Research Paper 11

The Refugee Crisis Facing Western Europe

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Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

B.R.C.	British Refugee Council
E.C.	European Community
E.C.R.E.	European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles
I.C.I.H.I.	International Commission on International Humanitarian Issues
I.O.M.	International Organization for Migration
J.C.W.I.	Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
O.A.U.	Organization of African Unity
U.N.	United Nations
U.N.H.C.R.	United Nations High Commission(er) for Refugees
W.U.S.	World University Service

Introduction

The growth of the world's refugee population during the 1980s has imposed immense strains upon Western European asylum policy. Rules designed for far smaller numbers of individuals from the 'less fortunate' countries of Eastern Europe cannot accommodate the proliferation of persecuted groups from Africa and Asia now arriving at reception centres. Immigration control is one of the most difficult and delicate issues for democratic governments to handle, even more so when those trying to enter present themselves as refugees. This complexity has yet to be recognized and in confronting the refugee question as an immigration issue, and in the process blurring the distinction between the two groups, governments ensure that the real losers are the 'genuine' refugees. It is evident that the approaches which have guided refugee policies in the past are inadequate for coping effectively with current and future refugee crises. There is a general consensus that new, and more comprehensive, preventative and solution-orientated refugee policies are critically needed as numbers of refugees and displaced persons continue to rise throughout the world.

Meanwhile despite the number of people uprooted this century, the subject of forced migration has been neglected by academics. Refugee research does not fit neatly into a distinct discipline or category within academia and as a consequence lacks standard texts, a theoretical structure, a systematic body of data or even a firm definition of the subject or the field (Stein and Tomasi, 1981; Loescher and Monahan, 1989; Widgren, 1989). Although geographers clearly have the capacity to augment current research into the analysis of forced movements, they have typically devoted very little energy and effort to refugee issues. Black (1991) maintains that existing work on the geography of forced migration is fragmented, incomplete and, to a great extent, superficial, so that within geography much research remains to be done before what could be described as a coherent body of literature exists. There are also dangers inherent in subsuming refugee studies within a wider category of 'migration studies', given the particular socioeconomic and political circumstances of involuntary migrants. Baker meanwhile denounces even that research which does exist; he suggests not only that it has been sporadic and non-cumulative, but that it has tended to reflect 'the interests of the researchers rather than the refugees themselves or those who aim to assist them' (1984, 19). Such criticisms may be overly harsh given that much of the current literature has come from voluntary agencies directly concerned with the problems of refugee groups (see for example Crisp and Nettleton, 1984; D'Souza and Crisp, 1985; Joly and Nettleton, 1990). However in fairness to Baker it should be noted that these are tailored to specific practical (or political) requirements. In this context what is needed is greater independent research, based on sound methodological and theoretical principles. It is of fundamental importance that researchers address causes and do not simply describe symptoms and that refugee research is approached from a general and comparative perspective which sees certain consistencies and patterns in the refugee experience (Stein, 1981; Kunz, 1983; Harrell-Bond, 1988; Richmond, 1988). Despite the diversity of countries from which refugees come to Western Europe seeking asylum and the variety of

factors by which they are driven, such movements must be seen not as individual historical occurrences, but as recurring phenomena.

The shortage of material in English on the position of refugees in European countries other than Britain is reflected in the paper's content; although Western Europe forms the broad area for analysis specific focus will be placed on the case of Britain, where the right to seek asylum is currently under threat. It would be tragic enough if a 'raising of the drawbridge' of this nature were confined to this country, but Britain is only in the vanguard as Fortress Europe closes its doors to the Third World's refugees. Meanwhile within Britain three main populations - the Vietnamese, Chileans and Ugandan Asians - have been the subject of existing analysis. Whilst these research biases are to a certain extent justifiable given that these groups together constitute a large proportion of those who have been admitted, other smaller refugee populations have been neglected. As a consequence this paper will be concerned primarily with individual asylum seekers and those groups which have not formed part of governmental 'quota' programmes. It is clear that these spontaneous refugee movements are posing complex challenges to governments. But it is also evident that it is the failure to develop appropriate policies in the area of immigration - rather than massive abuse - that is threatening the asylum system.

The Refugee Crisis in Historical Perspective

That there is a refugee crisis in Western Europe and across the world cannot be denied. Such global trends are disturbing but whilst their nature has changed their existence is nothing new. Too often media images and ministerial statements present the movement of refugees into EC countries as something novel and threatening when in reality Western Europe has both created and received refugees for centuries. Although its significance has waxed and waned rarely has human migration in general been insignificant to understanding society and politics in Europe or, for that matter, in the rest of the world. In the first half of this century in particular Europe was the focus of international refugee problems; the rise of fascist movements during the 1930s and the Second World War itself displaced millions of people whilst many more fled from the countries of Eastern and Central Europe in the immediate post-war period (Crisp and Nettleton, 1984). It was in the context of these involuntary migratory flows within Europe that the major international institution dealing with asylum seekers, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was established against a background of humanitarian law which was already initiated in the 1920s by the League of Nations. It would be misleading however to suggest that in establishing a legal and organizational framework for dealing with the problem of refugees the powers of Western Europe were guided only by humanitarian concerns; economic and, most significantly, ideological motives were perhaps foremost in the minds of governments (ICIHI, 1988).

Geopolitical and ideological considerations have always been crucial in determining the treatment of refugees. In the context of post-war Western Europe refugees were welcomed not

only in order to facilitate growth associated with the economic boom of reconstruction but because movements from the East demonstrated dissatisfaction with, and fear of, their nation's political and economic system; in this context Loescher (1988) suggests that the West used refugees as symbols of foreign policy. Meanwhile because the late 1950s and the 1960s were a period of economic expansion, Western Europe not only managed to absorb asylum-seekers from the East and expatriates from the colonies, but also actively recruited millions of manual workers under its 'guest-worker system'. There was at this time little demand for asylum or resettlement in Western Europe from Third World refugees. More recently however the pattern of refugee movements has changed.

As independent states emerged from colonial rule during the 1960s and 70s, Britain and the rest of Western Europe has witnessed the development of a new phenomenon; the arrival of asylum-seekers from the Third World driven out of their countries by international and local crisis and conflict and facilitated by an unprecedented degree of international mobility as a result of the technological revolution in transport and communications. People who are confronted with intolerable conditions in the 'South' are moving towards the more prosperous and secure states of the 'North' in increasing numbers so that 'the refugee problem, previously regarded as a factor in east-west relations, now has] a north-south dimension to it' (ICIHI, 1988, 33). Since 1983 approximately 70 per cent of asylum applications have come from the underdeveloped countries (Baldwin-Edwards, 1991), and by 1985 the number of asylum-seekers exceeded the number of legally admitted foreign workers for the first time, thus marking the beginning of a major new phase in the post-war history of European migration.

Until recently, most refugee emergencies in the Third World were contained regionally. Although this remains the predominant pattern, today's 'jet' refugees are able to leave their region and apply for political asylum in Western Europe (Martin, 1985; Kliot, 1987). As Martin (1985) points out the old system took for granted certain barriers to movement that kept the numbers of direct asylum-seekers from outside Europe tolerably low and thereby shielded the West from having to confront fundamental tensions surrounding the right of refuge. In the 1970s the largest groups of refugees from these areas entered Britain under the auspices of special government settlement programmes - as 'quota refugees'. However those who arrive in the country as individuals or with their families, and who make an application for asylum either at the port of entry or once they are in the country, have become increasingly prominent. The principal applicants for asylum in the United Kingdom are listed in Table 1.

The arrival of these non-Europeans has severely shaken existing refugee law and practice and such refugees have not received the same welcome as their earlier European counterparts, partly as a result of international economic recession but more significantly, because of foreign policy and international relations implications. Furthermore the 'new refugees' often come from cultures which are different from that of their host country. This has been a distinctive and significant development in Western Europe resulting in special adaptation difficulties (WUS,

1977; Keely, 1981; Gallagher, 1989), and it is significant that whilst imposing visas elsewhere, the EC has recently decided to waive them for East European countries (see the Independent on Sunday, 18.08.91). It is no coincidence that the crack down on asylum seekers from the Third World comes at a time when a new source of cheap labour for the advanced economies of Western Europe has become available; in January 1991 Germany to called on its EC partners to help it absorb immigrants from the former Soviet bloc, and to make room for them, if necessary, by cutting back on Third World 'immigrants'. As Webber notes, since the only 'immigrants' from these countries allowed into most European countries are, in fact, refugees, 'the message was to get even tougher on asylum-seekers' (1991b, 85). Meanwhile the countries of Western Europe face a dilemma; whilst they are keen to play down the extent of the refugee problem, fearing that if they acknowledge its scale they will be expected to respond in accordance with international law, government led tales of 'flooding' and 'swamping' continue in an attempt to build public hostility towards the refugees themselves.

