

The World's Refugees and Asylum Seekers: The Sri Lankans Come to Australia

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

Global Research, July 29, 2014

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State](#)
& [Civil Rights](#)

A cursory glance at the Australian media landscape yields a few standouts, not in the manner of steely objective analysis, but wholehearted demagoguery. The Australian, Rupert Murdoch's organ extension down under, shows itself to be the bellicose voice of yesteryear, one with an almost tinny reactionary quality. It has made demonising the refugee in the name of faux humanitarianism its specialty.

Everything that it writes has to be seen as anything from cosmetics to whitewash. The Australia that comes out of The Australian is incurably pristine, supremely generous, and aware. Slant and circuit is everything when it comes to its incomplete data, and so the "biggest longitudinal study of humanitarian migrants to Australia in more than decade" by the Australian Institute of Family studies is seen as apologia and corrective. The study, in the words of the paper's social affairs reporter[1], "casts doubt on the idea that this nation is harsh and inhospitable destination for refugees."

The paper is selective, highlighting political refugees in the study (the same paper, incidentally, having followed the government line about Tamils from Sri Lanka being distinctly non-political), showing Australian generosity in action. The author of the study, Diana Smart of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, argued that, "Despite grappling with serious issues, most immigrants feel they have been made welcome, few experienced discrimination and the results speak well of the Australian community."

Then there is the other side, the more gruesome part of the account: the debilitating nightmares, the lingering trauma of those who found themselves in carceral confines. Iranian refugee Mohsen Soltani was one such character, and it is notable that the individuals who took him in were not those connected with the Australian government, but those in charity and the goodwill of his lawyer. Bless that innate and bountiful capacity on the part of many to forgive.

The other side of the study has been neglected, showing that respective governments have, through bestially novel measures, circumvented the UN Refugee Convention to create an atmosphere that is populist and hostile. Any situation that tolerates the makeshift dungeons on Manus Island, Nauru and illegal on-sea processing must be deemed such. Australian governments since the 1990s have operated upon a paradoxical principle: tariffs and barriers to capital flows and trade bad; barriers and restrictions to people coming, good.

The last 30 years or so has seen a grand abdication of responsibility towards the globe's refugees and asylum seekers. The refugee camp has become a brutal micro-society of life,

where violence and iniquity is rife even as the claims are being processed in the name of dry humanitarianism. State responsibility tends to be farmed out to the meek UNHCR. In the Australian case, the responsibility is deflected and outsourced, first to a poorer country (Papua New Guinea, for instance) and then private security firms.

The chronicle of refugee mismanagement is certainly packed with detail, resembling that of an insurance company desperate to find an escape clause to avoid disgorging the funds. What, pray, will void agreements and undertakings? For that reason, the 157 Sri Lankan asylum seekers held at sea for almost a month are now contemplating legal action against the authorities in Canberra. They find themselves in the unusual situation, at least since the Abbott government initiated its “turn back the boats” policy, of actually being on Australian soil, albeit of the less holy sort. The Curtin Detention Centre in remote Western Australia is hardly a promising home.

The decision to bring the asylum seekers to Australian shores was made on Sunday, but only after lawyers began proceedings in the High Court to prevent their expulsion to Sri Lanka. Vital to those proceedings was the interpretation of the Maritime Powers Act and relevant government powers in intercepting a vessel at sea and removing it to some destination other than Australia.

The Australian Immigration Minister, Scott Morrison, is none the wiser, taking the fixated line his predecessors have. Inside every Australian immigration minister is a shock jock waiting to get out, the little voice that wishes to be heard. In their narratives, boat bound individuals who are heading to Australian shores are the money bags brigade and ill-gotten gains sorts. This, of course, defies the figures that show, repeatedly, that this image is false. Asylum seekers heading to Australia, on being validly and thoroughly assessed, are shown to qualify as refugees within the meaning of the Refugee Convention in the highest percentiles.

Nay from Morrison, who has already done his shoddy assessment of the Sri Lankan claims without legal scrutiny or expert oversight. “These people have come from a safe country of India. They haven’t come from Sri Lanka.” India has suddenly become a darling in the Morrison text book of refugee recipients. “If we can’t take people back to India, what next? New Zealand? India are a vibrant democracy, they are a good partner, they’re working closely with us.” This is the sort of man who is bound to convict on a case of un-renewed dog license.

The fact that the refugees arriving in Australia may find themselves, once they do get their feet on the ground, welcome, is almost beside the point. They were not wanted here to begin with, suggesting that government is *very much the problem when it comes to regulating immigration. Any group that scours documents for exit clauses is bound to be.*

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

[1]

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/refugees-feel-welcome-despite-struggles/story-fn9hm1gu-1227003519007>

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Dr. Binoy
Kampmark](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca