# Chapter One
# Introduction

Nothing personal, it's just business: this is the new Satan of liquid modernity.
Bauman and Donskis (2013, p. 10)

## Migrant Deaths

In 2013 an unannounced inspection of Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre revealed worrying instances of neglect. Harmondsworth is a British secure facility near London that incarcerates refused asylum seekers prior to their deportation. The inspection, undertaken by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, reported that 'on at least two occasions, elderly, vulnerable and incapacitated detainees, one of whom was terminally ill, were needlessly handcuffed in an excessive and unacceptable manner… These men were so ill that one died shortly after his handcuffs were removed and the other, an 84 year-old-man, died while still in restraints' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014, p. 5). Staff had ignored a doctor's report declaring the 84-year-old, Alois Dvorzac, unfit for detention and in need of medical care. 'These are shocking cases where a sense of humanity was lost' the report continued, '[n]either had been in any way resistant or posed any current specific individual risk' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2014, p. 13). Harmondsworth has the capacity to hold 615 detainees, making it the largest detention centre in Europe. It holds men

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only and the security in various wings is comparable to a high security prison. The report concluded that the centre displayed, 'inadequate focus on the needs of the most vulnerable detainees, including elderly and sick men, those at risk of self harm through food refusal, and other people whose physical or mental health conditions made them potentially unfit for detention' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014, p. 5).

Mr Dvorzac's specific case is not an isolated phenomenon. Deaths in immigration detention are part of a global pattern of migrant deaths that occur as a result of the combination of bureaucratic ineptitude, the desperation of migrants and the strengthening of border controls. What is more, is not just asylum seekers who face risks.[1] For example, 58 Chinese stowaways who had suffocated in a container en route to the UK to work were discovered in Dover in 2001, together with just two survivors, almost suffocated amidst the putrid smell of rotting corpses (Hyland, 2000). The migrants had travelled from the southern Chinese province of Fujian on the Taiwan Strait and would have paid around £15,000 to get to Britain, most likely travelling on the strength of a deposit and facing the rest of the debt upon their arrival.[2] Although widespread consternation was expressed at the time, no fundamental alterations were made to the border policies and control practices that are at least partly responsible for the high risks they took. Another 23 Chinese migrants died picking cockles on the sands of Morecambe Bay in Lancashire, United Kingdom, in 2004. They were employed illegally, paid well below the minimum wage, and were sent to work in dangerous conditions without safety equipment or the ability to call for help. When the tide suddenly came in they were swept out to sea and suffered 'death in a cold, strange land' (BBC, 2006a). Although their deaths prompted the adoption of the Gangmaster (Licensing) Act (GLA) 2004, there 'is little direct evidence to suggest that the GLA has reduced worker exploitation, including long hours, lack of holiday and/or sick pay, unfair deductions, poor-quality tied housing, and restrictive contracts' (Strauss, 2013, p. 190). More recently, one man died and another 34 others were found suffering from dehydration and hypothermia, in a shipping container in Tilbury Docks, Essex, in August 2014. In this case the group were Afghan Sikhs who were intending to claim asylum, and included 13 children; they had been trapped inside the container for at least 12 hours.

The moral claim made by asylum seekers is seen as different from that made by economic migrants even though both often experience hardship, uncertainty and discomfort. Asylum seekers are invoking their right to safety from persecution rather than their right to work. As such they do not offend the sensibilities of those who are concerned about 'British jobs for British workers' in quite the same way as economic migrants, although overstated suspicion about 'bogus' asylum seekers – i.e. asylum seekers who are really in pursuit of employment or other financial gains – is never far from view in the British context (see Zimmermann, 2014, for an exposition