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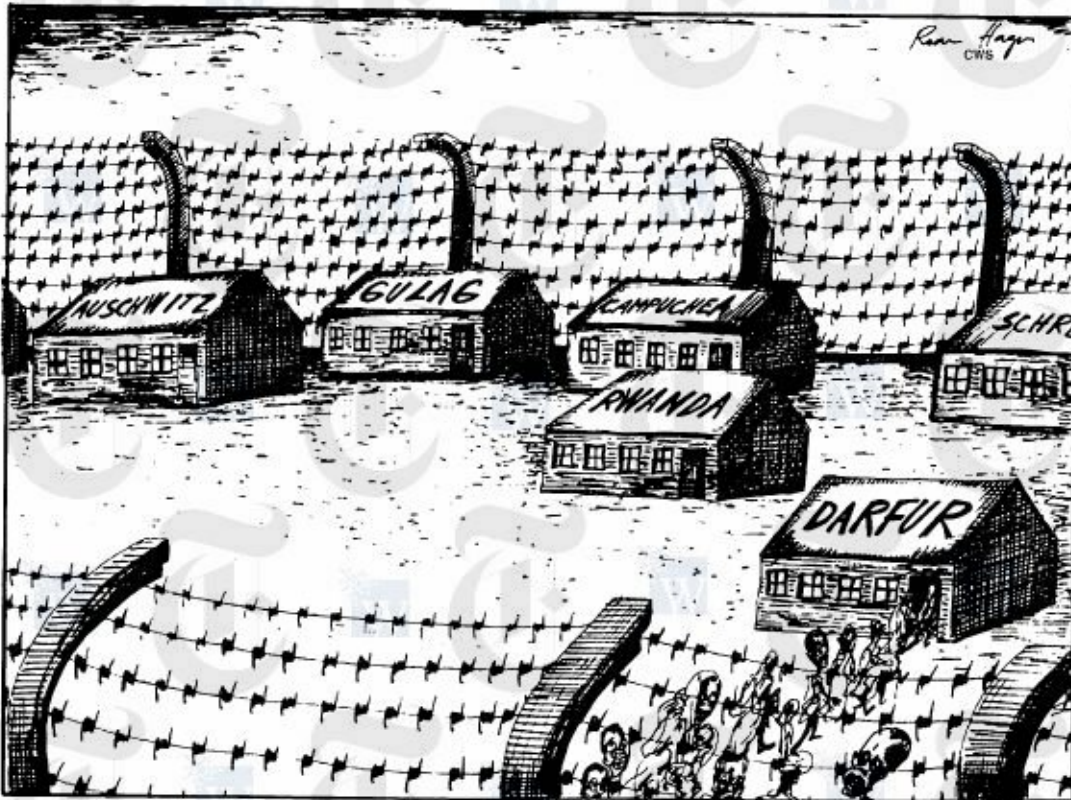
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DRAFT PAPER – NOT TO BE QUOTED (thanks)

Advocates in Fortress Europe: Working for Refugee Rights

Dedicated to Latefa and Ahmed Jnr.

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Advocates in Fortress Europe: Working for Refugee Rights

There is a challenge here for us in Europe, to create in the midst of this racially infected immigration storm, an exemplary multi-racial society... Innocence is only as real as our capacity to maintain denial (Sereny, 2003: 243, 250).

...a rope that is plaited of ignorance and inaction comes in handy whenever the voice of democracy needs to be stifled or its hands tied (Bauman, 2005: 128).

1. Introduction

In this paper we reflect in Part I on the context and in Part II on some of the motivations and practices of activists and advocates seeking to protect and promote the rights of asylum seekers and refugees in Western Europe. The main rights involved include: basic welfare (housing, subsistence, adequate income), protection from arbitrary detention, the right to family life, access to legal advice, access to health and education and the right to work. Singly or in combination, these rights are protected and promoted through campaigning and advocacy strategies in which a wide range of individuals and organisation can engage, through advocacy networks. We examine two networks working to counter destitution, detention and deportation, focussing on failed asylum seekers, or ‘illegals’ in particular.

This work draws on our experiences in the UK and The Netherlands as an engaged researcher and a professional advocate respectively. Mainly on the basis of examples known to us, in which we have been personally involved, we look at some of the broad and specific motivations of those organisations and individuals who engage in pro-asylum advocacy work. In passing we reflect also on how such work seeks to have an impact, and how it brings a range of actors together who try to protect and promote asylum seekers’ rights. The macro-context is first mapped out in Part I, and in Part II, we then address some of the motivations and strategies of individuals and organisations involved. The broader picture consists of a progressive erosion of the rights of asylum seekers, a ‘war on terrorism’ and the rise of the surveillance state, busy with excluding those declared officially undesirable.

Engagement in pro-asylum work involves everything from direct action to conferences and public debates, discussions with decision makers in private, campaigns to obtain legal reform, media work and legal cases, civil disobedience and mass protest via e-mail campaigns and on the street. The networks we look at use the arts and media and campaigns, demonstrations and meetings to try to overcome denial about how unjustly asylum seekers are treated, the innocence that Sereny doubts in her quotation at the start of this paper. Although research, lobbying and getting support from politicians and prominent public figures are the main means of influencing key decisions-makers, the main emphasis here is on individual cases and publicity to overcome public and official denial. Primarily, once we have mapped out the broad policy context, we focus on some *examples of pro-asylum advocacy network organizations, rejecting the state's construction of illegality, and its enforcement through destitution, detention and deportation and instead asserting that 'there are no illegals' since everyone has civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights.*

Gita Sereny has been a long-time researcher of Nazi architect, Albert Speer, and recently wrote on the rising mood of xenophobia and racism in Europe (Sereny, 2003). Her quotation at the start of the paper is important since it expresses both hope and despair; twin emotions that beset anyone in this field. Inside 'Fortress' Europe we ignore the abuse of officially unwanted 'outsiders' at our peril, suggests Sereny. Ignorance is not innocence, and indifference is a form of denial, as identified in the monumental study of Stanley Cohen (Cohen, 2003). Perhaps denial is rooted in unwelcome feelings of responsibility and worry for the future of Europe. If so, then there is hope that this may prove a good basis for future overcoming of denial. The starting point for our study of pro-asylum advocacy is the common recognition among such advocates of a positive civic duty to support and protect those most vulnerable to rights abuses. Failed asylum seekers and illegals are by definition susceptible to abuse. The next two sections, section 2 and 3, consider first the dominant myths about refugees, and then the 'war on illegals'. Both, it is suggested, are part and parcel of a global war on the poor, known also as the war on terrorism or the new imperialism.

PART I – The context: draconian state controls

2. A few common myths

Those in authority generally go a long way to prevent direct challenges to their own positions of control, or to their legitimacy. One way they do this is to encourage political aggression to shift from the vertical to the horizontal plane. Problems that might be blamed on politicians and business elites (e.g. crime, disorder, atrophying public spaces) are instead attributed to the weak and vulnerable: peasants, criminals, the insane, the elderly, youth, asylum seekers. Widespread problems such as unemployment, endemic fiscal crisis, inadequate public service provision and the breakdown of law and order can all be blamed on the ‘backwardness’ and ‘dishonesty’ of certain groups of people, whose vulnerability makes them easy targets for officially sanctioned and impetuous bullying. Victim-blaming, after all, has a long and dishonourable history (Ryan, 1971). In general terms: “The cumulative effect of such discourse is to normalize or naturalize unjust and violent social and political conditions” (Leatherman, 2005: 12). The system is fine as it is; the problem lies in those who do not fit in.

