announcement by government that children would be released from immigration detention. I wondered why they had such faith in their government as we were told in 2008 that no children would be held in detention centres and again we are told they will be out by June with a parallel narrative that finding community accommodation is not easy.

The way we continue to have faith in governments to dispense justice to all inside our borders is a flawed faith. The way we are duped into believing that this nation does not discriminate against people on the grounds of race, culture or religion is not evident in practice. This faith in government has not subsided and the propaganda machine of the state is trenchant and value is bestowed on misinformation with a failure to question its veracity (Haebich 2011). The information we receive about asylum seekers and their cultures and religions assumes an aura of authenticity and groups are defined on the basis of these attributes which rationalises and normalises their discriminatory treatment including banishment from society and the polis.

Some of you will be familiar with Emmanuel Levinas' concept of alterity (1999). Levinas, a Jew who lost family members to the Nazi Holocaust and was himself detained in a prisoner of war camp, spoke of the obligation to make ourselves available to the neediness and suffering of other persons (Putnam 2002). While harsh policies are meted out to those asylum seekers constructed as the Other there have been concerted endeavours to protest against and to reverse dominant discourses and the policies that follow. Faith groups have been to the fore of some of the protest, the support offered to immigration detainees and the endeavours to offer houses of welcome to asylum seekers.

Through the People's Inquiry into Detention we heard stories from ministers of religion who had offered solace to immigration detainees and those who had tried to influence both government and their flocks. One resident of Port Augusta began visiting the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre as he heard from the pulpit that Australia's treatment of asylum seekers was antithetical to Christian dictates of love. He began as a visitor sharing cake and later converted into a tireless advocate, pronouncing that this was the first time he had been involved in political action. Another advocate from Sydney spoke of how her Rabbi had said he was going to don his Kippur and head off to Villawood and suggested to the synagogue congregation that they might wish to join him. In the UK the Jewish Social Action Forum says how Jews are commanded 36 times in the Torah to look after the stranger – no other commandment is repeated this many times.

Placing the question of human security to the fore in a challenge to border security paradigms and I suggest we need to more rigorously present this approach to governments in the hope of diminishing border obsession. Edwards and Ferstman (2010) suggest that a people centred approach to human security overcomes the question of exclusion as the focus on all peoples becomes equally valid. So-called non-citizens, in this case the alien asylum seekers, are not then viewed as a non-person or outsider, as they are under the state-centric system of international relations, but instead as equal citizens in the global community facing interdependent and universally relevant threats. Not only does human security offer a focus on people rather than the state, it focuses on shared goals such as dignity, equality and solidarity that transcends cultures and beliefs.

Open borders is a concept that is gaining some traction. When we look at the question of asylum seekers on a global scale this cannot be readily discounted for only a small percentage of the world's population is on the move (Gibney 2010) and an even smaller proportion are asylum seekers. A model for partial open borders already exists within the European Union in the nature of the Schengen, which means that member states have committed themselves to what is in effect a borderless union (Muller 2004). The world is riven, writer Phillippe Legraine (2006) argues, between those who are free to move and those tied to one place which is he says is 'morally wrong, stupid and politically unsustainable'.

Then there's the question of education. The recently released (2011) report into *Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia* (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011) pointed out that there is widespread support from all voices – whether religious, spiritual, secular or agnostic – for education about the religions, spiritualities and worldviews present in and affecting Australia. There is a debate raging in Victoria right now about that State Government's allocation of funds for Christian education in government schools, which is seen by many as a thrust that excludes the diversity of beliefs in this country. Patron of InterAction, a multi-faith youth network Father Bob Maguire (cited in Topsfield 2011), suggests that

You have to learn more about each other before you can live with one another. If you keep separating and dividing you are going to foment distrust, dislike and fear. Fear is the killer.

We have choices – to be collaborators, to be bystanders or to be protesters. On a visit last year to Palestine I saw graffiti on the Separation Wall that denies rights to the Palestinians contained within: *Silence is Complicity*. Consistent with this call, it is surely beholden on people of conscience to stand up against the demonisation of asylum seekers whether it is cast in terms of religion, cultures, terrorism or disease.

I end where I began. Phillip Adams in an article in November 2009 speaks of how between Kristallnacht and the Final Solution many Jews tried desperately to escape the Nazis but country after country turned them away. Those who arrived in Australia in 1940 on the HMT *Dunera* were sent to Hay in New South Wales, shoved into a detention camp with a sign at the front gate declaring it a 'concentration camp'. He says:

Jews then. Muslims today. We should learn from this moment in our history: not to exploit fear of refugees; not to toss decency overboard into the cesspit of racism (Adams 2009, p. 6).

As Father Maguire said: Fear is the killer.