Table 1 Where the refugees are coming from: asylum applications to Britain, Jan-July 1991

Latin America	78
Zaire	4277
Angola	3281
Ghana	1825
Somalia	1825
Ethiopia	1201
Uganda	1164
Togo	815
Sudan	397
Other African	1523
Sri Lanka	2261
Pakistan	2075
India	1248
China	53
Other Far Eastern	430
Turkey	1465
Lebanon	600
Iraq	570
Iran	324
Other Middle Eastern	116
Romania	319
Bulgaria	271
USSR	115
Poland	10
Yugoslavia	10

Source : Home Office Statistics cited in The Guardian, 02.02.91, p.6

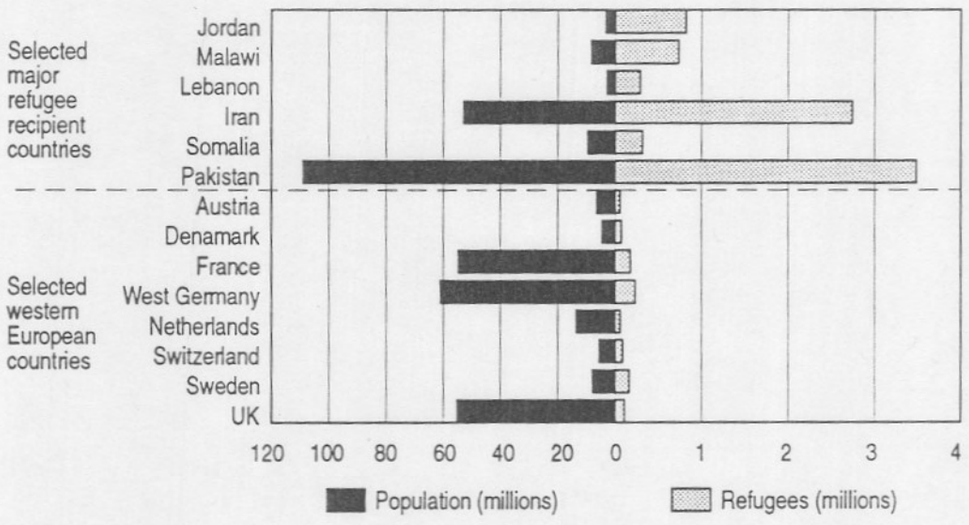
Whilst it is in the nature of refugee movements to rise and fall, the editors of a recent issue of the International Migration Review (1992) have suggested that one is hard pressed to recall a period in which international migration figured so prominently in European history as since 1989. This is not least due to an inflow of asylum seekers-which have overwhelmed the capacity of Western European states to process and adjudicate claims. In addition to the 'new refugees' arriving from the countries of the Third World, Europe is, for the first time in half a century, generating substantial numbers of its own refugees and potential refugees as a result of civil wars, the dissolution of states and ethnic and religious tension. The international system is complex and multifaceted; as Boer suggests, 'we have moved from a stable world characterized by tense relations to one where there is less tension but, strangely enough, less stability too' (1992, 668). This global instability is reflected in the extent of the refugee crisis facing the countries of Western Europe.

The Extent of the Refugee Crisis

As previously indicated, involuntary migrations of people have always occurred. What is unique about the present time however is the scale of such movements and the fact that 'there is nothing to suggest that this trend will be reversed in the immediate future, particularly in the developing countries' (ICIHI, 1986, 9). In the 1980s regional conflicts and upheavals, exacerbated by superpower rivalry and intervention, created vast refugee movements in South-east Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa and Central America. According to Hocke (1986) the world today is faced with a refugee problem the dimensions of which, whether viewed in terms of numbers, causes or geography, have never been experienced before, and the consequences of which, if left unchecked, will be profound. Refugees worldwide currently total over 15 million, and there are millions more 'internally displaced people' who are not included in international definitions. Shawcross (1986) maintains that in many senses they are a 'Fourth World', far less able to speak for themselves than the Third World from which most originate and where the vast majority remain.

Certainly numbers can be seen to matter; a single refugee (or more, so long as they are viewed from the safety of the living room) is seen as a heroic figure. A thousand however are a problem, a million a threat. No-one disputes that the number of asylum-seekers has risen dramatically, but regarding the actual figures there is considerable disagreement because most dispossessed people are not easily categorized (Shaw, 1991). Within Western Europe however a number of trends are nevertheless discernible. In particular the number of applications for asylum in EC countries has risen (Table 2) and between 1983 and 1989 the annual number of persons seeking refuge more than trebled. However such trends must be seen in their global context; the number of people arriving in Europe in 1985 amounted to less than two per cent of the refugee population worldwide (Shawcross, 1986), and whilst Britain, for example, is currently home to 150,000 refugees, there are 650,000 in the Sudan and nearly 1 million in Pakistan (Refugee Forum, n/d). One of the major misconceptions that needs to be dispelled is

Figure 1 Refugees in relation to population



Source: Joly and Nettleton 1990 p.11

that most refugees are in the West. They are not; over 90 per cent of the world's refugees remain in the Third World, and the largest concentrations of refugees in relation to population are to be found in the poorest countries (Figure 1). The vast majority of refugees move within their own countries, the next-largest share move across national boundaries within the less-developed countries, and a relatively small percentage cross boundaries to developed countries.

Table 2 Applications for asylum in European Community Countries[1]

	1980	1988	1989	1990[2]
Belgium	2700	5100	8100	12950
Denmark	50	4650	4600	5300
Federal Republic of Germany	107800	103100	121300	193050
France	13700	31600	58750	56050
Greece	1800	8400	3000	4400
Italy	2450	1300	3350	4750
Netherlands	3200	7500	13900	17600
Portugal	n.a.	350	150	100
Spain	n.a.	3300	2850	6850
United Kingdom	2350	5250	16300	30000

[1] Information is not available for the Republic of Ireland and Luxembourg
[2] Some of the 1990 figures are provisional estimates
n.a = not available
Source : Fiddick 1991 p.4

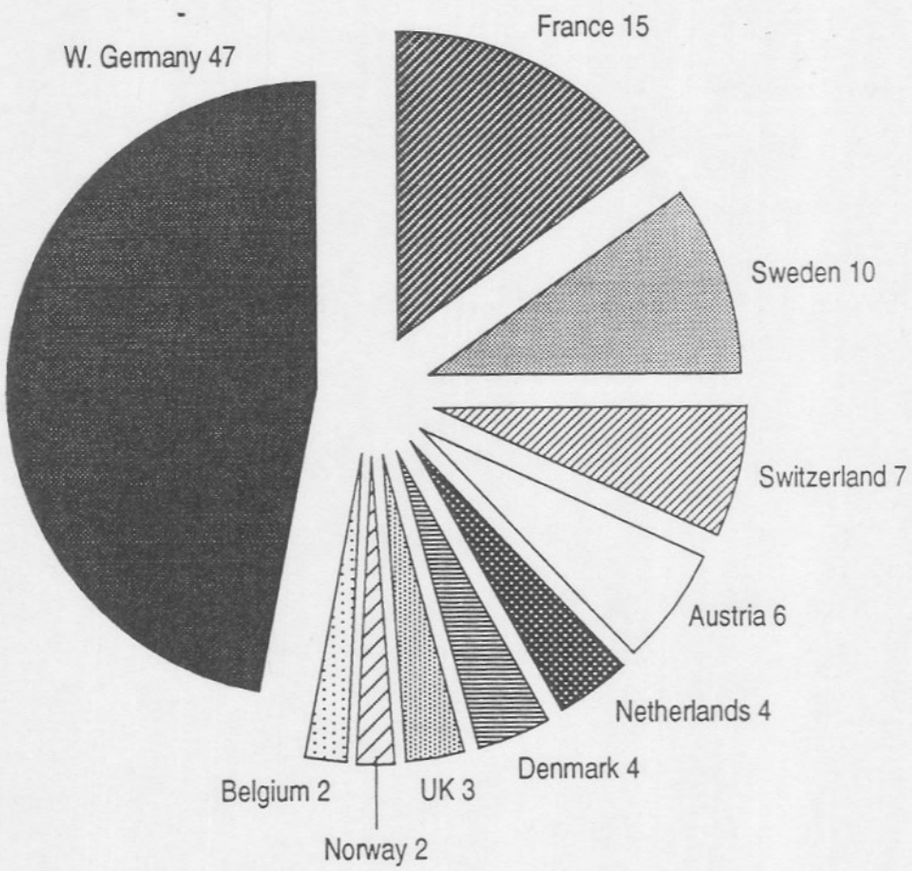
Whilst the problem of refugees within Western Europe must not, and cannot, be ignored, the current wave of hysteria which is being seen is not justified numerically. Europe, and Britain in particular, is not on the verge of being 'swamped' with foreigners in the manner governments and some sectors of the media would have us believe; on the contrary Western Europe, standing at the edge of the world refugee crisis, has only felt the last ripples of the large refugee flows of the Third World. As Loescher (1989, 618) points out, 'less than 2 per cent of the world's refugees today appear as asylum seekers in Europe annually. The number of asylum seekers arriving in Britain since 1986 represents 0.02 per cent of the British population'.

Table 3 Asylum seekers as percentage of total population

Britain	0.02
Denmark	0.48
France	0.16
Sweden	0.78
Switzerland	0.56
West Germany	0.43

Source: Castella, 1988 p.188

Figure 2 Asylum seekers in Europe 1984 - 1988 (%)



Source: Joly and Nettleton 1990 p.11

The conclusion must be that the governments of Western Europe are using refugees as scapegoats, drawing attention to their role as competitors in employment and housing markets in the face of persistent economic recession.