Among the myths we hear is that if we trust the state we will no longer feel vulnerable or unprotected. Our children will not suffer, terrorists will not flourish, criminals will not take over, and we will all be able to go out safely after dark. However, it should be clear by now that the state and its security apparatuses rarely keep us safe. More often they frighten us or violate our safety, perpetuating structural and overt violence on behalf of those in power. Those who wield authority may be there to protect us, but may attack us. Parents who neglect or mistreat their own children may make a great fuss of disliking paedophiles and wanting to ‘string them up’. Diverting attention from their own incapacities and violations, states (in this example, the parents) mistreating their own citizens but shout about those strangers who are the real danger. Like refugees, we flee towards the state for security, only to find that our vulnerability is then exposed. And if we give credence to the myth of protection, we are more easily misled and lied to. Quite often we should fear those living in the mansion, rather than the strangers at the gate. We should also fear our own naivety. In Western Europe, we rally behind our governments *as if there were a war*. And the war is against illegals, against immigrants, against

refugees. If those of us inside the protective fences of Fortress Europe are protected, what is the threat; are we perhaps not protecting but consigning others to the dustbin of history (see cartoon on cover)?

Another myth is that we do things more efficiently, and less coercively, in Western Europe than in other parts of the world. For some time, structural violence has been more cost-effective in Western Europe than overt physical compulsion of labour. Yet if life is hard enough, people will do almost anything for money, and if money is not lacking, some will do it for security. Can we really sleep easy, knowing the state's army boots, police batons, guns, nuclear bombs, and so on are always there to protect us? Distrust of the security state is almost a pre-requisite of responsible citizenship in the present era, with its emphasis on control combined with irresponsibility. The *tutti bianchi*, protestors padded in white, in a style originating in Italy, and apparently owing much to the satire of Swift, carry slogans that spell the mood of the times: "Greed is good"; "Trust the Government, Never Complain", "Nuclear Power is safe". These parodies incite disbelief, asking us to disagree. Such ironies may be lost to those unable or unwilling to question the good faith of those in authority. Yet it is now that the state is weakened; "No longer in full charge of the economy, security or culture the state cannot promise its subjects the whole-life protection from the cradle to the grave which it not so long ago strove to provide" (Bauman, 2005: 45).

Another myth is that we know all the most important problems confronting us since they are reported daily in the papers, on TV, and in the latest special report. Fifty years ago, the problem was mainly communism. Now the problem is mainly the global network of terrorists. Or is it? What about global warming? Even faced with the rampant inequities of the global system, we cling to the idea that democracy can bring each and every one to a kind of 'inclusiveness'. This is another myth, according to which we are all equal *really* because we vote, and are all citizens of somewhere. We are all democratic now (Leatherman, 2005: 17). But those who rule over us let us take the risks so they can live in peace.

In the face of such myths that seek to justify the state of things and of authority in particular, there is a palpable and global rise of disbelief. In older liberal democracies, including India and France, and newer democracies like Russia and South Africa, the status quo is challenged at every turn. Economic and social democracy, and participatory democracy are being demanded, so that citizenship is not just about voting rights, but about bread and butter issues too. Voting will change nothing unless there is structural transformation. Economic and social rights are integral to most popular historical movements of the oppressed. Economic and social rights are also integral to most broader definitions of democracy and human rights. For millions of people to actively engage as citizens, requires they have decent living conditions, to which they are entitled as of rights.

Most of us try to avoid 'negative' attention by speaking out too loudly or aggressively against the dominant myths of our time. There is virtue in expressing our concerns in a diplomatic manner, unthreatening to those with authority over us. We believe in negotiation, compromise; in keeping things 'positive'. Advocates arguably have to do this, or they could not survive. Acting in ways that pointlessly antagonize decision-makers needs to be reconciled with shaming them on occasion. The danger is that without more confrontational strategies than these, the emperor will be shown to be naked, and will remain, naked, in his throne. Pro-refugee activists need protest and civil participation behind them, need a political movement, so that they can use a language that goes beyond the accepted discourses. In the second part of this paper, we consider the devotion of advocates to their work, their lack of respect for the security state and their skepticism about its protective role. Armed with experiential knowledge, advocates promoting the rights of asylum inform themselves about the world as it 'truly is' for those on the receiving end, *and* for policy makers. Their role as interlocutors obliges them to straddle two worlds, or more. They translate the impact on 'illegals' and others of the dominant power structures and their draconian systems of rounding up, and express this impact in a manner that politicians and officials can understand. The refined, polite, attractive; powerful and well-placed individuals who work for large formal organizations are confronted with the brutality of the system they so calmly oversee. The routinised

brutality of officialdom is thus exposed as far more threatening to society and human rights norms than even the most criminal and wayward elements among the dispossessed and excluded could ever be.

3. The war on Illegals and Asylum seekers

Forced by ever tighter controls, some people opt to have themselves smuggled across frontiers, deserts and seas, are suffocated and frozen to death in hot weather or cold containers, end up drowning at sea in overloaded fishing vessels. Europol makes a clear distinction between illegal immigration and trafficking, although they recognize the overlap between the two “it is inevitable that some victims of trafficking will enter a country as illegal immigrants” (Europol, 2006). Sometimes those seeking to enter are physically pushed back outside territorial waters by diligent coastguards. In the Netherlands many are stuck back on a plane within 48 hours of arriving in Schiphol. There is an almost roaring silence around the mainstream UK and Netherlands media about such dispatching of unwanted human cargo, as the opening quotations from Bauman reminds us, the silence may not be innocent. The UNHCR expresses concern, The Independent newspaper, Le Monde and a few others conscientiously report on the deaths of desperate people. Citizens of the EU can travel freely (provided they can pay), so what’s the problem, seems to be the attitude. However: “(t)hose on the receiving side of the new planetary mobility don’t have such freedom...For them there are neither unguarded exits nor hospitably open entry gates” (Bauman, 2005: 5).

Once people are smuggled over a European border where they can ask for asylum, the best they may be able to hope for are the ‘3-Ds’ – destitution, detention and deportation. Very few indeed will be granted refugee status or leave to remain. They find themselves excluded from even the most basic means of making a living, the right to work. Officially organized exclusion from rights is used as a means to get people to return home ‘voluntarily’, but does not work. Instead, emerging global networks of migrants, refugees and their supporters, are seeking to protect a range of civil and political, economic and social rights for asylum seekers and illegals *who will not go away in many cases because they are terrified of being killed, through persecution or not.* Global

networks of advocacy organizations are demanding that refugees and asylum seekers be given the right to work, not be detained indefinitely without charge, have asylum cases considered fully and fairly, whether individually or collectively, and be allowed remain legally so long as they cannot be deported back to a country where their human right to life and basic entitlements would be violated. Regularisation demands have no logical end, given the production of ever more categories of illegals worldwide.

