

# Border Crossing and Displacement: Forced Migration of Afghan Children in Refugee Fiction

**T. S. Gangothri**

## **Abstract**

Wars and political unrest in Afghanistan make its children one of the most vulnerable groups among refugee communities. Afghan children suffer from poverty and a lack of basic facilities available to the majority of children in other countries. Refugee literature, notably, has become an effective medium in representing their plight of living in stateless and homeless conditions. Novels with refugee child characters demonstrate the relationship between national borders and stateless children's lives. This article examines this relationship in two novels: Fabio Geda's *In the Seas There are Crocodiles* (2011) and Tristan Bancks' *Detention* (2019). These novels reveal the life of Afghan Hazara refugee children who cross borders to escape war and oppression. The protagonists Enaiat and Sima respectively become symbols for understanding the life of the Afghan refugee children. The article uses the border studies framework and theories of childhood to study the relationship between borders and refugee children.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, border-crossing, refugee children, forced migration, war, refugee fiction.

## **Introduction**

Afghanistan, a South Asian country, has long struggled with political instability, causing millions of its people to migrate to other countries as refugees to save their lives. This forced migration forms a barrier to their movement to safety, due to the border policies of global nations. The strict policies of several countries in the global north on border-crossing have made Afghan refugees enter these nations bypassing surveillance and disregarding migration restrictions, as illegal immigrants seeking asylum. Among Afghans who migrate, Afghan children make up about half. These children escape war either with their parents or as unaccompanied minors.<sup>1</sup> Threats to life due to famines war, and the suppression of minorities have forced children to flee war and violence. The journeys undertaken by Afghan refugee children forcibly convert them into 'immediate adults' rather than 'adults in becoming'. This large-scale violence and forced migration has led to the representation of Afghan children in a plethora of novels. Almost all fiction on Afghan children portrays the dangerous journeys and forced migration undertaken by these minors. The novels, however, through a range of representations, politicize the global refugee regime, border politics, citizenship politics, and the plight of children who are no longer under the protection of a 'state'. The novels discussed are Fabio Geda's *In the Seas There are Crocodiles* (2011) and Tristan Bancks' *Detention*

---

T. S. Gangothri is a PhD research scholar in the Department of Indian and World Literature at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Email: gangothri.tsa@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> Zulfiqar Ahmed Bhutta, 'Children of War: The real casualties of the Afghan conflict', *BMJ* (2002), pp. 324-349.

(2019). This article explores the relationship between national borders and refugee children's lives, using frameworks from border studies and theories of childhood.

### **The Afghan Wars and Forced Migrations**

Afghanistan is inhabited by people with different beliefs and cultures and is differentiated widely based on geographical terrain. Its mountainous landscapes seem immune to modernization. Notably, the people of Afghanistan, being nomads, farmers, and tribes, were largely unaffected by political changes until the twentieth century. The advent of the Cold War and the struggle for power in the state are the genesis of the Afghan wars and the resultant mass migrations of Afghans. As Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman point out, these wars have united Afghans to have: "common experience of mass destruction, death, exile, and tyranny... Citizens in every region share[d] common resentments against some of the country's current or former neighbors and other foreigners. They all bemoan corruption, government incompetence, and the power of warlords."<sup>2</sup> The history of major power struggles began in Afghanistan after its independence from the British government in 1921. The fight within the royal family for power in the country ended with the coup of Mohammed Daoud Khan in 1973. He became the first president of Afghanistan and attempted to modernize the state.

The lack of interest in the accumulation of powers in the hands of Khan led to another coup in Afghanistan in 1978 by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Nur Muhammed Taraki became the president after the coup. The country did not welcome his traditional vision of social and political changes. These unwelcomed radical changes in the country created an umbrella group called Mujahideen, a guerrilla Islamic resistant movement. Further, the mujahideen grew large in number and started to rebel against the government supported by the Soviets. The assassination of Taraki by Hafizullah Amin's supporters caused Russia to invade the country. The unwanted entry of the USSR into Afghan land created wide unrest in the political realm, causing the mujahideen to fight against the government and the USSR. The US government, supported by Pakistan, started to attack the Russian troops. The rivalry between the US and USSR led to ten years of war in Afghanistan, with people being displaced; "2.8 million Afghans...to Pakistan, and another 1.5 million...to Iran."<sup>3</sup>

As the Afghan wars led to economic depression, poverty, and a vacuum for potential leadership in the country, the Taliban (from Arabic *talib*, student) came to the forefront in 1994, promising growth in Afghanistan. Being young and rooted in religious principles, Afghans considered them the new leaders of Afghanistan. The growth of the Taliban witnessed the parallel growth of religious extremism. As they were Pashtuns, the majority in Afghanistan, they started attacking the minorities in the country. The minority Hazara people became their prime targets.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, women were burdened by rules that diminished their freedom.