Meanwhile within Europe asylum-seekers are unevenly distributed with Britain providing refuge for only 3 per cent of the European total (Joly and Nettleton,1990). Figure 2 illustrates the countries in which the 789,500 applications for asylum were made between 1984 and 1988 and suggests that the notion of a Europe-wide 'refugee crisis' is highly misleading, especially given that the number of applications for asylum in France fell in 1992 from 50,000 to 27,000 and in Britain even more sharply from 44,700 to 9,600 (Financial Times, 15.04.93). The real crisis, if there is one, is above all in Germany where nearly 440,000 asylum-seekers arrived in 1992 and numbers are still rising; in January 1993 alone 36,300 would-be refugees arrived, an increase of 14.7 per cent on the previous month (Guardian, 06.02.93). However perhaps the most significant general trend is towards an increase in the number of rejections of applications for refugee status and a corresponding increase in the use of humanitarian status, so that as the number of applicants has grown the proportion granted asylum has fallen. In 1980 asylum was granted to 65 per cent of applicants across the EC whilst in 1990 the figure stood at 10 per cent (Baldwin-Edwards, 1991). Meanwhile among European states rates of rejection vary by over 50 per cent depending on the country concerned; in 1985 for example Denmark recognized 72 per cent of applicants, France 31 per cent and Britain just 17 per cent (Joly and Nettleton, 1992).

As Martin suggests, 'the dilemmas of the 1980s should be seen as an urgent invitation to rethink the fundamentals of refugee protection, but few are listening to that invitation in the midst of the noisy political battles that are now taking place' (1985, 2). A highly dangerous fallacy persists, that most refugees are simply looking for a better wage packet, a better house and brighter prospects for their children. Whilst this is undoubtedly an important element - all refugees are seeking to escape from situations in which their lives are in danger and by definition seek refuge in a place where that is not the case - the vast majority of these people want eventually to be able to return home, and even if restrictions were completely lifted the entire population of the developing countries would not move North. Attempts by the governments of the countries of Western Europe to present refugees as opportunists are not only inaccurate, they represent a retreat from the spirit, although not the written word, of international law, and confirm that fundamental flaws in the international definition of a 'refugee' are open to manipulation by the countries of the European Community.

The Definition of the 'Refugee' in International Law

The problem of definition remains significant in the context of the refugee crisis; attitudes towards the new influx of asylum-seekers might be more positive if it was possible to distinguish them more clearly from other migrant groups. As it is the complexity of the issue of definition has spawned a variety of terms which are frequently used interchangeably; 'de facto

refugees', 'political or economic immigrants', 'externally displaced persons', 'convention' or 'extra-convention' refugees, or 'mandate refugees' among others (see Grahl-Madsen, 1983 for further details). The confusion which is apparent from such terminology derives in part at least from the inadequacy of international law itself and in particular from the early frameworks which were established at a time when the refugee problem seemed manageable. It is increasingly being argued that, faced with a ten fold increase in the number of claims for political asylum, the countries of Western Europe can no longer afford to abide by international refugee laws. However what is perhaps most significant is that not only are these deceptively vague they were, as Platt points out, 'written at a time when the word 'refugee' conjured a white face' (1991, 5).

In international law the position of refugees is governed primarily by the United Nations Convention on Refugees of 1951 held at Geneva which was extended beyond Europe in a subsequent UN Protocol (1967). The body of the law is very limited in its scope - it relates to the treatment of refugees once they have fled their country of origin and does not deal with the root causes, the situations that create refugees. Furthermore there exists a Catch-22 situation; an asylum seeker cannot benefit from the rights outlined in the Refugee Convention until he or she has been admitted to the country of asylum and has been recognized as a refugee, yet cannot enter until refugee status is recognized. The Convention itself defines a refugee as a person who

> 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country (of origin)' (UN, 1951, cited by the Refugee Forum, n/d).

Refugees are human-rights victims and the principle of non-refoulement provided by Article 33 of the Convention asserts that no state can expel or return someone who conforms with the UN definition. However although refugees have the right to seek asylum, there is no corresponding obligation on the part of states to grant it; it is the sole prerogative of the recipient state to recognize refugees and grant them asylum on their territory. Despite the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention and the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, there is no international instrument that enables a right to asylum to be invoked against European States (Weh, 1986). The Geneva Convention did not 'invent' the institution of asylum, it presupposed it.

No absolute definition or international law on refugees is provided nor, some might argue, is it possible. Rather taken together, the conventions and resolutions represent an internationally accepted ethic of human rights which has emerged in response to changing circumstances (Joly and Nettleton, 1992). International law under the present circumstances seeks only to define the minimum that should be offered to refugees, and what has been described as the 'international refugee regime' (Loescher and Monahan, 1989), which was created by the leading Western

powers in response to what was essentially a European problem, is acceptable only in so far as the system serves, or does not run counter to, their particular interests or needs. Although the vast majority of the asylum-seekers arriving in Western Europe and the rest of the developed world have left because conditions within their own country have become intolerably dangerous and insecure, many are unable to meet the United Nations definition. The central clause incorporates both objective and subjective criteria and both 'persecution' and 'fear' are difficult if not impossible to define precisely (Joly and Nettleton, 1990). As a consequence the interpretation of the criteria depends on the approach of government officials, so that evaluations and decisions which are crucial to the well-being of individuals may vary both temporally and spatially. 'Economic' factors, such as famine or natural disaster may drive people by necessity to seek a better standard of living outside their own countries, but unless their poverty and distress are accompanied by fear of personal persecution, they will not be refugees and are likely to be classed as 'economic migrants' or even as 'economic refugees', a term which is actually a misnomer.

The idea that many asylum-seekers are in fact economic migrants in disguise has been greatly exaggerated. Joly and Nettleton (1990) point out that in contrast many of the immigrants of the 1960s and 1970s were in fact refugees 'in disguise'. If economic gain were the primary motive refugees would come from the poorest countries of the world when in reality they do not; according to the report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Affairs (1984) the largest numbers of new applicants in Europe in recent years have come from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Ghana and Uganda. The report also cites a recent study which has estimated that the number of 'manifestly unfounded' asylum applications amounts to no more than 15 - 20 per cent of the total. In the process of preventing what really are a very small number of unfounded claims for refugee status there is a real danger that the security and liberty of many genuine asylum-seekers is being jeopardized, and while there are many people in a refugee-like situation, only a proportion of them are accurately described as refugees in terms of international law (Crisp and Nettleton, 1984). Such deficiencies in the universal definition provided by the UN Convention and Protocol have been exploited by Western Europe. In particular, the interaction of different causes in generating involuntary migration may make a distinction between 'political' and 'economic' migrants meaningless (Keely, 1981; Black, 1991). There never was an era of the 'pure' refugee, and we need to remind ourselves of the vicious circle in which poverty and hopelessness breed social disorder, disorder breeds repression, and repression breeds persecution, violence and forced movements of people.

Legal definitions and international conventions have evolved to include and exclude varying groups and individuals on different criteria according to the character of a particular period. Given both the size and the complexity of the world refugee problem, it is, as the Hocke (1989) suggests, time that the international community took a fresh look at the legal instruments available and identified a political means to address the problem more effectively. Members of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) have extended their definition to include any

individual who 'owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order...is compelled to leave his habitual place of residence' (OAU, 1969 cited in Crisp and Nettleton, 1984, 5). Strategic international motives prevent the European Community from adopting this extended definition.

The Dynamics of Displacement

Both governments and international organisations assume legal responsibility on the basis of a definition of the term 'refugee'. Yet how one defines a refugee implicitly includes an understanding of the determinants of international migration generally and of the ways in which refugees are distinct from other migrants. As the character of international refugee movements change the existing definition of a refugee becomes untenable (Keely, 1981). Clearly there is, as Black (1991) suggests, a need for some kind of definition of refugees, if only to ensure that international cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparison is possible. However it is also important that such a definition should not be so rigid that it implies either a false level of similarity within the category of 'refugees', or excludes those in 'refugee-like' circumstances as a legitimate object of analysis. It is vital that the dynamics of displacement are understood both from a theoretical perspective and through an understanding of the forces which cause people to seek asylum in the countries of Western Europe, yet in doing this it is also important to recognize that whilst differences in the motives and origins of asylum seekers undoubtedly exist, the refugee crisis cannot be resolved at the individual level (Crisp and Nettleton, 1984). We need therefore to look beyond the unique in refugee situations and in the process formulate useful, general theories to explain the dynamics of displacement and the characteristics of refugee flows which differentiate them from others.

Despite the fact that there is at present more potential for, than concrete examples of, work on the underlying causes of refugee flows, there have been attempts to document and analyse the causes of modern refugee movements. This work is most useful where it highlights the complex interactions between different forms and processes which generate both the decision to move and the form of migration. Migration has frequently been described as the outcome of interacting forces of 'push' and 'pull' between the place of origin and the place of destination. Although the listing of various 'push' or 'pull' factors has been largely superseded in contemporary migration studies, at the risk of oversimplification it should be noted that whilst voluntary migrations are shaped mainly by the latter, involuntary or forced moves of the type seen in refugee flows, are strongly influenced by repulsive 'push' factors (Kliot, 1987) According to Gurtov (1991), refugees are groups of people who flee under compulsion; whatever the actual causal factor directly responsible for the move, all cases are marked by a form of violence which creates a major insecurity. This emphasis on the role of violence merging refugees into a coherent group distinguishing them from other migrants is found elsewhere (see for example Zolberg, 1986). In many circumstances however the involuntary characteristic of the refugees departure is not easy to identify; complications arise for example

in situations where the same circumstances give rise to both refugees and economic migrants. As Black (1991) points out, economic depression does indeed cause economic migration but it can also create unrest resulting in repression and refugee movements.

