

*Anouk Ride writes about **Migration***

- 1 To outsiders, the cane toad is something that makes Queensland unique. To
Queenslanders they are pests. Imported to Queensland to eat bugs found in cane sugar
crops, cane toads soon took advantage of their new environment. They bred rapidly and
ventured out from the sugar fields, across to the Northern Territory and down into New
South Wales. Ravenously, they consumed resources and took over wildlife habitats. They
became a nuisance on the roads, leaving a foul stink and slippery patches when squashed
flat. The toads forgot their place, as humble bug-eating servants, and invaded swimming
pools and ponds in the poshest suburbs. From the same state that hosted the cane toad
came right-wing politician Pauline Hanson who believes that migrants are like the cane
toads. 'Australia is being swamped by Asians,' she said. 10
- 2 This argument gave Pauline Hanson a significant proportion of the vote in Queensland.
Some people were surprised by Hanson's popularity - given that 40 percent of Australians
are migrants or the children of migrants. The rationale of Hanson and her counterparts is
becoming a global phenomenon, partly as a response to one of the greatest migrations in
history - today, one in 100 people live outside the country of their birth. Most of these are
not refugees who flee persecution, but migrants who move for a variety of reasons. 15
- 3 Some people leave home to join families who have already left, or just to experience new
places. But the shift to a globalized economy - where every person *must* have something to
sell - means more people have to sell their labour, often by migrating to areas where it is
needed. Worldwide, 80 million people cannot make a living in rural areas and have moved
to cities. In places such as India, rural communities become indebted and have to send
workers away to earn a living. Other people move because economic expansion has
destroyed local livelihoods - 30 million people worldwide have had to relocate within their
own countries to make way for economic development. And, as an area the size of Belgium
becomes desert each year, by the end of the decade, an estimated 60 million will no longer
be able to live on their degraded land. Most people migrate within the developing world, and
yet migration is often a consequence of the undemocratic, unsustainable development
which the rich world continues to peddle across the globe. At the same time, it is the West
that is slamming its borders closed with a giant bang. 25
- 4 But people want to move so much that they scale fences, swim rivers, hide in ships, lorries
and planes. Chinese migrants who stowed away on ships to the north of Australia then
walked - barefoot on hot sand - for days to the nearest settlement. They 'made Superman
look like a wimp,' in the words of a local police officer. However, people do not move for a
taste of a real-life action movie. Most go because they see it as the best or only way to
improve their lives. People run from poverty and hopelessness, only to face the biggest
hurdle of all - the myth that migrants are a 'problem' rather than a symptom of the world's
ills. Even if the world had equality of opportunity, there would still be migrants. But if choices
were not constrained by the need to make a living, or simply to survive, migration would be
more voluntary. 35
- 5 Rather than working towards this goal, Western governments are lamenting their
'immigration crisis'. It is a subject which naturally promotes passionate debate; an issue that
cuts to the heart of some of the most central issues of a nation - its population, workforce,
money and ethnic make-up. All governments seek to regulate their population and
immigration is one of the few levers they can successfully use. In Australia, which has a land
area of 7.7 million square kilometres but the same population as Los Angeles, governments
have used migrants to increase their population. In Denmark, immigration was a big issue in
the last elections despite adding only 0.2 per cent to the population annually. All over
Europe, immigration laws are being tightened while immigration has become controversial in
other developed countries such as Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. In 45

- the US, a nation of 260 million, the conservative environmental lobby pushes for cuts to immigration. This group reasons that further immigration will strain resources already under pressure and lead to social and environmental decay. 'Look at what has happened to Cairo,' they say, 'overcrowding, pollution, without a bit of green in sight. Unless you want that to happen here, keep migrants off our turf.' 50
- 6 Their false logic once again provides a convenient alternative to facing the real causes of resource strain – over-consumption and corporate activity. The truth is that economies could not survive without migration. Even the most highly skilled industries are dependent on migrant labour. A study of high-tech industries in San Diego in the US, and Hamamatsu in Japan, found that employment of unskilled cheap migrant workers meant that manufacturing stayed in those countries rather than going elsewhere. Wayne Cornelius, political scientist at the University of California at San Diego, says: 'You have to ask yourself, would the United States as a country be better off if these jobs were performed in the Caribbean or in Indonesia, where there is no multiplier effect in terms of consumer spending, taxes paid and so forth?' 55 60
- 7 But economic narrow-mindedness has captured government policy. Skills and education are all very well, but what many countries want from migrants is instant money. The rich can move freely around the world, but the poor cannot. Here is the problem with economic rationalism. It ignores some of society's most important issues - its harmony, unity and diversity. Migration has so changed the racial mix of many cities and countries that our great grandparents would scarcely recognize them today. 65 70
- 8 Many countries have reacted to an influx of migrants by blaming the newcomers for unemployment and recession, and spreading racism and anti-immigration propaganda. Migrants everywhere live a tenuous existence, rarely gaining the same rights as non-migrants, their hosts always aloof. Blamed for a range of ills - from unemployment to crime, strained social services to lack of national unity - migrants are aware of just how easily their rights can be swept away by the majority. 75
- 9 To mould new societies where migrants are accepted as "us" not "them", we can start by urging rich world governments to provide the developing world with aid and fair trade to create the local livelihoods that make mass migration unnecessary. At the same time they must accept migrants themselves. This two-pronged approach is complementary as it ensures that movement is voluntary. The rich world cannot continue to push its notion of 'development' onto the developing world while shutting out the human cost - millions of migrants. Receiving governments also need to support migrants' rights - including equal rights to work, housing and political freedom. For example, the US has recently declared an amnesty for certain illegal migrants; a move that is far more sensible and less expensive than repatriation or lengthy appeals. 80 85
- 10 All countries should have progressive policies, formulated in conjunction with what is being done to prevent unwanted migration, rather than knee-jerk reactions. In addition, governments should actively encourage global equality and not use migrants as scapegoats for social divisions within their borders. Without migration my own life would be unimaginable - there would not be friends, lovers, family, mentors and colleagues. I feel comfortable in a place bursting with the vitality of migrants. Not the static scenario advocated by anti-immigrant politicians which produces the very thing it fears - a group of greedy people who refuse to associate with anyone different. Like colourless slimy toads, these isolationists sit alone in their ponds. With their cold eyes half-open to the world, they croak away, unintelligible to anyone but themselves. 90 95