The US and their allies meanwhile assert the need to fortify their borders through all sorts of physical and technological means; through walls, bio-metric fingerprinting and tighter policing. All for the security of the homeland. This desire for control is as old as the state itself, but the technology involved is now potentially more sophisticated than anything dreamed of by Orwell or Huxley. Whatever the distinctions made by Europol, “as the rich raise walls to keep immigrants and refugees out, they fuel illegal trade in people” (Sassen, 2002: 4, cited in Leatherman, 2005: 10). Where there are walls to scale, there will be people selling ladders, and people who will go up them even if they are not safe. Before the Iron Curtain fell, new walls were already constructed, across divided cities and spaces, and in this age of instantaneous mass communication and the internet, walls are growing larger and spreading from cities to entire countries. A bizarre development. Fortress Israel is almost entirely begirdled, and Fortress Europe is in the making through defences on its outer perimeters, including off-shore islands and exclaves. Around Saudi Arabia, a human-proof fence 800 km long will soon cut off the border with Iraq. Private construction companies are busy building walls all over, and between US and Mexico the ‘Tortilla Curtain’ will act as a one-way membrane, keeping out Mexicans, and letting out gringos.

The system we live under increasingly resembles a globalised version of the gulag (see cartoon on the front cover). The pass laws of apartheid South Africa have apparently stretched to girdle the planet, creating new categories of illegality, new sub-categories of non-members of the global community. Considered in terms that are basically sub-human, categories like ‘asylum seekers’ the ‘illegals’ and ‘undocumented’ are created, bringing into being those Robin Cohen memorably called the ‘new helots’ two decades

ago, himself very aware of the South African apartheid analogy (Cohen, 1987). As Bauman puts it, “(t)hey are the dregs, the waste and rejects of the global free trade and economic progress that on one...end of the spectrum sediments the joys of unheard-of-affluence, while dumping unspeakable poverty and humiliation at its other end, and sprinkling fears and gruesome premonitions over all its length” (Bauman, 2005: 22). The ‘state of exception’ spreads its tentacles in the way of free movement worldwide, and: “(b)etween the start and the...arrival is a desert, a void, a yawning abyss into which only a few would muster the courage to leap of their own free will, unpushed” (ibid: 5).. In the case of asylum seekers, fear and desperation may be as important as courage (Hintjens, 2006a).

The rich across the globe will soon be fenced into their gated havens, while poor people are dumped out of town, to pay the price for losing public spaces. To gain access they will have to dig tunnels, swim dangerous waters, stow away, be crammed into dangerous vehicles going across town, across the border, to the industrial zones. They will risk their lives just to stay alive. War zones like the US-Mexican border will spawn mini-exclusion zones where commerce and piracy become indistinguishable, being fought over the bodies of men and women working to improve their lot, to survive (Hintjens, 2007; Harris, 2002). The same is true of Europe’s southern flanks, for instance in the Canary islands or in Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish exclaves in Morocco. The benefits from this state of affairs are mostly to businesses that sub-contract cheap labour, to government officials (who are employed) and private firms (which make profits) from detention and surveillance of borders. But the more successful the defences, the less work there will be for officials and for private detention companies. So there is a definite tension, and cases of corruption are repetitively documented in the UK, where immigration controls allow people in for a fee. Who can be locked up if no one gets in?

There is a story that encapsulates this logic, is *The Selfish Giant* by Oscar Wilde. A giant whose garden is used by children to play in, returns from his travels, chases them out and builds a wall around his beautiful garden. “The children came skipping down the road after school, only to discover the dreadful wall”. Later he breaks it down the wall when

he realizes spring will never come to the garden if the children are kept out. In it a small child who makes the garden bloom has stigmata on his hands, which makes the Giant feel compassion and love. With the story of *The Selfish Giant*, Oscar Wilde showed how people's worst fears can be realized when they cut off their contact with others. Defences, constructed to make us feel safe, only reinforce our feelings of lacking freedom, cutting us off from possibilities as well as avoiding risks. In the end, one wonders, like the poet Robert Frost in 'Mending Fences', who one is keeping in and who one is keeping out. But unfortunately "a lot of commercial capital can be garnered from insecurity and fear – and it is" (Bauman, 2005: 69).

From Hong Kong to England, and from Iceland to Brazil, private detention facilities are very much on the agenda. In an excellent study on private security companies' major involvement in the UK immigration detention business, Christine Bacon has shown that those who seek to enter the country in order to apply for asylum, perhaps because they were refused elsewhere, are likely to be arrested on arrival and put into a privately run detention centre. In some countries, like Australia, detention of asylum seekers is mandatory. What Bacon calls "the detention estate" is characterised by an extreme and immediate "willingness to detain despite clear principles and rules" which should limit the use of detention as a "last resort" (Bacon, 2005: 4). What is disturbing, as was also apparent in an earlier study carried out that involved looking a compulsory detention of all asylum seekers in Australia, is what Bacon refers to as "...the secrecy and lack of accountability inherent in immigration detention, and in some respects, the move towards increasingly harsh detention policy and practice" (ibid; Hintjens & Jarman, 2003).

4. The Age of the Camp

As besieged mega-powers seek to exclude their enemies and identify more enemies within, *refoulement* has become the basis for 'firm and fair' refugee and migration policies in the EU. Cells, guns, hunger, the end of family life, forcible deportation; all these are use as instruments to discourage those who might move into the EU in future. The age of the web and virtual on-line worlds where players wander about at will, is simultaneously the age where physical cruelty and barbarism have become the hallmark

of civilization (perhaps they always were). Even the proper papers do not ensure that you pass the check point and are not hauled away. Agamben calls this 'the Age of the Camp', and with good reason. He was speaking partly metaphorically, but there are now camps located all over Europe, dozens of them, more than at the height of the Nazi concentration camps. Two maps side by side make sobering viewing, one uncomfortably resembling the other (see Maps 1 and 2). Only that in the new camps there is not much work done, and the camps are more numerous and spread more widely.

Analogies between Nazism and anything else are of course a deliberate 'wake up call' for public opinion, designed to anger and shock. Many deny the comparability of the holocaust with anything, but for those working on other atrocities and genocides, the understanding of processes related to the Holocaust, and the Nazi genocide of Jews, gypsies and politicide of 'social' and political enemies, are fruitful. Agamben caused an outcry when he compared the status of prisoners in Guantanamo to that of people interned in Nazi concentration camps. But later interviewed he reflected "their situation is legally speaking actually comparable...the detainees of Guantanamo do not have the status of Prisoners of War, they have absolutely no legal status...They are subject only to raw power; they have no legal existence" (Agamben, German Law Journal, 2004). The same is true of many detained in camps in Europe too.

It would be reassuring to dismiss comparisons with Nazism as far-fetched; we wish we could. But for those incarcerated in camps across Europe, hundreds of thousands of people who have not committed any crimes, there are obvious similarities; *they are to be disposed of - removed*. No wonder the number of people demanding asylum in Western Europe and North America slowed down dramatically from 2000 to 2006. Halliburton has nonetheless been commissioned to construct 50 new immigration and asylum detention centres across the US. Presumably they will be to lock up existing illegals at a faster pace. Similar plans in Europe to increase 'reception centre' capacity in UK, Germany and The Netherlands, as well as Poland and the Ukraine, have involved deals with private companies. Corporate involvement in the concentration camps is often overlooked, but should not be forgotten.

More generally, regarding migration regimes (as opposed to asylum) OECD states have been restricting cross-border movement since the early 1900s, and then with a vengeance since the 1970s. If you are from the 'wrong' country, it is now almost impossible for you and your family to obtain a Schengen visa or enter the US or Canada. If you enter without proper documentation, or with papers the border police think are fake, you can be detained, to be later deported. You may be denied entry rights in future if this happens. If you manage to enter, you will live in a camp or in a camp without walls, which is the illegal status of destitution and the permanent danger of being picked up, detained and deported. And everywhere the 'war on terror' meshes with internal security controls of all kinds. 'Illegals' can barely subsist on their wits; some would prefer to be in prison, since at least they will get medical treatment there. The worst is to be in 'holding centres' in off-shore islands, boats or in the dungeons and prisons of transitory countries, caught en route and returned. People are sent to Indonesia, the Dominican Republic, the Ukraine, Libya, Malta and tiny, parched Vanuata in the Pacific, to be incarcerated away from the gaze of the media, without lawyers or doctors, and 'processed'. In time and space, and for all practical purposes these hundreds of thousands are the disappeared of the European, North American, globalizing state system; the disappeared of a war on refugees.