It is apparent that the world of the forced migrant is too complex to reduce to cost-benefit type calculations, but a recognition of the push which is involved nevertheless remains vital to an international definition of the asylum-seeker given that the situation of refugees and immigrants are covered by different national and international legislation and conventions. Refugees are essentially distinct from other immigrants in that they are here by force of circumstance and not choice. As Kunz argues effectively, 'it is the reluctance to uproot oneself, and the absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere, which characterizes all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrant' (1973, 130). Thus the refugee can be viewed as a distinct social type. Whilst recognizing that there are two types of movement - that of 'anticipatory' refugees who foresee the crisis and 'emergency' or 'reactive' refugees who are the victims of it - the key to Kunz's kinetic model of the refugee in flight (1973), is the idea of the push. The inner self-propelling force of most other migrant flows is singularly absent from the movement of refugees.

It is evident that attention needs to be given to a reformulation of the concept of 'refugee' to take into account a variety of crisis and disaster generating situations which warrant international collaboration. However perhaps most fundamentally it is also evident that the 'refugee crisis' is a symptom of much more profound conflicts and contradictions within the global system which indicate that refugee policies can no longer be dealt with in isolation but must form part of a wider international effort incorporating developmental and political initiatives. As Black (1991) suggests, by looking at the relationship between these political, economic and environmental factors in forced migration, geographers have distinctive skills and interests to contribute to the wider debate.

Root Causes and European Responsibility

The countries of Western Europe have, at the very least, a humanitarian obligation towards the world's refugees and the harsh measures which are being passed by most Western governments to stem the flow of asylum seekers have alarmed both human rights advocates and refugee scholars, who warn that they are excessive and signal a move away from humanitarian standards (see for example the reports by Amnesty International, 1991 and 1992). Meanwhile the exact role of the UNHCR in particular is complex and at times ambiguous. Originally mandated to protect and assist refugees and to find 'permanent solutions' for them, the Commission is increasingly aware of the need to address the root causes of the crisis; international agencies have traditionally refrained from examining the causes of refugee flows and from dealing directly with the countries of origin because of their strict non-political status. However if refugees are involved in promoting political objections, then by implication so are those who assist them (Barber, 1984).

Despite recent attempts to redefine its relationship with both governments and refugees themselves, the UNHCR is further restricted by the limitations of financial dependency. Like the voluntary agencies which work alongside it, the UNHCR simply lacks the financial independence and institutional strength to challenge it's largest benefactors (Loescher and Monahan, 1989). All of the Commission's assistance budget is met from voluntary contributions, primarily from UN members and regional groupings including the European Community. It would be naive to believe that donor governments do not expect certain advantages on the basis of their contribution and do not try to exert influence to reflect their specific government policies (IHICI, 1986). Thus the limitations which have been imposed on the UNHCR and similar organizations reflect ideological, as opposed to purely humanitarian considerations whilst Europe's obligations to respond positively to the new asylum seekers are far greater than it would have us believe.

Analysis of the causes of refugee migration represents a growing area of interest for both geographers and other social scientists, and in the search for the underlying causes of refugee migrations geographers have tended to focus on the spatial element to power and the control of territory (Black, 1991). The specific reasons for refugee flight and the processes which govern their recognition are frequently complex. Refugees are created by many factors, but above all, by serious and gross violations of civil, political economic, social and cultural rights (Joly and Nettleton, 1992). Yet whilst explanations of refugee migration must clearly be multi-causal, simply listing the different 'causes' is not sufficient for an understanding of how these flows are generated. As geographers we must avoid a temptation to slip back into a static typological exercise, in which refugees are distinguished from other migrant groups on the basis of identifying a single 'cause' of their migration (Black, 1991). Furthermore not only is the involuntary characteristic of the refugee departure frequently difficult to identify, many of those who flee as a consequence of such conditions cannot, in legal terms, be conferred refugee status because they are not the victims of individual persecution as required by the UN Convention. Victims of generalized violence constitute a major category of those excluded from the international definition of a refugee; probably the largest number of refugees and displaced people are the victims of civil war and governmental counter-insurgency operations.

Mass displacements also result from armed conflicts which take place across state boundaries. However in identifying the causes of such refugee flows, most Western governments emphasise the internal weaknesses of states rather than the involvement of external powers (Zolberg, 1986; Loescher and Monahan, 1989). Whilst we should beware of misdirecting our efforts to focus exclusively on specific factors such as the legacy of colonial boundaries in Africa, contemporary refugee flows to the countries of Western Europe are frequently a response to the inherited conditions of newly independent states; the chaos of de-colonization and nation-building have been major sources of instability in both Asia and, more especially, Africa (Kliot, 1987; Loescher and Monahan, 1989).

Meanwhile refugee crises of recent years have frequently taken place where local conflicts have been drawn into the broader superpower struggle for global influence; fights for geopolitical and strategic interests can be seen in the context of the Horn of Africa, Indo-China, Central Asia, Southern Africa and Central America. In Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Uganda, Western administrations have armed, trained and supported rebels against governments, whilst in countless other countries they have supported (sometimes installed) authoritarian governments to protect 'vital interests' (Sivanadan, 1988; Webber, 1991b). The control of arms forcing the peaceful solution of human conflicts cannot be divorced from the issue of forced migration, and according to Black (1991) there is a need for analysis of the hegemonic role that superpowers play in situations which generate large numbers of refugees. Most recently the Middle East became the focus for attention of the industrialized nations. The numbers displaced as a result of the Gulf War were not small; since the beginning of 1992 the IOM alone has assisted in the movement of a total of 18,526 persons in the Gulf Region, the majority of whom have been Iraqi Kurds (IOM, 1992). The repercussions of the Gulf War might be have been expected to place increased refugee pressures on the European Community but the countries of Western Europe took measures to ensure that they were not directly affected. It was only massive public outrage and incredulity which forced Western leaders to agree, belatedly, that they had a moral obligation to help the refugees which their war with Iraq had created. However it is also evident that one of the unspoken concerns motivating European governments when they set up 'safe havens' for the Kurdish refugees in Northern Iraq, was the avoidance of an influx of asylum- seekers (North, 1991).

The limitations of the current international regime are not least the result of the failure to reach an adequate understanding of the international political roots of many refugee flows, and in this context geographers can contribute significantly to the understanding of refugee migration by focussing on deeper geopolitical issues. Hocke maintains that the refugee problem concerns not only individuals in their relations with states, but also states in their relations with one another; 'as long as the emphasis is put on the former, the refugee problem is bound to remain on the periphery of international relations' (1989, 41). Meanwhile according to a report by ICIHI, 'mass displacements reflect profound structural problems within the international system. They are becoming the norm rather than a deviation from it' (ICIHI, 1986, 17). It is no longer possible to treat refugee movements as completely independent of the state of the global economy and the nature of the global economic system has been of crucial importance in creating the refugee flows from developing countries witnessed today in Western Europe; refugee flows reflect a fundamental characteristic of the contemporary world, namely its transformation into an interconnected whole in which national states have been internationalized. Despite nominal equality among states at the level of international law and talk of an 'international community', 'the global network that came into being is founded on enormous asymmetries of power and wealth' (Zolberg, 1986, 157). We are told increasingly that the root cause of the exodus to Europe are economic, yet the struggle for control over

scarce economic resources and strategic positioning is ultimately waged at the political level. Meanwhile the relationship between poverty and war cannot easily be dismissed; four fifths of applicants for asylum to Britain come from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian subcontinent; in 1991 these regions experienced twelve wars and civil conflicts which displaced thirty million people.

To establish a basis for genuinely remedial policies, we must achieve a better understanding of the reasons for the existence of refugees and that involves both Europe and other countries of the West facing up to their responsibilities. The refugee crisis is neither a temporary or unsystematic phenomenon, rather it exhibits global patterns which need to be recognized by governments and researchers alike. The refugee generating crises which have occurred, and continue to occur, in the Middle East, in Africa, Central America and Asia are not unrelated to the ideological and military confrontation of the superpowers, the competing interests of multinational companies and the problems of development facing the countries of the Third World. Since refugees are a global problem, the search for lasting solutions must also be global and these can only be found by tackling root causes. According to Joly and Nettleton (1992) it is essential to work for economically and ecologically sustainable development, allied to civil and political rights, and to achieve economic, social and cultural rights, particularly minority rights; in this context development assistance and trade should be clearly linked to the active promotion and observance of human rights. Meanwhile however it is also of fundamental importance to recognize that there are some situations so extreme that, at least in the short term, outside pressure will provide no amelioration. Under these circumstances European governments must act with all urgency to protect those refugees arriving in the countries of Western Europe. Ultimately therefore the asylum controversy is not just about the commitment of governments to the protection of human rights. It is also a test of whether the countries of Western Europe are prepared to face up to the problems of economic inequality across the world and the consequences of their own geopolitical and strategic interventions. At present the member states of the European Community are failing that test miserably.

