

BOOK REVIEWS

THE LONG JOURNEY: VIETNAMESE MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Nancy Viviani

Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria

Cut off from Europe by the billions of Asia, Australia has for generations favored a 'White Australia' immigration policy — bolstered by the belief, the conviction, that without such a policy the pressures of Asian immigrants could result in a demographic invasion which would convert Australia into just one more Asian country.

This policy remained intact until after World War II, when changes in the composition of the Australian elite — industrial and commercial, educational and political — led to the rise of an internal lobby favoring the 'emancipation' of the Australian aborigines — now largely of mixed blood — and the lowering of barriers against colored immigration. Despite the title of her book, author Nancy Viviani has directed her research not to the "long journey" from Vietnam to Australia, but to the political and social struggle which resulted from the Australian government decision to admit the Indochinese "boat people" to Australia in the face of opposition from over two-thirds of the Australian electorate.

The latter goal became a political possibility when humane sentiments were aroused by the plight of the Vietnamese boat-people. Permitted — possibly even encouraged — to emigrate from Vietnam by the new Communist regime, in the wake of the withdrawal of American support for non-Communist South Vietnam, large numbers of Vietnamese immigrants attempted to obtain admission to neighboring Asian countries, but were increasingly refused entry on the principle that immigration is equivalent to conquest. Thus author Viviani comments:

"Finally, in June 1979 the Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Hussein Onn announced that no more refugee boats would be allowed to land. The Malaysians in fact had been pushing some boats off since 1975, but now all boats were to be resupplied and sent on. As Singapore had refused since 1975 to allow boats

to land without guarantees of resettlement from third countries, the effect of the Malaysian decision was to transfer landfall to Indonesia . . . A little later, the Philippines also closed its doors to refugees."

Seeing an opportunity in these circumstances to break down Australian traditions of racial exclusiveness, the Australian government authorized the acceptance of Vietnamese immigrants into Australia on grounds of humanity. This move did not pass unopposed, even though it was supported by a well-orchestrated media campaign:

"The Queensland RSL State Congress had several motions before it condemning Australia's acceptance of 'supposed refugees', and in mid-June, a nationwide poll confirmed that Australians were clearly divided on the question of refugee entry. In the poll, 30 percent of respondents believed Australia should accept about the same numbers of refugees or more. This was the bedrock of support for the government's policies. Another 30 percent wanted fewer to enter, while 37 percent wanted no more accepted. Thus more than two-thirds of those polled wanted fewer Indochinese to enter Australia."

Meanwhile the USA exerted pressure on Australia and neighboring countries to aid the outflow from Vietnam, with only limited success:

"The United States also placed Japan under pressure to make a substantial response. The Japanese, however, refused an American request to take 10,000 refugees, though later agreeing to take 200 Vietnamese from Malaysia and to pledge more money for UNHCR support."

"France, which had earlier cut its intake of refugees, agreed to take 5,000 more. At the end of June, after a summit meeting of the 'Big Seven' in Tokyo, the United States, as an exemplar, had doubled its refugee entry quota to 14,000 a month."

"The rapidity with which these international events took place, and the inundation of the Australian media with human-interest stories and interpretive reporting on the crisis (particularly by Michael Richardson) raised the temperature of the debate on entry of Vietnamese to Australia considerably during June and July of 1979. There was a crisis, and this was fully reflected in the emotional treatment of the issue in the Australian media. Most newspaper editorials were firmly in favor of increasing the numbers of refugees Australia should take."

Despite the traditional White Australia policy, the author argues that Australians were not traditionally ideological racialists. However, the appearance of increasing numbers of Asians in their midst — a people who customarily produced families much larger than those of White Australians — provoked public resentment. This was largely spontaneous, however, and was no match for the determined and sustained pro-immigration policy of the government and the media.

“Peter Hastings quickly to point out in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that despite the growth of racism in Australia, we would need to take more refugees so as to avoid the political folly of offending our ASEAN neighbors who carried the largest load. Newspapers gave good coverage to the arguments of the ‘refugee lobby’; the ICRAs, the Vietnamese Associations, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Anglican Synod all called for the government to admit more refugees. The Rev. Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel argued flamboyantly that we should take the lot.”

“It was clear, though there were few to acknowledge it publicly, that a majority of Australians were against even maintaining the current intake of refugees, and that this was acting as *the* major constraint in preventing the government from increasing the refugee target.”

“Finally, the government appointed a Refugee Advisory Council to advise it on reception and resettlement of refugees and on action ‘to produce a more understanding and tolerant community attitude towards refugees’.”

Today, for the first time in its history, Australia has an internal race problem (other than that of its aborigines), and this is a problem which is becoming linked in the Australian mind to the problem of the aborigines. While White New Zealand had largely come to accept the Maori population as autochthonous and legitimate, any possibility that the White Australians will now accept their aboriginals in the same way seems to have become irreversibly linked to the question of the status of the new ‘Vietnamese Australians’. The Asian immigrants do not seem anxious to assimilate, and the White Australians have acquired a new race consciousness, and a certain bewilderment at the rapidity with which the old Australia they knew has been converted so quickly into a multi-racial Australia. As the author concludes:

"One of the effects of Vietnamese migration to this country has been to sharpen the question of what it is to be an Australian. Before the war Australians were quite clear on this. They were a mixed Anglo-Saxon and Celtic people in race and culture, and if prompted, they would also remember black Australians. After the war the effects of immigration led to major and partly successful attempts to change this self-perception. The official adoption of the ideology of a multicultural society has meant that we have less of a sense of what it is to be an Australian, despite substantial efforts to persuade us that to be an 'ethnic' Australian is desirable."

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Pranab Bardhan

Basil Blackwell, Oxford and New York

India, the second largest country in the world in terms of population, is also one of the poorest. Yet her enormous resources, her elaborate administrative and legal systems, bequeathed largely by the English, her large internal market and high savings rate give her the potential to become an economic giant. Why, then, has per capita income been growing at the rate of the only 1½ percent per year over the last thirty years, leaving nearly half the population in abject poverty?

In this wide-ranging and readily accessible book a well-known economist examines the political and economic constraints on Indian development. He demonstrates the central role of public investment in agricultural and industrial infrastructure and public management of capital in economic growth. He explores the nature of the relationship between government and society in India and reveals the retarding influences of corruption, nepotism and patronage. He then traces the impact of these factors on the functioning both of the economy, in particular its growth process, and of the polity, in particular its democratic process.

While it is customary to laud India as the world's largest democracy, the author's portrayal of the reality is hardly complimentary to the image of democracy. Thus, he writes:

"The Indian style of politics is deceptively consensual, but