Camps exist abstracted from usual notions of work, of time and space, and of due process in the legal sense. Agamben describes this as 'the state of exception', paradoxically not exceptional at all; the normal state of affairs for asylum seekers is abnormal; their legal rights are suspended at will, at any time, and especially *in certain places*. The European public watches this spectacle through the eyes of the draconian state: "our television cameras focused on the gallant policemen rounding up the 'illegals' and *sans papiers* and transporting them to the nearest refugee camp" (Bauman, 2005: 22). For Agamben the camp is a paradigm for the dominant global economic and political order because those fleeing war or seeking a better life may be kept here at will; it may be days, months or years; it is arbitrary and it *depends*. In global terms, "those who have lost in the consumer game...have been bounced out of...the casino" (Bauman, 2005: 101). Meanwhile they

are kept away from public view in places where they may or may not see daylight, where they can be kept, moved on somewhere else, or ‘bounced out’ at an instant’s notice in just the shirt on their back. In The Netherlands, many people are send back from Schiphol within 48 hours, without having set foot in the country, legally speaking.

PART II – WHERE DO PRO-ASYLUM ACTIVISTS COME FROM?

5. Free Movement: no one is illegal

Many, if not most, pro-asylum advocates start with the premise of free movement. Of course, population movement has never really been free, and restrictions on movement have been imposed as modernity has both aged and failed to globalize its benefits. Movement – whether forced or relatively ‘free’ - across natural frontiers and territories has always been integral to human history, and this provides pro-asylum and pro-migrant activists with historical antecedents and a pedigree. For centuries, when millions suffered persecution in Europe, they fled where they could to find relief. They either left, to settle and colonise new lands, or remained as vulnerable minorities, later to be herded into camps to be killed after being subjected to totalizing corporate and state power. That those killed in genocides, atrocities and purges were always, by definition, alone and unprotected, is the underpinning of asylum law. Pro-asylum advocates learned from this experience that formal, legally enshrined rights to leave one country must be matched by reciprocal duties on the part of other states to allow entry so that asylum can be claimed in the first place. If you are in danger, you should not be sent back. In this case, the right to move across national borders should hold, temporarily, *as if* there were no borders. The Geneva Convention’s basic principle of *non-refoulement* arguably legally underpins the free movement ideals that inspire organizations, individuals and networks. The argument would be that the fact there is no human right to free cross-border movement in any treaty does not make it any less real or essential a human right. The right to come and go across international borders is not only the corollary of free movement within states, but also the logical, requisite counterpart of the right to leave a state, and a condition of *non-refoulement* in relation to those seeking refuge from persecution (Dummett, 2002). These ideals have been outlined in a number of serious studies (for one example see Hayter, 2004).

The appearance of a 'free movement movement' across Europe has accompanied the selective closure of Europe's external borders and the tightening of internal policing of the 'illegals' thus created. The frontier countries of Europe are more and more remote, and include Tanzania, Kenya, Egypt, South Africa, Costa Rica, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Thailand (and the offshore islands of Europe) as well as Libya, Morocco, Malta, Senegal and so forth. Here are the new battle grounds against a groundswell of movement against the gates of global closure. Just as the gated communities of the world close their security barriers tightly, those trying to escape political repression, hunger and conflict find themselves locked out of escape. Three or four decades of neo-liberal squeezing have created new conflagrations, fought out as if identities were the main resources left to the dispossessed (Chossudovsky, 1998). We are now all contained in the grip of a war on terror hardly anyone believes in.

Another feature of pro-asylum advocacy is an opposition to the misuse of law for coercive ends, and of violent forms of state control in the name of border controls. The first strict immigration restrictions came into force in Western Europe in the early 1900s, the time of the strengthening of the coercive and police state. But deportation started much earlier, for example in the 1760s when 20,000 freed Black slaves were deported from London to Sierra Leone in West Africa for incensing the decent folk of English society with their 'mixing' with the female population of that city (Dummet & Nicol, 1990). Still, the term 'deportation' in the UK context is officially used to refer to people removed for criminal reasons. Failed asylum seekers and non-criminal illegals are subject to 'removal orders'. In The Netherlands, deportation is considered a dirty word by some, for being associated with the deportation of Jewish people to concentration camps during World War II. The word 'uitzetting' (literally 'placing outside') is preferred, at least by officials and those who support current restrictions. It is similar in meaning and 'neutrality' to the term removals in the UK. With the exception of lawyers, who tend to use the legally correct terms, most pro-asylum advocates in Europe refer to the removal of illegals and failed asylum seekers to their home countries, or to a third country, simply as 'deportations' or even as 'disappearances'.

Campaigns across Europe have been inspired by the simple proposition that making people illegal is illegitimate, and against a basic human right to an identity, citizenship and residency somewhere on the planet. Thus on any occasion that the social justice movement organizes on the issue, demanding amnesty or regularization, or an end to detention of children, for instance, the slogan 'no one is illegal' comes up time and again. It is a subsidiary slogan of 'Another World is possible' of the World Social Forums; at every European, national and World Social Forum, migration and asylum issues are on the agenda, often quite centrally, and 'no one is illegal' is a rallying cry. This slogan shows that 'the problem' of asylum and deportations is socially and legally constructed, and illegitimate. Creating categories of illegals through calculated policies of exclusion and denial, makes the problem rather than solving it; ultimately the 'solution' is to stop creating illegals, rather than deporting and detaining those classified as such. Media attention on the almost inevitable cases where destitute and desperate illegals resort to crime, makes a recipe for public consent to silent atrocities in the form of internment, removal, and the overnight disappearances of those who came to flee terror and state repression, vendettas and wars.

6. Not in our name

Another perception that fuels pro-asylum advocacy in the UK and The Netherlands is that we are all made complicit, as citizens certainly, in the repression and stigmatization of vulnerable people for the purposes of border control for its own sake. Our repression and stigmatization is officially sanctioned and celebrated. The text of a letter written on 17 July 2007 by Meg Hillier, the new Under Secretary of State responsible, presents as good news that: "Asylum applications are down 74% from their peak in 2002. In 2005...more individuals were removed than ever before. These achievements have not happened by accident"; she states: "(t)hey have required a lot of hard work from a lot of people". Yes, indeed, and many really repressive measures carried out by people 'so poorly paid for bullying and creeping, I really hope their salaries improve' (in the words of a Brecht-Weil song of the 1930s, parodying those turning a blind eye to the rise and rise of the National Socialist party).

Officially sanctioned repression outrages advocates and fuels them to continue working for illegals and would-be refugees whatever the odds against them. Draconian controls require increasingly determined work to break down the walls of ignorance and indifference. The media silences news not regarded as news. Those detained, deported and made deliberately destitute in the name of protecting EU citizens, if they are seen at all, are viewed as ‘the price we pay’ (or rather our price, they pay) for freedoms and securities we enjoy (but they don’t).