Attitudes and Policies Towards the New Asylum Seekers

Western Europe has not merely been enriched by refugees and asylum-seekers it does, according to the ICIHI (1986) owe its modern development to them; the process of economic development has been accelerated and consolidated by the arrival of people from other parts of the world and cultural exchanges have long formed the mainspring of human progress (Shaw, 1991; WUS, 1992). Refugees bring with them not just a bundle of belongings but a lifetime's accumulation of skills and knowledge. With the right initial help they can make an extremely positive contribution to the country of asylum, but they are increasingly viewed as a threat. Despite the tradition of offering asylum, the countries of Western Europe have reacted to the recent influx of refugees and asylum-seekers with restrictive, if not repressive, policies. The

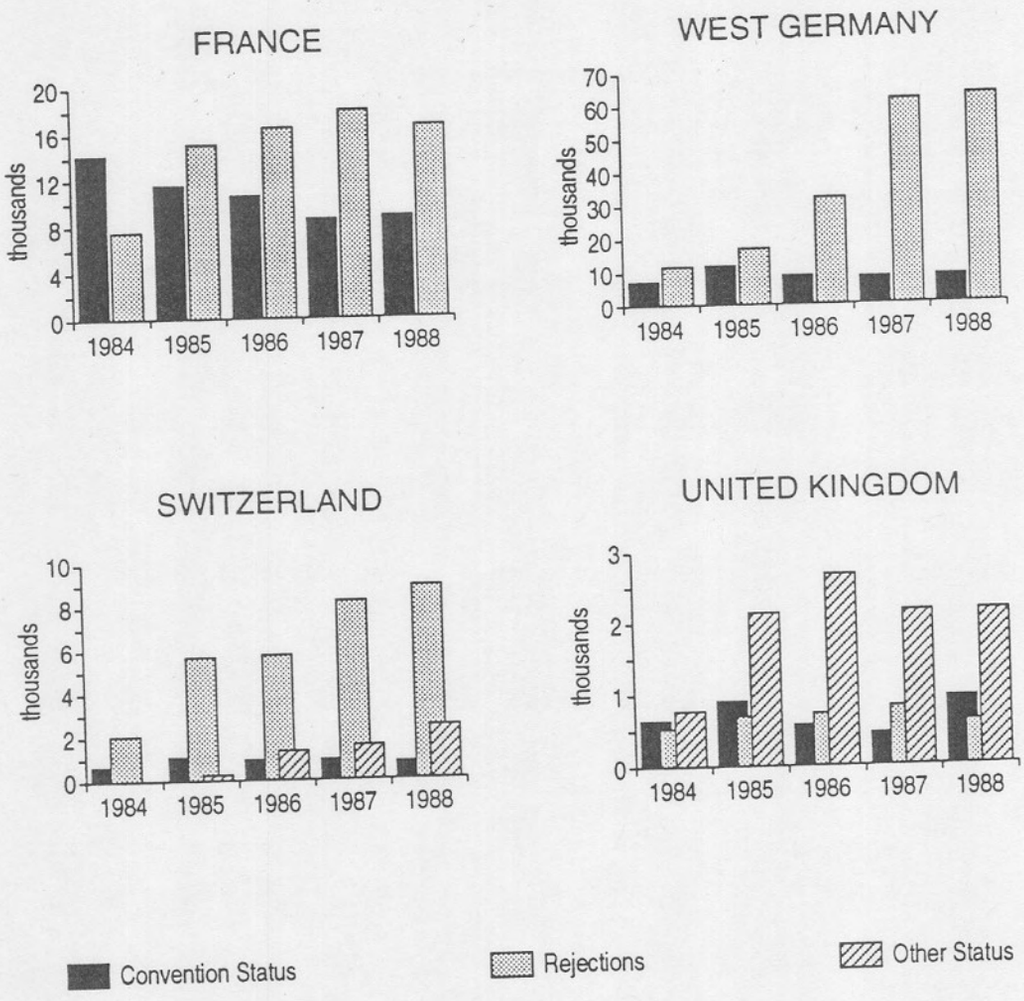
result has been a wide range of dissuasive or deterrent measures aimed at preventing the access of refugees - most specifically from the countries of the Third World - which are based not only on a misrepresentation of the nature and scale of the problem and which therefore form an excessive response to the situation, but which are also a diversion from the real issues posed by the global refugee crisis. Such measures also signify a retreat from human rights norms relating to asylum, and in particular a narrowing of the interpretation of the 1951 Geneva Convention.

In Europe as a whole, the percentage of asylum-seekers granted asylum has declined from about 65 per cent in 1980 to around 10 per cent in 1990 (Baldwin-Edwards, 1991; Webber, 1991a). Figure 3 illustrates increases both in the number of persons awarded a standing inferior to Convention Status and in outright rejections. West Germany, which was one of the first European States to crackdown on refugees, now accepts only 3 per cent of those who apply and even Sweden, renown for its generous refugee policy, has recently launched a far more restrictive approach (see Grahl-Madsen, 1983; Hammar, 1991a and 1991b). The late 1980s have also seen the growth of the RIO (refugees-in-orbit) phenomenon - refugees being shuttled from one European airport to the next and back again, as states argue about whose responsibility they are. International laws contain no agreement on shared responsibilities or basic legal and social treatment of refugees, and a growing number of asylum-seekers are sent back to countries outside Europe where their protection cannot be guaranteed, a trend which violates the Convention principle of non-refoulement (British Refugee Council, 1987). Under international law a government has the absolute right to block its borders against refugees, and rather than seeking solutions Western Europe has pulled up the drawbridge on spontaneous refugees from the Third World to such an extent that some fear that it is building a fortress around itself which will exclude non-Europeans (Swift, 1991; Vanovitch, 1991).

The formulation of refugee policy involves a complex interplay of domestic and international factors at the policy making level, and illustrates the conflict between international humanitarian norms and the sometimes narrow self-interest calculations of sovereign nation states. The countries of Western Europe are adopting contradictory standards; they expect and assume that some of the world's poorest countries will maintain an 'open door' policy towards millions from neighbouring states but are increasingly reluctant to grant asylum to those who genuinely are in need of protection. Refugees have become, internationally, the unwelcome guests, perceived as an economic burden to their hosts and as competing with the indigenous population for scarce resources. In the context of the 'new refugees' from the developing world, the fear also is that their presence may exacerbate or create racial, ethnic and religious conflict (Stein and Tomasi, 1981; Gallagher, 1989).

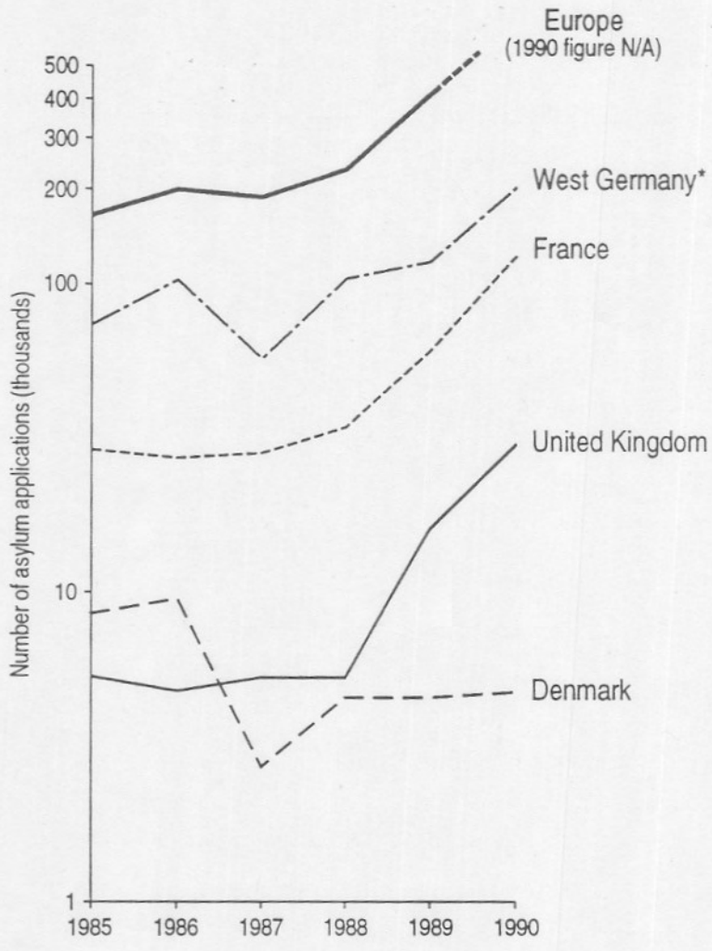
Immigration and asylum policy should, in theory, be quite distinct; the former is an economic and social issue, the latter a humanitarian one. The distinction between voluntary migrants and refugees is a necessary one especially given that the majority of migrants follow asylum

Figure 3 Decisions on asylum applications 1984-1988



Source: Joly and Nettleton 1990 p.12

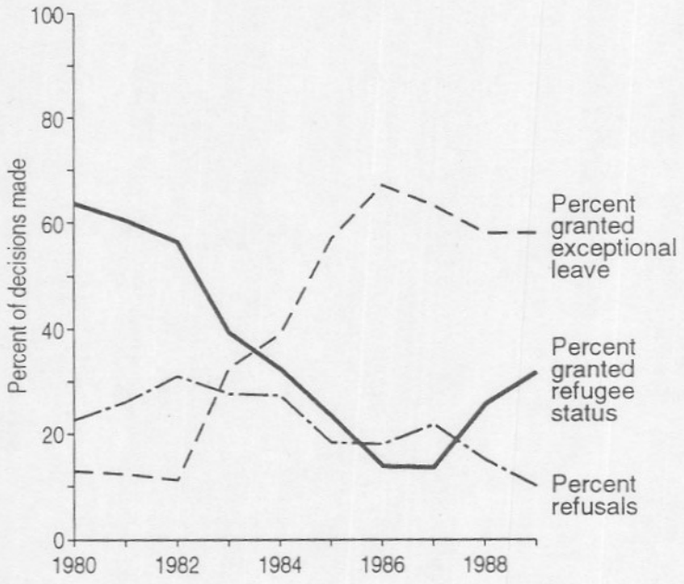
Figure 4 Asylum applications in Europe, 1985 - 1990