References

- Bowen, C. (2011), 'Why Sheridan and the Immigration Minister parted company on the road to multiculturalism', *The Australian*, 16 April, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/why-sheridan-and-the-immigration-minister-parted-company-on-road-to-multiculturalism/story-fn59niix-1226039684812>, accessed 18 April 2011.
- Adams, P. (2009), 'Don't forget the war', *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 14-15 November, p. 6
- Ahmed, S. (2000) *Strange Encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*, Routledge, London.
- Aly, A. (2011), *Terrorism and Global Security: Historical and contemporary perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, Melbourne.
- Aly, W. (2011), 'Monoculturalism, Muslims and myth making', in *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism* (ed. R. Gaita), The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, pp. 47-92.
- Briskman, L. and Dimasi, M. (under review), 'Multiculturalism in Australia: Emerging refugee communities', *Proceedings of Multiculturalism and the Global Community Conference*, Tehran 2010.
- Briskman, L., Latham, S. and Goddard, C. (2008), *Human Rights Overboard: Seeking asylum in Australia*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne.
- Burke, T. (2001), *In Fear of Security: Australia's invasion anxiety*, Pluto Press, Sydney.
- Burnside, J, 'The abuse of one exposes what we're doing to them', *The Age*, 7 July 2005.
- Dean, H. (2010), 'From indifference to Islamophobia: Australia's Muslim responses', in *Enter at Own Risk? Australia's population questions for the 21st century*, Black Swan Press, Perth, pp. 205-214.
- Durie, M. (2011), 'Muslim violence a fact, not prejudice', *The Age*, 25 March, <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/muslim-violence-a-fact-not-prejudice-20110324-1c8ge.html>, accessed 27 March 2011.
- Latham, S.(2011), 'Perpetuating human rights abuses against Australians', *The Drum Opinion*, 13 April, <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/56392.html>, accessed 15 April 2011.
- Edwards, A. and Ferstman, (2010), 'Humanising non-citizens: The convergence of human rights and human security', In A. Edwards and C. Ferstman, *Human security and*

non-citizens: Law, policy and international affairs, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge pp. 3-46.

Evans, C. (2008), *New Directions in Detention*, Address by the Immigration Minister at the Australian National University, Canberra, July.

Gaita, R. (2011), 'Introduction', in *Essays on Muslims and Multiculturalism* (ed. R. Gaita), The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, pp. 1-17.

Gawler, G. (1838), 'Statement to Aboriginal people', SA Memory, <http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1466>, accessed 25 April 2011.

Gibney, M. (2010), 'Boundaries of belonging: Deportation and the constitution and contestation of citizenship', *Refugee Studies Newsletter*. University of Oxford, pp. 4-5.

Grewcock, M. (2009), *Border Crimes: Australia's war on illicit immigrants*, Institute of Criminology, Sydney.

Haebich, A. (2011), 'Forgetting Indigenous Histories: Cases from the history Australia's stolen generations', *Journal of Social History*, in press.

Hage, G. (2003), *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, Pluto Press, Sydney.

Kruger, P. (2007), 'Pig head protest over planned Islamic school', *The World Today*, 29 November, <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2007/s2105111.htm>, accessed 20 April 2011.

Legrain, P. (2004), *Immigrants: Your country needs them*, Little, Brown, London.

Levinas, E. (1999), *Alterity and Transcendence*, Athlone Press, London.

Lygo, I. (2004), *News Overboard: The tabloid media, race politics and Islam*, Southerly Change Media, Anglesea.

Manne, R. (2005), *Left Right Left: Political Essays 1977-2005*, Black Inc, Melbourne.

McCulloch, J. (2008), 'Enemies Everywhere: (In)security politics, asylum seekers and other enemies within', in *Asylum Seekers: International Perspectives on Interdiction and Deterrence*, (eds. A. Babacan and L. Briskman), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Oberoi, P. (2010), 'Empowering migrants: Human security, human rights and policy', In A. Edwards and C. Ferstman, *Human security and non-citizens: Law, policy and international affairs*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 227-272.

O'Donohue, L. (2003), 'Return to Afghanistan: Resettlement or refolement', Public forum on Afghanistan, Adelaide, 27 February, <http://www.safecom.org.au/lowitja.htm>, accessed 30 October 2009.

Marcus, A. Jupp, J. and McDonald, P. (2009), *Australia's Immigration Revolution*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

Migliorino, P. (2011), 'FECCA head blasts The Australia's Greg Sheridan's anti-Muslim tirade', *Cultural Diversity*, 14 April, http://www.culturaldiversity.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=881:fecca-head-blasts-the-australians-greg-sheridans-anti-muslim-tirade&catid=1:human-rights-news&Itemid=16, accessed 24 April, 2010, accessed 26 April 2011.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2000), *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous women and feminism*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane.

Parliament of Australia (2010), *Budget 2010-2011: Immigration. Border protection and detention*, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/RP/BudgetReview2010-11/BorderProtection.htm> , accessed 28 March 2011.

Perera, S. (2002), 'A line in the sea'. *Race and Class*. 44(2), 23–39.

Poynting, S. and Noble, G. (2004), *Living with racism: The experience and reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of discrimination, abuse and violence since 11 September 2001*, Report to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 19 April 2004.

Putnam, H. (2002), 'Levinas and Judaism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Rau, C, and McDonald, J, 'My sister lost her mind, and Australia lost its heart', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February 2005, <www.smh.com.au/articles/2005/02/06/1107625064599.html>.

Rashid, T. (2010), 'Migration and Belonging: Brown Muslim women's experiences', in *Migration, Belonging and the Nation State*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Roskam, J. (2011), *7.30 Report*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, February.

Sheridan, G. (2011), 'How I lost faith in multiculturalism', *Weekend Australian Inquirer*, 2-3 April, pp. 1-2.

Said, E. (1995), *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London.

Stratton, J. (1999), *Race Daze: Australia in identity crisis*, Pluto Press, Sydney.

The Canberra Times, Editorial, 11 February, 1947

Topsfield, J. (2011), 'Call to teach students the ethos of all religions', *The Age*, 18 April, <http://www.theage.com.au/national/education/call-to-teach-students-the-ethos-of-all-religions-20110417-1djt3.html>, accessed 19 April 2011.

Wise and Aly (2008), *Muslim Australians and Local Government: Grassroots strategies to improve relations between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians*, Centre for Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Australian Human Rights Commission (2011), *Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia*, AHRC, Sydney.

Zizek, S. (2010), 'Human face masks same old barbarism', *The Guardian Weekly*, 8 October, p. 19.