Editorial

The Impossibility of Home: Displacement and Border Practices in Times of Crisis

Lucy Fiske [1,*] **and Linda Briskman** [2,*]

1   Social and Political Sciences, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney 2007, Australia
2   School of Social Sciences, Western Sydney University, Liverpool 2170, Australia
*   Correspondence: Lucy.Fiske@uts.edu.au (L.F.); L.Briskman@westernsydney.edu.au (L.B.)

We launched the call for papers for this issue in March 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic was spreading rapidly around the globe, disrupting lives and stalling movement as country after country went into lockdown, and death tolls starkly revealed racial and economic inequalities within and between nations. We are finalising the Special Issue in September 2021 as a new wave of mass displacement from Afghanistan is underway. The US and allied withdrawal from Afghanistan after two decades of military occupation and failed state-building led to the collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban taking power. Newsfeeds around the world showed US military helicopters ferrying their citizens from the city to the airport and a chaotic two-week evacuation of foreigners and some Afghans who would now be at risk due to their support of foreign intervention. These events are still unfolding as we write, but already, it appears the Taliban has softened little during its 20-year exile and mass displacement from Afghanistan, a nation that has topped the refugee-producing nations' league table for most of the last 40 years, is likely to continue.

While this Special Issue is titled 'Human Rights and Displaced People in Exceptional Times', too much is sadly 'unexceptional'. Images of the US withdrawal from Kabul in 2021 are difficult to distinguish from those of the US withdrawal from Saigon in 1975. This month also saw global circulation of images of white American men on horseback rounding up Black Haitians seeking protection in the US from Haiti's political instability, colonial legacy and ever more frequent natural disasters, evoking the US's own colonial, enslaving past. The violence of the border is usually hidden, whether by distance in faraway places neighbouring refugee-producing countries or, closer to home, hidden behind the walls of detention centres and buried within Kafkaesque bureaucratic processes—processes designed principally to exclude rather than include. These processes are overwhelmingly deployed against racialized groups bearing the legacy of centuries of imperialism and exploitation.

Writing in the aftermath of World War Two, Hannah Arendt observed that neither displacement nor the gulf between human rights' rhetoric and reality were exceptional or new, 'in the long memory of history, forced migrations of individuals or whole groups of people for political or economic reasons look like everyday occurrences. What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one' (Arendt 1976, p. 293). There are more people displaced today than at any time since World War Two, some 70 million people worldwide. People displaced by war, political repression, natural disasters, neocolonial interventions, international real politick and economic hardship are not new phenomena, but the wealthy world's response to them has not always been so exclusionary.

The geopolitical response to mass displacement prior to 1989 was to develop mechanisms to integrate displaced people back into the global nation-state order. Such responses were more likely motivated by a desire to protect and preserve the international order of nation (citizen)–state–territory (Haddad 2008, p. 7). Refugees, while an arguably inevitable product of the international order, are also a threat to it and so are defined as

a problem—not so much on the basis of humanitarian ideals, but for the coherence of the world system itself. Therefore, when the Huguenots were forced out of France in the 1600s, they were welcomed in Germany, The Netherlands, England, Canada, the USA and France, with countries competing to attract them (Mentzer and Van Ruymbeke 2016). Some 11 million people were displaced by the end of World War Two, and while there was some ambivalence among resettlement countries, by 1951, all but two Displaced Peoples' Camps were closed, and all were resettled by 1959. After the Vietnam war, several nations collaborated under the auspices of the UNHCR to form the Orderly Departure Program to clear Southeast Asian refugee camps and ensure all Indo-Chinese needing protection could access refuge safely. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian refugees were settled in the USA, Canada, Australia, France, Germany and other countries during the 1980s. As the Cold War ended and geopolitics shifted, alongside fatigue from seemingly endless displacement, refugee-receiving nations' attitudes began to shift. The Orderly Departure Program was replaced by the Comprehensive Plan of Action, introducing screening, deterrence and return measures and marking a turning point in responses to refugees (UNHCR 2000, p. 79).

Today, as the numbers of displaced people continue to climb, and as geopolitics have shifted, there is no great ideological battle to be won and today's enemies of wealthy states of the Global North are 'terror', 'drugs' and other spectral ghouls not rooted in the state system. States have realised that the international order can continue, despite so many people being 'out of place'. States that previously sought to reintegrate refugees into the world order, now put their efforts into repelling those who flee situations not of their own making. Money, technology and policy and political efforts are overwhelmingly put in to making borders impervious. The European Union has budgeted EUR 34.9 billion for border protection between 2021 and 2027, most of which will go to private companies, including the development of EUROSUR, the European Border Surveillance System (Gifford 2020). The US government spends more on immigration enforcement agencies than all other federal crime agencies combined, some USD 24 billion in 2018 alone (Meissner and Gelatt 2019, p. 3). Australia's figures are smaller, but it too is willing to put more money into keeping refugees out of its jurisdiction than into protecting them, spending AUD 4 billion on border protection in 2017 (Karp 2018).