Yet suddenly we can be outraged when ‘ordinary, decent people’ are stopped and searched under the surveillance regime daily applied to suspected terrorists and so-called illegals. Recently, for example, it was reported that members of environmental groups like Greenpeace and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK might be stopped and prevented from demonstrating under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (*The Independent*, 27 July 2007). But when asylum seekers and suspected terrorists are treated like human guinea pigs, almost in the same breath, the state experiments with new and dangerous forms of repressive surveillance that can later be imposed on everyone. Ankle bands, tranquilising drugs, exclusion zones and bio-metric IDs are all used in this ‘war on illegals’, forms of torture are justified, as in the war on terror. These forms of stigmatization and control are applicable to anyone, bird-lovers included. Neither the first nor last to say so, Agamben notes how: “History teaches us how practices first reserved for foreigners find themselves applied later to the rest of the citizenry” (Agamben, *Le Monde*, 2004).

In line with this, a wider motive of some pro-asylum advocacy and activists, therefore, is the preservation of civil liberties in general. Their preservation for minorities and the most vulnerable is the lynchpin of their generalisability. There is a pragmatic and practical realization that human rights are ultimately interdependent and indivisible, and we collectively ignore specific rights abuses against targeted groups at our peril. Ultimately, from this point of view, the specific rights of one need to be defended in order to defend the general rights of all.

One legitimate and democratic response to totalitarian control is civil disobedience and physical confrontation. In different parts of Europe, activists demanding an end to repressive border controls have physically attacked camps and detention centres. In 2002 in South Australia protestors converged on Woomera and (accidentally, it turns out) dismantled barriers from within, while those detained destroyed them from within. The result was over 50 escapes, and eventually the closure of the camp. Camps under construction have been dismantled camps under construction has also happened in Italy, brick by brick. Pro-asylum advocates, and asylum seekers who are detained in prison-like conditions, often worse, can act as demolition experts. They destroy walls physically as well as in the public mind, and seek to let the proverbial children play freely once again, bringing spring to the Selfish Giant's garden that Europe has become.

In much of Europe, where vital life seems transfixed or dying, the desire for stasis harshly interrupts the constant flow of human movement. Movement in and out both depend on restoring some kind of public space across boundaries. Break down the main defensive walls and barriers, and a large part of the cause of frustration with today's globalised system will have been removed. The wall around Palestine is an admission of defeat, of moral bankruptcy. Counsellors of despair one after the other advise raising the barriers, the walls, check points, security alarms and video cameras. Some kind of lifting of these restrictions will need to happen in Europe if we wish for life to remain livable and to constitute any kind of example to anyone, inside or outside the EU.

As private detention centres mushroom, one campaign has focused on getting all children in particular out of prison or detention. 'Geen kind in het cel' goes a campaign in The Netherlands in 2005-6 by a number of NGOs and child rights organizations. Throughout the EU, women, men and children, including confirmed torture and rape victims, are held arbitrarily for long periods of time, and subjected to conditions that can only be described as inhuman and degrading, as torture. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty, among others, routinely document the damage done by detention and deportation to children and to adults alike. Large companies like GSL (Global Solutions Limited) have been taken to

task for inadequate provision of care for adults and children alike. Anne Owers, Her Majesty's Inspector of prisons reported in 2005 that she found evidence of: "a sub-culture of abusive comment, casual racism, and contempt for decent values" among the staff of (Emma Ginn, e-mail, 16.8.05). Physical and psychological torture have been documented on many occasions in private detention facilities. Owers' reports make grim reading, documenting reports about the neglect that leads to deaths in detention and cases of medical neglect. On deaths during deportation a study by the Institute of Race Relations covers the whole of Western Europe (Fekete, 2005).

Although he was not the first or last to say it, Agamben notes that: "History teaches us how practices first reserved for foreigners find themselves applied later to the rest of the citizenry" (Agamben, *Le Monde*, 2004). Self-interest too can motivate the pro-asylum activists and those fighting for the rights of others. In some cases, therefore, the basis for pro-asylum engagement is not idealistic commitment to globalised free movement but the more practical realization that our rights are ultimately interdependent and indivisible. Thus we defend the specific rights of one because it affects the general rights of all. All these abuses set dangerous precedents for attacking the basic civil liberties of full citizens, which is why the task of defending failed asylum seekers and others defined as 'illegals' is arguably *the* human rights battle to be fought in Europe regarding not only civil liberties but also economic and social rights attached to broader, more inclusive notions of citizenship.

7. The Non-Generaal Pardon in The Netherlands

A Generaal Pardon was announced in early 2007, shortly after the election of a new government, and initially 26.000 people were expected to be regularised, all long-term asylum applicants who had fallen into illegality. They would now be able to remain in The Netherlands legally, to work and to find shelter. The public (and international) perception is that most people living illegally in The Netherlands will now be able to stay, but this is far from the case. Strict qualifying restrictions have to be met before someone's case can even be considered, and this has excluded unknown numbers of the 26,000, possibly most of them. The Generaal Pardon may not prove to be very general at

all. Flushed into the open, as it were, after years of living as human shadows, and disappearing into the narrow cracks of Dutch society, illegals blink in the light only to be told that they must satisfy conditions that are almost impossible to meet.

A case from PRIME experience is a man who has lived in Holland for many years, and was finally refused asylum not long ago. Afghani, he fears returning to a country where there is neither peace nor security. He became illegal after being refused, and tried to enter UK once he discovered he had a brother there. He had not seen his brother for more than thirteen years, and discovers his brother was granted some eight years earlier. However, on arrival in UK, the man is immediately detained and placed in a 'private correctional facility', and suspected of wanting to abscond and become an illegal in the UK. Although such detention should only be used as a last resort, it is being used in a preventative way to prevent him gaining access to the UK (Bacon, 2006). Our wretched Afghani spent all but nine months of the last thirteen years in The Netherlands, and had been hoping that this *Generaal Pardon* might finally mean some kind of relief for him. However his three months in prison in the UK mean that he will not be eligible, as he has spent more than three months of 2006 outside the Netherlands, failing to meet this particular requirement. He will almost certainly remain an illegal, and is now more vulnerable to deportation as well.

The granting of the *Generaal Pardon* was only possible because previous Minister for Immigration and Integration, Rita Verdonk, resigned. Her main aim had been to ensure a tough deterrent policy that prevented asylum seekers from coming to The Netherlands in the first place. It was largely successful. Overall applications for asylum have gone down from around 45,000 in 2000 to less than 5,000 in 2006. Even after Rita has left, in the view of PRIME (Participating Refugees in Multicultural Europe): 'Verdonk's ghost remains in the machine' (Pouri, 2007). Dutch implementation of the *Generaal Pardon* has proceeded in a Verdonkian manner; anyone in prison more than one month, even for a very crime, will not qualify. Anyone who missed the deadline of 1 April 2001 for applying for asylum, even by a single day, need not apply. Those who have spent even a day over three months outside The Netherlands during 2006 need not apply (even if like

our unfortunate Afghani friend, they were unjustly detained). They will not qualify for the Generaal Pardon. Although all these qualifications are questionable in legal terms, including the requirement to demonstrate continuous residence in The Netherlands throughout 2006, it is proving very difficult for illegals to qualify for the Pardon. There are rarely any mitigating circumstances.