Note: all 1990 figures are provisional estimates
* figures compiled before unification

Source: North 1991 p.17

Figure 5 Decisions on asylum applications in Britain, 1980 - 1989



Source: North 1991 p.16

procedures; the right of asylum belongs to genuine refugees and should not be undermined through its use as a cover for voluntary migration. It must be a basic principle that manifestly ill-founded cases are distinguished from the more serious ones as quickly as possible, without any damage being done to the cause of genuine refugees. In practise however two sets of policies have become inseparably intertwined, because a liberal or humane asylum policy is bound to be seen as a loophole in a restrictive immigration policy. Many Western politicians have found capitalizing on anti-foreigner sentiment a profitable occupation; all seem to suggest that refugees are indistinguishable from immigrants and that, if admitted, they will settle in their new countries permanently. In this context it is significant that the distinction between a refugee and an economic migrant remains to a large extent in the hands of the governments of countries of asylum which are able to discriminate, for ideological reasons or otherwise, so that whilst the granting of asylum is in theory a humanitarian act, in practice the willingness of governments to accept refugees is frequently coloured by political, economic and even racial considerations (D'Souza and Crisp, 1985; Loescher and Monahan, 1989; Loescher, 1989; Joly and Nettleton, 1990). Refugee groups are not treated equally within the refugee regime and their social, civil and economic rights differ considerably from country to country. The world's richest nations are guilty of returning many to possible torture and death every year and in this context there are political advantages that come from a successful scheme of barriers and deterrents which prevent refugees from arriving in the countries of Western Europe in the first place; if fewer asylum seekers arrive, then government officials are far less likely to be caught in the political controversy surrounding repatriation, forcible or otherwise (Martin, 1985).

No-one can deny that the increase in numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Britain has been steep (see Figure 4), although refugee support groups have suggested that the Home Office is inflating figures by counting applicants who are already here as well as new arrivals. Meanwhile the British government has been a more than willing partner in the effort to close Europe's doors to refugees (Figure 5). In 1980, 64 per cent of asylum seekers were granted full refugee status; in 1989 by contrast only 32 per cent were recognized with nearly 60 per cent being granted 'exceptional leave to remain' - a second class refugee status which carries no rights to security or family reunion and which was originally designed to cover a 'small number of cases' (Home Office Memorandum, 1984 cited in Fiddick, 1991, 30). This trend coincided with the introduction in the 1980s of various measures designed to restrict the entry of asylum seekers. Visa regimes were implemented in Britain in 1985, largely in response to Tamils arriving from Sri Lanka. In spite of absolutely clear and incontrovertible evidence of brutal oppression and of atrocities committed against the minority Tamil communities, the Home Office refuses to recognize refugees fleeing from this violence (Refugee Forum, n/d; The Times, 04.03.87; Burgess, 1991; Shaw, 1991). Also implemented in response to these non-government programme refugees, the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act of 1987, which was extended in 1991, imposes fines on airlines and shipping companies who bring people into this country without the necessary documentation. These sanctions against transporters, combined

with the general use of visas imposed on citizens of non-European countries, are indiscriminate. Airline staff are not immigration officials and injustices abound suggesting, in effect, that the fate of asylum-seekers is often being decided outside any formal and fair procedure (The Times, 06.04.87; Fiddick, 1991).

The conclusion of the Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons that 'Britain's general record on asylum is satisfactory' has been challenged by the Refugee Forum which maintains that the government, 'continually mistreats, abuses and criminalizes refugees and asylum-seekers' (n/d, 7). This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the recently proposed Asylum Bill. Although the introduction of special legislation on refugees is normally a welcome indication that a government has come to realise the importance of incorporating the substance of its international agreements into domestic law, this is not the case; the Asylum Bill will give the government the power to get rid of applicants on a 'fast-track' procedure, to send people back unless they claim asylum in the first country they reach, to refuse legal aid, to fingerprint people who are not suspected of crime, to penalise refugees if anyone mounts a campaign on their behalf and to discriminate against students who criticise the very government from whom they are seeking refuge. Under the proposed legislation applications can be deemed 'manifestly unfounded' if there is an abuse of asylum procedures as, for example, in the deliberate destruction of passports, tickets and other documents. Yet it has generally been accepted until now that refugees should not be penalized for the subterfuge necessary to make their escape; deception is often necessary to flee persecution, as evidence from the Second World War testifies.

Not surprisingly the proposed Asylum Bill has met with intense criticism, from the UNHCR (1991), Amnesty International (1991b, 1992) and the Refugee Council (1992). In the view of these organizations the Asylum Bill, as it currently stands, will not result in a fair and effective refugee-determination process. The government cannot fully meet its international obligations while adopting measures that have the effect, if not the aim, of restricting the opportunities of those genuinely fleeing persecution to seek protection in Britain. Through measures that insist that refugees should apply for asylum in the first safe country they reach, Britain is shamelessly using its geographical location to reduce the number of refugees to a minimum, and throughout the West similar legislation has ensured that impoverished Eastern Europe has become the buffer zone for Europe's unwanted.

In Britain and in other countries of Western Europe there has been a racially overt and openly-declared policy to deter and detain refugees; as Goodwin-Gill (1986) points out such measures, as in the case of British visas, often apply to specific groups identifiable by reference to race or national origin, and as such in breach of the principle of non-discrimination. Wide discrepancies in the way visitors to Britain have been treated have long been reported by groups assisting immigrants; of those applying for visas in order to visit relatives here one in four Bangladeshis is refused admission, one in 67 Jamaicans and one in every 2,000 white

North Americans. Furthermore government proposals have been accused by the Commission for Racial Equality of conflicting directly with the 1976 Race Relations Act (The Times, 03.02.91). It is evident that the cultural clash which has resulted in part from the arrival of refugees and asylum-seekers has assumed racial overtones despite the image of Britain as a 'tolerant country'; in the context of the Asylum Bill, 'for refugees read black/brown people. The issue is race' (Pilger, 1991, 10). The government knows that immigration is a minefield and has been careful to insist that its refugee policy is colourblind. The reality however is that the proposed Bill is racist even by implication since most of the applicants come from Africa and Asia. Although it has been put temporarily on hold its content is indicative of wider trends throughout Western Europe in which the country of origin and the 'race' or 'colour' of refugees plays a significant role in their treatment. Harsh measures are being planned to keep Third World refugees in particular out of the EC; a leaked draft of European Community ministers' immigration proposals declared that in future 'intercontinental' refugees will generally be ineligible for asylum (The Independent 22.10.92)

Meanwhile economic recession in the countries of Western Europe has been inextricably linked to the rise of racism. Deepening economic crisis provides fertile ground for the exploitation of sentiments of insecurity by governments and the media alike; as Bell (1985) suggests, every system in crisis looks for the enemy within and xenophobia, the hatred, or more exactly the fear, of the foreigner is spreading across Europe. Many Western politicians, together with much of its press, combine occasional displays of sympathy for refugees with a much more consistent willingness to evoke racist sentiments for electoral advantage, by exaggerating abuse of the asylum process and portraying asylum-seekers as part of the 'threat' of alien immigration. Boer (1992) suggests that there is a self-reinforcing cycle at work in which politicians and opinion formers help create an anxiety about the 'flood' of refugees seeking entry to Western Europe; this helps increase hostility towards refugees and immigrants. When that spills over into outright violence, the politicians and opinion-formers of course condemn it. But in speaking of 'understanding' the causes of the violence, and in linking it to the refugee / immigrant influx (whether real, threatened, exaggerated or imagined) they add to the anxiety and hence to the hostility and violence.

In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, a qualitative change has taken place concerning the general perception of asylum-seekers and refugees. In particular there has been a notable growth of fascism and racism which in the European context can be related to a more generalized re-emergence of nationalism and authoritarianism. Throughout Western Europe there has been the development of radical 'new right' ideologies which encompass a 'new racism', the most dangerous characteristic of which is a widespread appeal to 'commonsense' thinking (Allen and Macey, 1990). In Britain the incidence of racially motivated attacks is extremely high and growing at an alarming rate and the situation in the rest of Western Europe does not differ significantly. The role of the popular press has been to create a popular conception of actual and potential incomers threatening to 'swamp' EC states destroying

culture, language and national character - a conception which Joly and Nettleton suggest 'has assumed a fantasy life of its own out of all proportion with the reality (1992, 117). As a result the backlash from governments as been matched and, in some cases, superseded by that of the public; in several European countries refugees and asylum-seekers have been the victims of violent physical attack.