The technology of the border is a highly effective blend of old and new—combining vigilantes on horseback and concrete walls and razor wire fences with military air, sea and land patrols, and high-tech surveillance systems, advanced biometrics and security features embedded in travel documents, an archipelago of detention centres and legal systems that all but ensures someone in need of refuge cannot step foot on the soil of a *Refugees Convention* signatory country. The world has grown comfortable with the idea of 'warehousing' refugees and is willing to invest significantly in it. The determination and ability of nations to close their borders to displaced people is exceptional indeed.

Despite these extensive technologies, borders are not entirely impervious; people in need of safety still manage to find cracks and some slip through the web of deterrence. Too often this entails life-threatening dangers, but people are agentic, creative and determined. Many papers in this collection challenge dominant discourses that criminalise displaced people or perceive them as unstable, or as hapless victims. The papers expound a range of bordering practices while revealing both the structural drivers of flight and the disproportionate measures used to repel, which are antithetical to human rights. While the papers provide clarity around the non-exceptional nature of flight and resistance, the COVID pandemic brings into sharp relief how a 'new' global crisis exacerbates existing trends.

Suzan Ilcan (2021), drawing on interviews with Syrian refugees, documents systematic border practices designed to deter would-be refugees, regardless of the human costs of such practices. She outlines a typology of three border practices: the hardening of borders, expansions of borders and pushbacks. These border practices always result in harm, sometimes breach the *Refugees Convention* foundational principal of non-refoulment, and sometimes cause deaths of displaced people. All refugees in her study encountered border

practices, yet these were the lucky ones who made it through. Their very presence in Canada and Sweden is evident of the impossibility of total control, and of the ingenuity of people in need.

From Australia, Rachel Sharples (2021) focuses on the expansion of Australia's border through the detention of refugees in island prisons in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. As a state-sanctioned spatial aberration meant to deter asylum seekers arriving by boat, offshore detention has resulted in a raft of legal and policy actions that are reshaping the modern state-centric understanding of the national space. This policy not only keeps refugees out of Australian territory and beyond any potential legal protections, but accompanying restrictions on journalists or visitors to PNG and Nauru through visa decisions are intended to silence refugees and keep them outside Australian consciousness. While border technologies may have physically excluded people, ideas and narratives are harder to police, particularly in light of widely accessible and affordable mobile phone and social media technologies. Using a sample of Twitter users on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, Sharples examines how refugees disrupt state discourse on off-shore detention, presenting their own narrative of who they are, the conditions of detention and exposing the harms of state border practices.

It is not only the recurring theme of hardening of borders and border practices that the collection reveals, but also an emergent exceptional feature with which displaced people must contend today—the coronavirus pandemic. Beginning in January 2020, coronavirus has swept around the world, killing over 4.5 million people and leading to border closures and even tighter restrictions on movement. Crawley (2021) reports that by April 2020, 167 countries had closed their borders and that 57 countries made no exceptions for people seeking international protection regardless of any national, regional or international laws and conventions prohibiting such closures. The Italian government's attempts to close its ports to displaced people during the European migration 'crisis' of 2015 had been unsuccessful, but with the onset of the pandemic, in 2020 it 'declared its ports "unsafe" for disembarkation of people rescued at sea "for the duration of the national public health emergency."' Similarly, Blue et al. (2021) detail 'how the US government weaponized the virus to cement the transition of the US asylum system to one of expulsion and exclusion'. The pandemic enabled governments throughout the Global North to enact border practices they had long desired, but previously been unable to enact in full.

Crawley presents a global overview of state responses to displaced people during the pandemic before outlining how migration and disease have coalesced within a politics of fear and rising populism to cause 'an effective end to the right to seek asylum', before reminding readers that the profound disruption of the pandemic also presents an opportunity to break with the past and imagine a new future using our common experiences of the pandemic as a foundation for connection and recognition.

Tazreiter and Metcalfe (2021) argue that the pandemic ought not be seen as exceptional at all, but that it is simply the latest empirical event that enables governments to 'draw on, but also create, moral panics that often use migrants as scapegoats for a range of social problems. They see policies excluding and marginalising non-citizens (both those already within the state and those beyond its borders) as a continuity of practice of racial capitalism that can be traced back to feudal and imperial Europe. Seeing the present day as exceptional dehistoricises contemporary justice struggles and sends social scientists in false directions locked into pre-determined pathways and constrained destinations. Using Australia's policies for asylum seekers, refugees and temporary migrants as a case study, Tazreiter and Metcalfe argue that the disruption of the pandemic presents an opportunity for social scientists to think 'beyond the humanitarian and human rights values that themselves remain embedded in classical liberalism and the histories of racial capitalism, tied to neoliberalism'.