The Generaal Pardon was in designed as a 'twin track' policy; its repressive alter ego was a greatly speeded-up deportation procedure for anyone who did not qualify for the Generaal Pardon. Even some who did qualify were vulnerable to speedy deportations before the policy came fully into effect, and PRIME was among the organisations that worked with those in prisons and detention centres to prevent such abuses (Hintjens, 2007). The Generaal Pardon regulations serve a dual purpose; many illegals were 'flushed out' of their hiding spaces and there followed an alarming intensification of police raids, detention and deportations. Police raids on organisations working with illegals were reported, and illegals were arrested who would previously have been relatively safe in these settings. The backdrop was a request by the central administration and immigration police, for local to provide lists of names of illegals so they could be deported. But the local authorities are refusing to cooperate with this request, associated with the Generaal Pardon (Edestad, 19.7.07). The local authorities claim that this request is incompatible with their duty of care to illegals, and their obligation to protect their welfare.

Even anti-terror policing provisions have been used with PRIME, as a group that works with illegals (Stichting LOS, 2007). One week, flowers are delivered to PRIME offices in The Hague. It was not the first time the police had sent flowers to say 'sorry'. A few days previously, as staff and volunteers left the PRIME office, they were picked up one by one, and told they were being held in the local police station on terror charges. It continued from four in the afternoon until 9 p.m., when the last person to leave the building was Ahmed Pouri. They finally found out why they were all arrested; it seemed one dissatisfied 'client' had been unable to get what he wanted from PRIME and had made claims to the police that PRIME were making bombs in their offices. Although he

was well known to the police for having psychological problems, on this occasion for some reason the police chose to take his claim seriously. Hence the ‘anti-terror’ procedures put into place. Later the flowers were to say sorry; everyone had been released the same day. Some PRIME staff were very distressed, others laughed it off. But when things like this happen, it becomes clear that pro-asylum work with illegals is regarded as bordering on the criminal in today’s EU. Such work is already illegal in France, and seems to be becoming ever more difficult in The Netherlands and the UK.

Since the Generaal Pardon was announced, complains Rian Ederveen of Stichting LOS, many organisations working with illegals have been experiencing various kinds of police harassment of this kind, including raids, unwelcome attention and detention of people previously left in peace. Lia Matheu of WOC, an organisation in The Hague working mainly with lusophone refugees and migrant communities from Angola and Mozambique, confirmed that deportation and the Generaal Pardon were designed together: “Yes they are chasing people out and deportations have been explicitly linked to the Generaal Pardon ruling” (June 11th, 2007). According to Matheu, there were to have been explicit signed agreement between the government, local authorities and the police. But when the local government authorities refused to provide lists of names, citing their duty of care, the agreements failed to materialise. They refused to follow the logic that anyone who failed to obtain amnesty under the Generaal Pardon should be ‘fair game’ for deportation. It might have been a tidy solution, but the local authorities considered it compromised their own integrity.

8. Countering destitution, detention and deportation in the UK

In the UK, the government was tremendously proud to have ‘mastered’ immigration by the time Tony Blair stepped down as Prime Minister. 2006 was a great year, apparently, because the UK authorities were able to deport more people than they refused asylum to. The UK Home Office called this *Tipping the Balance*, a public performance target. Let’s look at what this ‘good news’ is really all about:

- “the number of failed asylum applicants removed each year exceeds the number predicted to have unfounded claims”

- That means that deportations last year exceeded expected total accepted refugees and those with leave to remain!
- According to a Home Office press release: “in 2006 asylum applications reached their lowest level since 1993, while the number of removals and deportations by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate hit an all-time high” (Home Office, 2007).

“We will be pressing on, not going backward...there is no need for an amnesty” reports Meg Hilliard to an MP’s enquiry on behalf of a constituent (Letter 17 July 2007). “A lot of hard work from a lot of people” as Meg puts it, has caused problems at a terrific rate for those supporting asylum seekers who are destitute, detained and facing deportation. The performance indicators tell a story of horror: removals for 2005 covered 71 per cent of unfounded (rejected or withdrawn) applications for asylum, compared with 49 per cent in 2004. But by December 2006 deportations reached 109 per cent of the target for that month. This is presented as good news for keeping Britain tidy and for the IND (Immigration and Nationality Department). Staff on performance-related pay would be delighted.

Deportation is even more dramatic than detention; many of those detained for months and even years end up being removed to their presumed home country, sometimes without the proper travel documents, and vulnerable to immediate arrest and detention again on arrival. This is a traffic in people in reverse; a sort of rendition policy writ large. If it is not, then what is it? It may even be legal, but it is contrary to any basic sense of justice for people who are sometimes so vulnerable that they prefer to commit suicide rather than be deported. Perhaps the Home Office reckons that the fact they do not commit suicide shows they are guilty of fraudulently claiming asylum. According to a Home Office document, for 2006 a total of 18,235 failed asylum seekers, including dependents, were removed from the UK, compared with an estimated 17,780 applicants, including dependents, who it was predicted would fail to be granted refugee status or other leave following their first or subsequent application or appeal. Alibhai-Brown aptly described the Home Office approach as: “policies and practices of institutionalised savagery, rebranded as efficiency” (*The Independent*, 2007).

In 2006, the public performance target was exceeded by 3% for the year (which amounts to a surplus of 450 people). This public performance target really cleans up! It leaves fewer foreign bodies in the UK body politic, and is presumed to make the existing legal inhabitants of the UK feel better. One may like to be organised and tidy. But tidiness can be as much a sign of not being bothered as extreme disorder. And tidiness is scary when directed at habits of the mind, and at the visitors in our midst. There are several words for when tidiness become racialised and legalised: it is segregation, ethnic cleansing, it is sweeping away surplus humanity. Off to their own hopeless swamps, an uncertain future in their own gulags, whether Darfur, Iraq or Columbia. The gulags outwith the EU.

Such an entrenched set of quotas and indicators makes a mockery of the argument that asylum cases are being considered one by one. Pro-asylum advocacy becomes much harder when decisions are being dictated by quotas and targets. Campaigns based on individual cases continue however, and to date the NCADC has managed to prevent almost one hundred and fifty deportations. It is a drop in the ocean, but significant symbolically, since it shows that pro-asylum advocacy can work. Increasingly refugees and migrants, asylum seekers are organising to resist returns and document the terrible risks of deportation to failed asylum seekers. High level campaigns have been mounted in the past few years that have included individual cases, demonstrations, petitions, and also legal challenges to Home Office rules to allow deportations to specific countries. The most important recently has been the DRC case, now briefly considered.

Perhaps the largest gulag outside the EU, to which people are still being forcibly returned after almost ten years of war, is the democratic Republic of Congo. Here at least 4 million, and up to 10 million people have died from the combination of war, forced labour in mines, insecurity and internal displacement, hunger, disease and sexual violence as well as torture and murder by the regime (Hintjens, 2006b). In mid-February 2007 a British MP, Rudi Vis, tabled an early day motion (EDM 926) calling for an end of forced deportations to DRC and asking for a chartered flight to deport Congolese scheduled for 26 February to be cancelled, arguing that such removals constituted “a grave violation of their Article 3 human rights as provided for in the Geneva Convention”. Before their

deportation, just 5 MPs had signed this EDM; after the actual removal and a huge amount of counter-publicity (in a sense once it was too late) another 40 MPs decided to sign the EDM within a couple of weeks. Sometimes it does seem that stories of despair and hopelessness are considered more newsworthy, where most newspapers are concerned, than stories of hope (hope for those most affected, the asylum seekers themselves). News is good news for 'us' (one less, ten less, lots less). The DRC February 2007 charter flight carrying 19 children and 23 adults was widely reported on. According to John O. of NCADC (National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, this was "the biggest and best response to an appeal to stop a deportation in the 12 years of our existence" (e-mail, 27 February 2007). NCADC coordinates a 'micro-politics of hope' in its work to link up groups working to protect individual asylum seekers and families, with wider campaigns like the DRC campaigns of 2007.