The whole of Western Europe is currently engaged in the latest version of the immigrant numbers game, in which the primary equation states: the fewer refugees, the fewer racists (or fascists). But numbers alone do not determine the depth of racist opinion. This is not to say that any country can cope with an unrestricted flow of refugees across it's borders. But once it is established that numbers alone are not the central cause of Europe's racist resurgence, that the political climate in which refugee problems are dealt matters far more, and that politicians and opinion-formers bear a primary responsibility for what that climate is, then a different, more humane response to the refugee crisis becomes conceivable. Racist attacks in the countries of Western Europe cannot be denied but they should be seen in the context of racist immigration and refugee policies on the part of the European States.

Responses to a European Refugee Crisis: the case of Yugoslavia

Both the scale and the ferocity of the Yugoslavian civil war have been unprecedented in post-World War Two Europe. The conflict and its ramifications - especially in the ethnically mixed areas of Bosnia-Hercegovina, where the intricately mixed population of Muslims, Serbs and Croats has led to bitter inter-communal fighting - have resulted in hundreds of thousands of people being displaced (Joly and Nettleton, 1992). It appears that dramatic long term population movements are taking place. Nearly one million Bosnian Muslims and Croats have fled the fighting in the former Yugoslavia; half are in Croatia, the rest scattered throughout Europe with the largest group, some 250,000 in Germany, followed by Sweden with about 80,000, Austria with 7[illegible]1,000 and Hungary with 40,000 (The Independent 08.03.93). The future remains problematic in the short term and almost certainly for much longer.

'Ethnic cleansing' is the euphemism given to the practise of kicking out minority populations which has been indulged in by all sides in the conflict and which is the primary reason that over 2 million are homeless. But whilst ethnic cleansing is the cause of the refugee crisis European ministers have had scant success in dealing with its effects. We cannot know yet how many of the refugees will have to be absorbed as immigrants and how many will be able to return home when the fighting stops, as most of them desire. At the present time the international community has rejected all talk of resettlement for Bosnians and opted instead to treat the problem in the region with food and medical care. This was done both out of fear of playing into the hands of the Serbs and more importantly, and as was similarly seen with Kurdish 'safe havens', in order to stem the number of people fleeing to its doorstep. Although never overtly stated in relation to Bosnia, many countries are keen to avoid a heavy influx of job-seeking refugees, particularly during recession. To argue, as government ministers have, that they

should be kept near their homes in order to facilitate their return is bogus. Nor is it fair to claim that resettling them condones ethnic cleansing. If European states cannot bring themselves to take actions to prevent ethnic cleansing then the least they can do is help the victims, not punish them further.

Whilst the financial costs of the Yugoslav civil war are likely to run into billions, the human costs of the refugee tragedy are incalculable. Most of those fleeing are women, children and old people, frightened to go home and afraid to move too far from their families. It is intolerable that this is allowed to persist in Europe and it is not enough to wring our hands and say how awful and incomprehensible it all is. So far however, the international community has demonstrated pitifully little solidarity in the face of this suffering. The Western response to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia has been fragmented, ineffective and dominated by raison d'etat rather than consideration of international responsibilities; the countries of Western Europe have been loathe to open up their borders, and slow in coming up with funds to assist in the crisis.

The international community has changed the rules of asylum to such an extent that Bosnians rarely qualify as refugees. This flies in the face of the 1951 Convention that supposedly guarantees the right of asylum to anyone facing persecution in their home countries because of race or religious or political beliefs. Bosnian Muslims certainly seem to fit these descriptions but are not being universally afforded the rights and protection as refugees. The question of whether the applicant has a well-founded fear of persecution is surely less of an obstacle in this particular conflict than in others; the claims of ethnic cleansing, the existence of detention camps where torture takes place and the fact that these actions are based on nationality, ethnicity or religion all go towards satisfying the 1951 definition. If displaced Bosnians are not refugees, then who are? Who could describe as 'manifestly unfounded' the claims to refugee status of tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslims whose relatives have been slaughtered or whose homes have been burnt or shelled? If proof were needed then one need only consult the graphic coverage of the crisis by Western European media. It is evident that the refugees fleeing the former Yugoslavia are 'genuine'; that is to say they are not economic migrants. They have a well-founded fear of persecution and have nowhere else to go.

Meanwhile reluctance to award refugee status to Bosnians has led the UNHCR to urge countries to grant the displaced rights on a temporary basis; even that plea has fallen largely on deaf ears. The EC is under a special moral obligation to Bosnian refugees because of its hand-wringing failure to save them from war. Some member states have fulfilled their obligation much better than Britain, which seems capable of civilized behaviour only when under public scrutiny. Britain's record for accepting refugees from the former Yugoslavia compares poorly with other European states, and voluntary and government funded refugee agencies say they despair over what they feel is Britain's foot dragging over letting refugees enter the country. Over 6,400 citizens of former Yugoslav republics have applied for asylum in Britain but not one person has been granted permanent refugee status (The Times 09.03.93). Four thousand

Bosnian refugees and dependents have been allowed temporary entry in Britain; when compared to the five figure numbers which Austria, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland have accepted, this leaves Britain near to the bottom of the humanity league. The stock response of ministers to the Balkan refugee crisis - 'We can't take everyone' - is as irrelevant as it is icehearted.

Against a background of at least three million displaced people in the former Yugoslavia - and Bosnian estimates of over 150,000 dead and missing - recent British draft proposals regarding refugees have explored ways of keeping borders sealed against 'manifestly unfounded' asylum applications, as well as the 'best practice' on expulsions. The attitude of the British government to the plight of Bosnian refugees is erroneous and reflects a narrow, bureaucratic mentality that is wholly inappropriate to the appalling disaster engulfing the former Yugoslavia. It has also exposed the pretence that its asylum policies are designed to stop economic migrants coming to Britain; Yugoslav policy demonstrates that the government is no longer concerned with distinguishing between the genuine and the bogus. The visa system in particular affects everyone especially given that Bosnians cannot apply for a visa in Bosnia where there are no British embassies or consulates (The Independent 18.11.92)

The Bosnian tragedy is just one of a series in Western Europe. That is why it is so important for EC ministers to raise their eyes from technical matters to the larger issues. Of these the most important and most difficult is that of burden-sharing. It is plainly unjust that one member state, Germany, should be taking in by far the heaviest share, estimated to be 80 per cent, of Bosnian refugees. It is also dangerous since the influx from Bosnia feeds the xenophobia fuelling the current racist outrages. It has been suggested that Britain should try to help Germany with its refugees rather than constantly criticising (The Guardian 09.03.93). After all the rush of refugees into Germany from the Balkans is not Germany's problem alone but Europe's. When Europe is faced with a genuine refugee crisis - such as that arising from the collapse of Yugoslavia - it needs to adopt a common approach, each member state accepting a proportionate responsibility for a situation that confronts us all, and Britain should have used its EC presidency to put forward an action plan to deal with the Bosnian refugee crisis and its likely successors. Burden-sharing in its widest sense should be part of such a scheme and in 1992 the executive committee of the UNHCR proposed that states which, because of their geographical situation or otherwise, are faced with large-scale influx, should receive immediate assistance from other states in accordance with the principle of equitable burden-sharing (The Independent 29.07.92).

The attitudes of Western European countries to the Bosnian refugee crisis derive from the false premise that the aim of government policy should be to let in as few as opposed to as many of the victims as possible. However given the nature of the refugee crisis which has resulted from civil war in the former Yugoslavia, any Bosnian arriving in Western Europe should be able to make a claim for refugee status and should not be returned. The reality of the situation is

however very different; when it comes to offers of refuge, the only sound across Western Europe is of frontiers slamming shut and many fear that European harmonization policies will serve only to render these barriers unsurmountable.

The Implications of European Harmonization

As the global political picture changes, refugees are rapidly becoming a common feature of the social landscape of numerous countries worldwide, and they are almost certain to become increasingly significant as the 1990s unfold. Few subjects are more intensively discussed between European governments than immigration, asylum and refugees, and migration and immigration issues illustrate better than most subjects the challenge facing the European Community both in terms of doctrine and in practise (Callori, 1992). As Callori (1992) suggests, the removal of restrictions on freedom of movement of persons in 1993, occasional misuse of the right of asylum, and the increasingly interdependent economies of the Community have caused immigration as move up the agenda.

During the 1990s, a period of rapid economic and political integration within an expanded European Community is expected alongside increasing refugee flows from the Third World to the countries of Western Europe. The elimination of internal frontiers between the EC member states and free movement across national borders within the region is central to the realization of a 'single market' within the community, and harmonization of asylum policy in Western Europe has been the subject of some considerable concern (see for example Amnesty International, 1991a; 1991b; 1991c). Closing the borders to non-Europeans while increasing the pace of European integration has led to a stricter and more limited interpretation of the 1951 Convention precisely at the time when refugee needs have become greatest. As Loescher points out, 'it has not, so far, been widely appreciated that the formation of a single market will also require the strengthening of the community's external border controls - which will inevitably have major implications for refugee and asylum policy in the region' (1989, 617). Over the last decade the restrictions and barriers to the entry of asylum-seekers have tightened in all Western European states and in almost every European country there have been consistent attempts to discredit and deprive refugees of their dignity in the eyes of the majority population (Joly and Nettleton, 1992)

It seems likely therefore that plans to open borders will most likely mean the hauling up of the drawbridge on Third World refugees, and it is increasingly evident that most Western governments 'seem to be doing their best to extinguish the lamp of asylum' (Shaw, 1991, 7). According to Sivanandan, 'we are moving from an ethnocentric to a Eurocentric racism - and 1992 won't help...the problem for an open Europe...is how to close it - against immigrants and refugees from the Third World' (Sivanandan, 1988, 8). As has been suggested, there is already considerable evidence of a growing consensus in the EC in terms of restrictive immigration policies operating on a racist basis, whereby non-Europeans are virtually viewed as intruders. It may well be that freedom for (white) EC nationals will be won at the expense of Third Country

nationals who will face threats to their right of entry, free movement within the community and access to jobs, benefits and general security of life (Allen and Macey, 1990). Allen and Macey (1990) have also highlighted the dangers of racist immigration policy for those already legally resident within Western Europe; there already exist sizeable minorities within the EC whose origins lie in the Southern periphery of Europe and in the Third World. Formally these people will enjoy all the rights of free movement as befits their citizenship. But in a climate which associates being black in particular with being an immigrant (and potentially an illegal one) it is difficult not to foresee an increase in racial harassment and control, not only at Europe's external borders but also internally as well.

