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Caught in the backwater of the world's existence, Australia struggles for relevance in various ways. It might show itself a leader in creating a sovereign fund (too late for that now); it might demonstrate, in various ways, a singular approach to solar energy (impossible, we are told, on that score). Lacking a decent number of terrorist attacks, it feels left out, stranded in a provincialism that ignores the decent, maiming bombing that might signal a boost in security funding. Lacking the millions of refugees Jordan and Turkey host, it feels cast aside, preferring to persecute the few that it has. Being a US satellite sometimes stings, if only to remind the policy makers here that a good education and service for Australia leads to a pledge to a foreign Queen and, yes, functionaries in Washington.

But there is always room to impress. Australia, land girt by sea, and terrified by what will approach via it. A fixation, one that should fill the psychiatric manuals, has captivated Australian politicians since it became unfashionable to avoid paperwork and get on a boat to head Down Under. In the late 1990s, the regulatory framework to punish and condemn those without documentation was established. The document became sovereign: lacking it landed you, not only in a spot of bother, but a spot of derision. The Migration Act scolded; the Australian immigration minister dispensed with. Australians like their queues; why did you, amidst falling bombs, murderous thugs and the odd exploitative pimp, show consideration and wait in line till we called you?

A certain literature – and to that, a good deal of ghastly celluloid – has been produced on the subject. All are, in essence, in violation of the United Nations Refugee Convention. No mention on the right to asylum is ever made; nor to the right not to be prejudiced against as an asylum seeker in terms of means of arrival. And that's merely the start. In gazing at these amateurish compilations of self-entitled guff, one is left with the conclusion that no one involved in this process has ever consulted a human rights manual, let alone familiarised themselves with the hideous post-Second World War period. There was a time when the term Displaced Person was not *entirely* revolting.

Such cinematic barrel scraping features warnings about arriving in Australia. It targets individuals at various stages of their travel. Farid Rasuli, as a 17-year-old refugee, managed to catch a video on YouTube, with production credits due to the Australian Border Force, a few years ago. Moving through Indonesia and hoping to conduct a search for videos in his language, Rasuli [found a dull](#), austere Australian major general popping up. It starts like this: "This video is produced in English by the Australian Government to ensure transparency of translated anti-people smuggling communication material being delivered to audiences offshore." Such breathtaking, granular authenticity!

The video proceeds in unequivocal manner. In bold type, it claims that, “You will be turned back.” The particular production, dull vintage 2016, insists that the arrangement with the United States to settle refugees that would, otherwise, find themselves in Australia’s holiday gulag, is a “one-off.” Potential arrivals are told that there will not be able to avail themselves of such an option, should they wish to leap on the off chance. What is not explained is that the US administration at the time offers no guarantees that such a measure would even work. (A certain President Donald Trump was going to get the wobbles on that one.)

In 2014, Angus Campbell, the commander of the unfortunately named Operation Sovereign Borders, Australia’s own secret mission of oppression, was co-opted in [making another video](#). It featured, in rather ugly fashion, the bold capitalised words “NO WAY” followed by the imperative shout, “You will not make Australia Home.” Above the message: an Australia with a line through it; a deleted, forbidden Australia. The duration of this ghastly pap is a mere minute. “The message is simple, if you come to Australia illegally by boat, there is no way you will ever make Australia home.”

The message is designed as a punch against both the smuggler and the cargo. “It is the policy and practice of the Australian government to intercept any vessel that is seeking to illegally enter Australia and safely remove it beyond our waters.” (The wording is important: whose safety are we really referring to?)

The Australian propaganda units have been busy – far busier than many of the citizens care to reflect upon. Money best reserved for Australia’s declining education system has found a home in other projects. In addition to film, the form of the [graphic novel](#) has been deployed. Going for 18-pages, one had a specific audience: Afghan asylum seekers. The message: should you dare make the journey to Australia, Nauru’s infamous hospitality awaits. The production positively reeks of persecution.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, the hardened advertising man of the government, has retreated into something he knows best: the shallow, bucket swilling call of the advert. This is interesting in a way: the same man condemned his opponents for doing something similar when they got on the anti-refugee video show. When Labor, then in government, introduced material to justify its “PNG solution” in July 2013, Morrison [claimed](#) that the party was “ramraiding the taxpayer’s ATM”. The then coalition opposition snortingly dismissed the effort by Labor as “propaganda”.

Shortened memories prevail. A [two-minute video](#) message is now ambling its way through 10 countries, though it will have to be translated, however accurately, on its crooked journey. “Make no mistake, if you attempt to come to Australia illegally by boat, you will not succeed.” Spare your pennies, insists Morrison. “So do not waste your money or risk your life, or anyone else’s life, for nothing.” Such is the awareness of a person who has never had to consider the throbbing, genuine feeling human rights conjures up in the breast of the oppressed.

Morrison is selling the measure as a necessity, a band aid to what the opposition parties have done to his cherished border protection policy. “Our government will be doing everything within our power – despite what the Labor Party have done to undermine our border protection regime – to ensure these boats don’t come.” Videos, and up at them.

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