In February 2007, in spite of mass faxing, picketing of XL.com offices and mass e-mailing through their website, the flight went ahead and although a few people were not deported because their legal cases were moved forward, more than forty women and children, and a few men, arrived in Kinshasa the following day, 27 February. In an e-mail of 5 March, Liz Atherton, and UK-based campaigner who is part of the NCADC team, described what happened: "More than 40 people were loaded onto the plane that day, handcuffed and distressed, the children crying, and they were accompanied by around 150 police and escorts. The whole exercise smacked of conspiracy between the British and DRC authorities". She also reports that some of the 150 escorts and UK officials filmed the group's arrival in Kinshasa, reportedly in order to use the footage at a DRC country hearing scheduled for later in 2007 (and already delayed several times at the government's request). If the government loses the country guidance tribunal (now set for September 2007) then on top of case law in 2005 and evidence presented by the BBC of torture facing returned asylum seekers, this could spell the end of forced deportations from the UK to DRC for some time. All the evidence already supports this position, yet the Home Office continues to insist on its right to deport people back to DRC. The campaign will need to continue.

9. The politics of hope and despair

To conclude this exploration, we consider the case of a woman, and we will call her Susan, who has worked voluntarily for about three years, first with first Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group (SBASSG) in Wales, UK and then with a legal support group in South Wales, Asylum Justice. Several years ago, Susan became interested in SBASSG, and found out about the group's background. She wanted to get involved and wondered what was needed most. She found out that until 2002-2003, when asylum seekers actually started to arrive, there were all sorts of plans, coordinated with the police, with housing providers, with the local government, and it all seemed so joined up, so well thought through, if totally unwanted by any of the asylum seekers themselves.

In 2003 asylum seekers arrived; and the first campaigns were for two Kosovans whose presence preceded dispersal. Although they had hundreds of supporters, only one was allowed to remain in the UK, the other deported in 2005. Another option would have been for him to marry in the UK, but these days couples married in UK are regularly told they can go and live together in Algeria, in Iran, in Kosovo. Brides without Borders was formed to change the rules on this, and is having some successes on that score, but many couples have been separated and struggle, both in UK and The Netherlands, through heartless policies that defy logic (Brides without Borders). But back to Susan.

In 2003, asylum seekers started to arrive in Swansea in numbers, and their own priorities took over all the nicely laid plans that preceded them. Material needs had priority over campaigning: finding prams, TVs, getting kids into schools, dealing with inadequate housing, finding classes. What had been an ideological project became a matter of logistics and networks, of face to face work among people and practical advocacy, rather than a matter of defending the abstract rights and interests of asylum seekers. The main difficulties were lots of people facing rejections by the Home Office and a lack of legal expertise in South Wales to help with appeals. There were very few lawyers, and the government soon made immigration and asylum law so unprofitable that most firms withdrew. There was a crisis in provision.

But it took a Kurdish asylum seeker being murdered in Swansea City Centre in 2005, to bring a wider group of people into the SBASSG. (At the funeral, white customers of a nearby bar taunted mourners 'We didn't see anything' they said, laughing out loud. When challenged they said it was a free country, and they could say what they liked). Susan had long been active politically, and was aware that she would soon take part in pro-asylum advocacy work. She was not alone. Since 2003, many members of SBASSG have been picked up by the immigration authorities and the police, detained, some released again, some detained and some deported. Some have fought campaigns, and a few have won thanks to the help of a new organisation set up to provide legal aid, Asylum Justice. It was with Asylum Justice that Susan decided to volunteer, helping setting up a special group for women, with legal advice being provided. Asylum Justice was established by a retired Swansea barrister, with some dedicated volunteers. This small NGO now does more legal work across South Wales than all the legal firms combined. Its work is pro bono; it mobilises a great deal of goodwill, but its legal capacity is strictly limited.

Susan's contacts through Asylum Justice, its networks and volunteers changed her life, making a whole new social circle in which she became immersed. Life changed for her, and a lot of the time she finds herself utterly appalled at the juxtapositions of immense talents and erudition with destitution, serious illness and the prospects of deportation and a return to extreme danger. Somehow or other this work with asylum issues has taken over her life, her home, her goodwill, her imagination and her concerns. It is exhausting, she confesses, even for a tireless organiser like her. After being involved a couple of years later, Susan reflects on this experience, and on her decision to get involved. She reflects that she had been quite reluctant to become actively involved not because of a lack of concern, but because she was already very aware that the experience would completely take over her life, change her life around and take it over. It did. It does. Susan is just one of many who feel the impact of the discovery and outrage at how people are treated in the name of something as banal as border controls. For several years she estimated correctly that being involved would demand a great deal of her, and that she would not be able to work 'by halves' in this particular field of advocacy. She proved to

be correct in her assessment. ((Profiles of at least one individual in the Netherlands will also be included in this section, following further research)).

The kinds of people who tend to get involved in asylum advocacy in The Netherlands and the UK are similar; they are people with the ability to give themselves whole-heartedly, but also to gain a great deal from the experience in terms of feeling they are working on something that matters vitally *and should matter to anyone who has any sense*. This urgency and the generality of their concern makes it about more than working with and for the most vulnerable; it makes their involvement in advocacy overwhelming because of its perceived urgency; asylum rights are not seen as a marginal issue for society by most advocates, but as central, a sort of ‘mirror’ that can be held up to the society as a whole, to look at its norms, values and degree of humanity.

Not wanting to be ‘submerged’ by over-involvement is a common fear, and is quite reasonable given the scale of the problems in EU countries today. One’s whole life, and one’s networks will be changed and moulded to facilitate the kind of work that pro-asylum advocacy requires. Asylum seekers, refugees, officials who deal with them, organisations and NGOs who work with them, will become your main points of daily contact. Families may resent the work taking up so much of your time and energy. The car becomes a taxi, whoever it belongs to. Everything from having a coffee and just talking, caring for children, looking at legal documents and filling in forms to helping decorate a house, find furniture, protest to the police at inaction, find baby clothes, getting someone critically ill to medical attention, liaise with agencies like the Refugee Councils, the Red Cross, medical charities or lawyers and detention authorities. Advocates bring their skills to bear: their writing skills, connections in the art world, their film-making, their ability to teach English or to write poems; whatever it may be. In Swansea art auctions were organised and the paintings donated by artists in Wales. Several anthologies of writings with and by asylum seekers and refugees were published too. A man we shall call Simon, in SBASSG, has a commitment that spans several years. Like Susan his life has changed, and also been enriched by his privileged contacts with refugees and asylum seekers who have been dispersed to Swansea. His engagement is

reluctant rather than passionate, as his family resents the stresses and strains and the interruptions and commitments that his engagement requires of him, and have asked him to cut back his obligations to the group.