Complementing Crawley's global overview and Tazreiter and Metcalfe's provocation, Blue et al. (2021) focus in on the US–Mexico border and on one camp in particular in Matamoros, Mexico to detail the border practices enacted during the pandemic. A year

before the pandemic began, the Trump Administration had enacted Title 42, forcing asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while their claims were determined. The pandemic did not precipitate the closure of the US–Mexico border, but merely amplified and justified practices already in place. The authors show the very human effects of harsh border policies and encampment on displaced people and how the pandemic has enabled their geographic exclusion and enforced immobility, yet how asylum seekers and their supporters have used this immobilisation to enhance their political visibility, exercise agency and contest their precarity.

While Blue et al. focus on those attempting to cross borders during the pandemic, Murphy (2021) addresses the pandemic's impact on asylum seekers already in Ireland. Asylum seekers in Ireland are held in 'direct provision centre' until a determination is made on their claims. These centres offer substandard, over-crowded accommodation and resulted in an inability to self-isolate or comply with other public health measures such as social distancing during the pandemic. Murphy outlines the mental health impact on asylum seekers in these centres as the pandemic represents further loss of autonomy and control, and the effects of increased stigma from some host communities. The virus may affect us all, but policy responses do not impact all equally.

Several papers deliberate on the continuation of border practices within *Refugees Convention* signatory states. Managing to cross the border into an EU state, the US or Australia does not guarantee access to human rights. Byrne (2021) examines the experiences of displaced migrants and refugees in Paris. Following demolition of the 'The Jungle' at Calais, northern France, in October 2016, more than three thousand asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants at any given time live in informal tent cities throughout the city's northern areas. They are left to fend for themselves and the conditions in tent cities have resulted in scabies outbreaks and heightened vulnerability due to the COVID-19 crisis. Rather than being identified as a vulnerable group however, the response of the French government has been to increase aggressive policing practices to 'disperse' and further displace already displaced people. The French government under President Emmanuel Macron has accompanied aggressive policing tactics with a politics of fear, exacerbating and exploiting Islamophobic sentiments and conflating immigrants with terrorists and criminals. Canning (2021) looks at the effects of hardening border practices and policing within Britain, Denmark and Sweden on lawyers, psychologists and others working with asylum seekers and refugees. She finds a number of predictable effects, of secondary trauma, compassion fatigue and burn-out, but more concerningly, her work also finds a weakening of trust in the state and state institutions. Practices such as police raids on social institutions previously considered 'safe' such as schools, community centres and churches have profoundly eroded practitioners' trust in the state itself.

El-Matrah and Dabboussy's (2021) paper does little to build trust in the reliability of state protection of human rights, even for citizens. El-Matrah and Deboussy detail the actions of Australia's government to its own citizens trapped in Al-Roj refugee camp in northern Syria. Forty-seven Australian women and their children are the wives and children of former Islamic State members who travelled to Syria with their husbands. Following the defeat of Islamic State, most nations of the Global North repatriated their citizens, but the Australian government has refused to do so, citing security concerns and reframing citizenship, not as a fundamental human right, but a privilege. Citizenship does not create rights—it simply identifies the state that is charged with the protection and realisation of those rights.

Kinowska-Mazaraki (2021) also addresses a state's failure to protect the rights of its citizens and causing a form of internal displacement. Her focus is on Poland under the far-right Law and Justice party, which has identified LGBTQIA+ citizens and Muslims as enemies within the state. Rather than protecting two vulnerable groups, the ruling PiS party has deployed hyper-nationalist populist strategies to increase its power. Redefining Polish national identity as heterosexual, Catholic and conservative, the party has declared sections of its citizenry to be traitors acting in foreign interests and sought to turn public feelings

and actions against them. Kinowska-Mazaraki traces Poland's history, particularly from its transition from Communist to a liberal democratic state, its great hope and subsequent disappointment and apathy to seek to understand the rise of the populist right and the consequences for Muslims and LGBTQIA+ Poles, forcing them to small enclaves in major cities and into a precarious and partial citizenship.

This precarious citizenship and social precarity for Muslim citizens are picked up by Giotis in Australia. Giotis (2021) looks at the role that media plays in representation and mediation between minority and majority groups, and how a new model of reporting holds promise for greater acceptance of vilified minorities into the polis. Giotis outlines the differential policing of COVID restrictions in Muslim-majority areas of Australia and the widespread conflation of 'Muslim-refugee-terrorist' in media reporting and popular discourse. As a journalism academic from a practitioner background, Giotis devised a process to facilitate direct contact between Muslim Australian women and working journalists and take them through a series of structured interactions designed to expose and confront elements of Islamophobia and build understanding between both Muslim community representatives and journalists. While Canning's paper outlines a concerning erosion of trust, Giotis' method identifies trust as crucial for improving reporting on (and thereby public views of) Muslim citizens and develops a method for building trust and understanding.