Many of the details of the harmonization process have been carried out in secrecy and implemented in an underhand manner and as a result the exact nature of the new policies is unclear. Furthermore because so much of the new legislation is technically complex, it is difficult to assess the full impact it will have on asylum-seekers (Joly and Nettleton, 1992). Nevertheless, when interior ministers of the EC meet to discuss immigration, several negative assumptions can be made. Firstly, the ministers will be preoccupied not with helping those driven from their homelands but with keeping them out of member states; they will take a narrowly EC view of the problems discussed, ignoring the needs of other affected countries in both Western and Eastern Europe. And secondly, they will not include representatives of agencies that might defend international law and stand up for the rights of asylum-seekers; much of the discussion has taken place behind closed doors without the consultation of such agencies as the UNHCR or ECRE. It seems likely that in future the rejection of an asylum claim in one EC state will constitute a rejection in all others so that whilst the borders may be opened inside, the outer ring will be reinforced (Patterson, 1991). Deterrent measures often have the unintended effect of simply diverting the flow of spontaneous asylum seekers else; it is this fear that has led governments to argue that refugees are obliged to remain within the country that first provides asylum until resettled or repatriated. The UNHCR fears that this will mean that asylum-seekers are shipped back to countries with inadequate asylum procedures and without the consent of the countries concerned. Meanwhile plans of the Schegen group, which includes France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands to hold data on individuals but with no proper data protection laws could have obvious openings for abuse and implications for the safety of asylum seekers (Jenkins, 1991). In this context the UNHCR fears that new European Community rules for immigration may lead to asylum-seekers being deprived of their rights under international law. In particular it is concerned that new accelerated procedures for sorting out manifestly unfounded claims will lead to refugees being repatriated when they have genuine claims.

Debate also surrounds the issue of whether the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees is adequate or should be revised or complemented by other European agreements. Refugee support groups maintain that the Geneva definition can accommodate all refugees if it is liberally interpreted and fear that, given present trends, European states would take

advantage of any opportunity to introduce measures which would be even more restrictive (Joly and Nettleton, 1992). There are good grounds for these fears especially given the potential of refugee movements from within Europe itself. There is no reason why, recognizing that refugees are the victims of generalized as well as personal violence, the UN definition cannot, at the very least, be extended along the lines of the OAU; such an inclusion would ensure that countries of intended asylum are less able to award refugee status simply on the basis of the political allegiance of the country from which they came, or their need or otherwise for additional labour power. Meanwhile near-total restrictions would not only be ungenerous, they would also be unwise; Western Europe itself is undergoing significant demographic changes. The population of Europe is aging and decreasing overall and several authors have pointed out the implications of such developments (see Castella, 1988; Widgren, 1989; Joly and Nettleton, 1990). Already the value of labour contributed by asylum-seekers to the Swiss economy is almost equal to the earnings of the watch and jewel industry, and it is evident that such people easily cover the expenses they impose on the country, in spite of working at the minimum wage level (Leinthardt, 1991). As Joly and Nettleton (1992) suggest, it is ironic that at a time when officials from European ministries of the interior are regularly meeting to explore ways of restricting access of refugees into Europe, other officials from ministries of employment and labour are investigating ways of overcoming a forthcoming anticipated shortage of labour by the end of the century by increasing the numbers of migrant workers in Europe.

In this context increasing concern about flows of refugees must not be allowed to reduce the attention that is paid to resettlement and integration. The scope for geographical work on the situation of refugees in richer countries of the world is far greater than the narrow question of the distribution of refugees, and it is important to analyse the experiences of refugee groups, and their structural position in host societies alongside those of other immigrants. In practise there have been few studies by geographers that focus on interactions between the refugees and their host populations, or on the outcomes of xenophobia and racism on the one hand, and social interaction, the intermixing of cultures and the potential contribution of refugees to their host economies and societies on the other (Black, 1991). Black also suggests that it is important to analyse the experiences of refugee groups, and their structural position in host societies, alongside those of other immigrants, especially given that, refugee communities, in spite of their unique difficulties, 'are likely to face the same problems of racism and discrimination as other migrant groups, and may fulfil similar roles in terms of the space economy of the host nation, for example within fragmented labour markets' (1991, 293).

It would be foolish to suggest that the industrialized states should adopt an 'open door' policy to refugees and asylum-seekers; as the ICIHI (1986) points out such a policy would render the important humanitarian concept of refugee status totally meaningless. However there is an absolute need for all European states to ratify international legal standards concerning asylum-seekers. Meanwhile given that vast discrepancies in law, procedure and traditions have resulted

in alarming inconsistencies in refugee policies and practice throughout Europe, a common refugee and immigration policy has to be developed. Conditions for entry to EC territory must be uniform, or at least co-ordinated between the member states but European harmonization must not be used as an excuse for further restrictions on refugees and asylum-seekers; the European Commission has warned against measures following the principle of the lowest common denominator, and asylum-seekers must not be routinely dismissed as 'immigrants in disguise'. Migration from the Third World is not a national problem, but a European one and the response must be co-ordinated and consistent, not its opposite as at present. In the context of a failure to create and structure any meaningful system of burden-sharing among receiving states it could perhaps be suggested that a more generous Western European attitude and an agreement to share the burden more equitably within the EC is not merely a matter of humanitarian ethics; it is a requirement of enlightened self-interest. In the case of refugees from Bosnia and Serbia, the first country of asylum will most often be Albania, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia or Slovenia, all of which are far less equipped to cope with the influx than any EC state; an overload on these country's resources will contribute to a breakdown of law and order and so to even larger flows of refugees westwards.

The problem we are dealing with is one of the utmost urgency. As yet however, the only common policies derive from a European consensus on the need to limit external immigration. The key problem areas have yet to be addressed: the determination of genuine refugees, the development of fair and effective determination procedures, the response to the causes of refugee movements and a recognition of the link between the refugee problem and development issues, and the development of a long-term Western European policy that addresses human rights issues. The limitations of the current international refugee 'regime' include the failure of Western policy-makers to look much beyond restrictionist measures to prevent the arrival of unwanted refugees and asylum-seekers and a failure to reach an adequate understanding of the international political roots of many refugee flows or to translate rhetoric on the need to address root causes into substantive policy measures and proposals. The European Community is in a unique position to provide solutions yet it appears to be moving, instead, towards restrictionist policies which would be tragic in their indifference to the growing global refugee crisis. What is needed is a policy which responds both to the concerns of governments and the needs of refugees; simply building new barriers around Europe will not make the refugee problem go away (Loescher, 1989).

The regulation of migration in 1993 is still at a crossroads with multiple possible outcomes. We have a choice: a retreat into the laager of 'Fortress Europe', in which restrictions on freedom of movement and civil liberties, and a growing xenophobia and intolerance are the prices to be paid for keeping out asylum-seekers. Or a more internationalist future in which attention to aid and fair trade as well as the preservation of peace abroad are seen not as policies to be pursued when harmony and prosperity are already in place at home, but as an essential means of achieving those objectives (New Statesman and Society 04.12.92). Meanwhile there is more

involved in facing the realities of the refugee crisis than playing with words in a definition. For the asylum-seekers themselves, the 'refugee crisis' is not just a matter of intellectual or even humanitarian interest - it is a question of survival. Attempts to deal with the 'crisis' must take place on two levels; both at the micro-level with immediate assistance to those seeking refuge, and at the macro-level, involving systematic changes that over time will create greater equality between and within nations. In this context geographers have much to offer the field of refugee studies; regional, social, political, cultural and population geographers (amongst others) all deal with themes and concepts that readily lend themselves to the geographic dimension of refugee (Black, 1991).

It is evident that the refugee problem cannot be resolved at an individual level alone and policy proposals by refugee organizations have pointed the way towards action on a broad scale, affecting whole communities, nations and the international state system itself. (see Crisp and Nettleton, 1984; British Refugee Council, 1987; Joly and Nettleton, 1990). Those states which systematically and consistently deprive their citizens of fundamental human rights must be condemned and singled out for economic and political non-cooperation by the international community (Gurtov, 1991). Meanwhile with conflicts changing shape but continuing in intensity in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Central America as well as the Balkans, and growing insecurity in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it is clear that the presence of large numbers of refugees in the world is a phenomenon that the world's academics, as well as its politicians, must come to terms with. What are required are long-term strategies which not only alleviate the problem in the interim but deal with its root causes. And that involves the countries of Western Europe facing up to their international responsibilities as well as their humanitarian obligations.

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