10. Full circle: back to the global picture

So are we any closer now to understanding why and how people become active in pro-asylum advocacy work? Compassion for other people in a similar, or different, situation is undoubtedly part of it. The desire to support others where one has, or has not, been supported, another. Many people involved have Christian or spiritual beliefs that help them keep positive, in their own words. The desire to do good work cannot be enough to keep people engaged, since pro-asylum advocacy involves a veritable labour of Hercules. The scale of the problem is such, there it needs to be acknowledged that relatively little can be done. Even so, this adds to the urgency of the advocacy work, rather than detracting from it, for those involved. They are simply, if you like, unable to ignore the problems, and some may even risk being swamped by feelings of guilt if they withdraw from pro-asylum advocacy work. They may not have wanted to become involved, but once they are, they can see that the grossness of the crimes being committed against illegals and failed asylum seekers require a continued tenacity, goodwill and sheer stubbornness if advocacy organisations and individual advocates are to be able to stand up at all to the tyranny of the security state and its private contractors. These are just some of the motivations and reasons we have become most aware of among people and organisations with whom we have worked.

A sense of outrage at the isolation of the asylum seekers and refugees; memories of the 1970s and the arrival of Chileans, and further back memories of the Second World War and the arrival of Poles and Jews seeking refuge can also be motivating factors for some. Linking the news in Iraq with Iraqis in our midst, the news about Afghanistan with Afghani people in our town, or the horrors of war in DRC, the sequels of genocide in Rwanda with disaster in the Great Lakes, and Congolese people seeking refugee status. For others, their involvement is through bearing witness to their faith, to supporting people 'like them' across the world, whether gay, seventh day Adventist, scholars,

communists or journalists. With the death penalty still applied in so many countries to homosexuals, with female circumcision, with Christians, Hindus and Muslims persecuted in hostile environments, with Roma treated as second-class citizens, with millions fleeing civil wars and having their families slaughtered, being raped, tortured and mistreated and placed on some list of suspected enemies, it is possible for almost everyone to find some point of common humanity, if they wish. It could be anyone, and one day it could be us, as a few far-sighted people realise. One grandmother in Swansea, protesting against vouchers being given to asylum seekers instead of money (a successful early campaign) asked: "And where will we go for asylum, if we treat other people like this?" She was in her eighties and remembered the upheavals of the War. Some activists get involved because they are artists, teachers of English, writers, poets, or just because they have active imaginations loaded with compassion. Among many, once engagement is taken on, there is a strong conviction that there is little else that could possibly be so worthwhile, and that if at all financially possible they will continue to devote as much of their time as possible to doing what they can to minimise the harm being done by officialdom and its allies.

The backbone of the pro-asylum advocacy networks explored here are human rights lawyers, old-time socialist internationalists, refugees and exiles, including intellectuals and professionals unable to find work in their former specialization. University lecturers and a few public officials, politicians and religious people are also represented. Some are spiritually inclined, others ideologically driven; many have first hand experience of how the system of border controls impinges on the lives of migrants and settled communities. Pro-asylum advocates and activists rarely distinguish migrants from refugees in principle, injustices against refugees may be seen as even worse abuse of human rights than limiting migration in general; and given the tide of possible advocacy, there tends to be specialization in one region or group of people, with similar language background or experience. Given the huge scale of the problems faced, it is common for smaller organizations in both the UK and The Netherlands, working with illegals and failed asylum seekers, to deal with issues in a particular locality or city, and to deal with groups of illegals and asylum seekers from particular countries or regions, given the need for

language specialisms and detailed background knowledge, as well as the creation of networks of expertise among lawyers, translators and doctors and other significant others.

All means possible continue to be used by advocacy organisations, including through the media, internet, the arts and politics, to put the message across that the draconian controls being put in place are harmful to almost everyone, the only exceptions being the private security companies that make profits, and the civil servants and Ministries that attain their performance targets. Cross-border camps and days of action are organized, internet sites maintained, visits made across borders, protests and occupations held at detention centers, deportations impeded through all means possible, asylum seekers supported in detention, given free legal advice and petitions signed and letters written. Legal test cases are funded, migrants' rights charters published (for example through Social Forums or MigrEurop or Human Rights First in the US), politicians are lobbied and questions asked in parliaments. There are also desperate actions of refused asylum seekers who face detention and deportation (Hintjens, 2006a). These include prolonged hunger strikes, self-harm such as sewing lips and eyes together, ransacking and burning detention centers, with often fatal results, and suicide. Anti-deportation activists organize against policies of deportation, arguing that people who fear returning home should be allowed to settle and have the right to stay.

No-border camps are regularly organized on the borders of Italy, Germany and Slovenia, among other places, demanding safe border crossing and creating symbolic control-free zones, if only for a short time. In Italy detention centers have even been physically dismantled following deaths of Albanian asylum seekers. Camps train activists in non-violent direct action, in legal rights and arrest, theatre and art, activist photography and film, and journalism skills among other things. The scarred bodies, traumatized rape victims abused again, families divided, communities torn apart when settled immigrants are detained and deported, all these are the daily reality that forms the content of on-line, internet and media campaigns against deportation and border controls.

An interesting innovation, from 2005, has been in Scotland where free movement campaign groups started to speak of ‘snatch squads’, ‘dawn raids’ and ‘disappearances’ of asylum seekers on Scottish soil. Through the Scottish Parliament, the UK Home Office was asked to end these practices. Scottish MPs were arrested on charges of unlawful protest. Activists are more and more willing to compare present controls and exclusions with other gross human rights violations, especially the totalitarian controls of apartheid and Nazi Germany. On a milder note, human rights lawyers remind governments of their international human rights obligations. As more restrictive quotas and deportation targets come into place, individual asylum seekers in particular are more hard pressed than ever to ‘prove’ that their claims are genuine. Among the organization to which they can turn for support are the Border Angels and AFSC in the US, and the No-one is Illegal network, the Noborder network (both with their own websites) in Europe. Intellectually, Nigel Harris and Theresa Hayter have made strong cases, from the liberal Left, for free movement as both just and beneficial (Harris, 2002; Hayter, 2004). Refugees International is one of the few campaigning organizations that seeks to end warfare that causes refugee movements in the first place. The European Social Forum in London in 2005 called for coordinated days of actions for migrants and free movement; the first was in April 2005. At the World Social Forum in Bamako in 2006, demands were made for reparations for the centuries of imperialist exploitation and continued neo-imperial exploitation, and imperial powers were blamed for the wars and poverty that cause emigration and flight today.

11. Up the rickety stairs

Never has the world been in such a mess. The state, like a frustrated housewife living her life amid the rubble and decay of a post-industrial or bombed out city, cleans her kitchen floor till it shines. Obsessively concerned with controlling and ‘keeping clean’ the physical terrain it occupies, the state is reduced to keeping people from coming in, detaining them if they manage to enter, then later getting rid of even the most vulnerable by shipping them out. Worldwide, security becomes big business, as it is tied in with the privatization of camps and premises, part and parcel of new modes of communication and surveillance. Expulsion of unwanted matter out of the body politic continues daily and

unabated. And it is against this backdrop that pro-asylum advocates use all the means and contacts at their disposal to try and get the message across that these policies are inhumane, unfair, unjust, illegal, contrary to the most 'cherished' values the EU is supposed to stand for. Citizenship, we need to be reminded, is never 'complete':

“Citizens’ freedoms...are planted and rooted in the socio-political soil and it need to be fertilized daily and will dry out and crumble if it is not attended to day in and day out by the informed actions of a knowledgeable and committed public” (Bauman, 2005: 126).

This is why the work of advocacy is relentless, is never done. To continue to do this work in the face of the steamroller of widespread indifference to the fate of the destitute and abandoned is vital. As Sereny reminds us here on our doorsteps, in the European Union, there is still much to do.

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