Green and Latifi (2021) look at the social precarity and marginalisation of Iranian refugee men who use drugs in Australia. Drawing on relevant sociological and feminist theories, the paper explores ways in which this group navigates the terrain of double displacement, through research conducted in Sydney. The findings highlight the ways in which social categories of gender, language, class, ethnicity, race, migration status and their relationship to intersubjective hierarchies and exclusion in Australia circumnavigate and intersect with participants' alcohol and other drugs' use and related harms.

Returning to the international sphere, papers by Missbach and Stange (2021), and by O'Brien and Hoffstaedter (2020), look at the mass displacement of Rohingya people from Myanmar. Southeast Asia has weak frameworks for human rights protections. As hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have been forced from their homes in Rakhine state in Myanmar due to mass violence, and into refugee camps in Bangladesh. O'Brien and Hoffstaedter contend that the Rohingya are victims of genocide, evidenced both by the violence enacted in Myanmar and, by the destruction of the Rohingya culture, including through assimilation and loss of group identity in refugee destination countries. Drawing on qualitative research with urban Rohingya refugees in Malaysia and an analysis of international laws pertaining to genocide and theoretical works on genocide, O'Brien and Hoffstaedter conclude that the treatment of Rohingya both in Myanmar and in Southeast Asia amounts to genocide.

Missbach and Stange examine the lack of effective protection for Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia, a region with weak normative frameworks for refugee protection. Rohingyas have overwhelmingly been denied the right to seek asylum. This was shown most overtly in 2015 during the Andaman Seas Crisis when Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai authorities intercepted boats carrying Rohingya refugees and pushed them back out to sea leading to some 8000 people being stranded at sea and an estimated 370 deaths (McLeod et al. 2016). Despite this, the UNHCR declared 2020 to be the deadliest year for Rohingya refugees attempting to cross the Andaman Sea (Al Jazeera 2021). Missbach and Stange draw on media content analysis and literature to shed light on how ASEAN's most prominent Muslim member countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, advocate on behalf of the forcibly displaced Rohingya while showing reluctance to provide sanctuary themselves.

While most papers respond to the exceptional determination and capacity of states to deploy border technologies and practices within, at, and beyond their sovereign borders, or the opportunities presented by the coronavirus pandemic for states to further demonise and marginalise displaced people, exceptional too is the rapid advance of global warming or climate change. While previous displacements have been overwhelmingly caused by

war, persecution and political shifts, today we are beginning to see increasing numbers of people displaced by climate change as lands become infertile due to drought, island nations are swallowed by rising sea levels and extreme weather events forcing people from their homes become more widespread and more frequent. Stanley's (2021) paper addresses an emerging category of displaced people arising from climate crises. Stanley explores how advanced liberal democracies respond to climate migrants in ways that reflect colonial logics and practices. Focusing on the Pacific, Stanley presents a framework for understanding a continuity of colonial logics in viewing people displaced by climate change in the Pacific: as savages who need to be saved by the West; as threats to white civilization; and as underserving of full legal protections. Systemic harms and injustices are created for those who flee environmental degradation, ensuring those most to blame for climate crises have shown least responsibility to take action. The paper ends with ideas about socially just responses to those most affected by climate harms.

Together, this collection of papers draws attention both to the continuities of displacement and the exceptional. All papers, sadly, confirm the truth of Arendt's words—that for the vast majority of displaced people, the prospect of finding a new home is slim. *Refugees Convention* signatory countries of the Global North maintain a rhetoric of human rights and its underlying principals by offering a small number of resettlement places (around 0.5–1% of those in need), but there is no evidence of political will among any nations to absorb people displaced by war, persecution or climate change back into the warm embrace of citizenship and home. This fact, that Arendt saw as exceptional when she was writing, has become the norm. Exceptional now is the proliferation of border practices—the money, technology and political will deployed to ensure those in need of a home do not find one 'here'. People displaced by climate change now join the ever-growing ranks of those displaced by more traditional means, all accelerated and exacerbated by a global pandemic. The papers in this collection also speak to the ongoing creativity, resourcefulness and determination of displaced people. No border practices have yet been able to stop ideas and relationships traversingThis borders, nor has any state achieved total exclusion of displaced people. If universal human rights are to have meaning, this is nowhere clearer than in the way nation states, individually and through inter-country agreements, ought to show a duty of care to those in the most precarious of situations. As the exceptional becomes normalised, our hope is that emergent threats, such as global health pandemics and climate change, leverage a politics of resistance to proclaim our shared humanity and a quest for human dignity for all.

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