---

<sup>2</sup> Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *A Brief History of Afghanistan* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> News Desk, 'A historical timeline of Afghanistan', *PBS News Hour*, 30 August (2021). At: [www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan).

<sup>4</sup> Amin Saikal, 'Afghanistan: The Status of the Shi'ite Hazara Minority', *Journal of Muslim Minorities Affair*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2012), p. 82.

Women were alienated from the public places in the name of religion.<sup>5</sup> As terror became part of governance, Afghans became unhappy with the rule of the Taliban. The support of the Taliban for Osama Bin Laden infuriated the US, again leading to war in Afghanistan. These continuing rivalries and wars between different powerhouses led the country into wars for more than four decades. These wars led to the destruction of the land and the lives of millions of Afghans, who were forced to migrate to different places to escape the war and save their lives.

The continuous wars and growth of religious extremists like Taliban have shattered the peace, economy and livelihoods of millions of Afghans. The Cold War rivalry of the US and the USSR severely affected the Afghans by making them refugees and internally displaced people. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi states that “Afghanistan’s displacement crisis is one of the largest and most protracted in UNHCR’s seven-decade history. We’re now seeing the third generation of Afghan children born in exile.”<sup>6</sup> This highlights the severity of Afghan refugee issues. The war and the suppression of minorities are significant reasons for the Afghans to migrate to foreign lands. The novels analysed in this article focus on the migration of Hazara Afghans, who have been most affected due to the war and the rise of the Taliban.

## Refugees and Borders

Borders and the life of refugees are closely linked because crossing the border of their country of origin makes people refugees if they do so without papers and permissions. These borders are pivotal in the experience of refugees during crises, for they impact their safety, legal status, and humanitarian access. As borders mark sovereign states in the modern global structure, they become the limit for determining immigration and asylum policies. The border policies in the global north are far stricter than in the global south, because the borders of countries like Europe and the US are regions under high surveillance. These border measures and identification of the refugee movement as a crisis in the contemporary political arena “has sharpened divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘citizens’ and ‘foreigners’, ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’; these divisions often lead to an increase in violence, hatred and hostility between the groups.”<sup>7</sup> Further, as Daria Davitti points out, “the fortified walls and militarized borders erected in response to the latest European migration ‘crisis’ reflect the waning of state sovereignty within the transnational global order.”<sup>8</sup> Technology in the surveillance of borders heightens violence occurring at the borders. Due to this, Reece Jones points out how: “Some migrants [refugees] are killed by border agents, but most deaths at borders occur because new enforcement technologies, from walls to drones and high-technology sensors, make the

<sup>5</sup> Larry P. Goodson, ‘Perverting Islam: Taliban Social Policy toward Women’, *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 20, no. 4 (2001), p. 415.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, ‘Afghanistan Refugee Crises Explained’, *US for UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency*, 29 July (2024). At: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

<sup>7</sup> Melina Duarte, Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, Serena Parekh, and Annamari Vitikainen (eds), *Refugee Crises: The Borders of Human Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Daria Davitti, ‘Biopolitical Borders and the State of Exception in the European Migration ‘Crisis’’, *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2018), p. 2.

crossing much more difficult and dangerous.”<sup>9</sup> The borders, in the name of security, have become highly challenging for the refugees who wish to seek asylum in these nation-states.

Within debates about border crossings and forced migrations, the children’s association with the “borders continues to matter and they matter for many children whose lives are intricately entangled with all that borders, literally or metaphorically, stand for: nation, state, identity, community, citizenship, inclusion, belonging, and security (and their approximate corollaries: foreignness, difference, threat, fear, exclusion, immigration, and anxiety).”<sup>10</sup> The refugee children, who are the most vulnerable sections of the refugee community, encounter the border and the border regimes that deny their rights to a safe childhood. Refugee children’s vulnerable identity challenges the universal construct of the child and childhood that “denies children’s political consciousness and their agency, and ... marginalises the diversity of lived experiences of many children, particularly in conflict zones. It sees children as ideally being apolitical, sheltered and separate from the political realm, but also, in the case of children in conflict zones, it regards them as only ever victims of adult political action.”<sup>11</sup> Studying the interface between refugee children and borders shows how stateless identity forms a liminal childhood that denies the child’s right to the protections of childhood as globally understood.

### ***In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* by Fabio Geda**

*In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* authored by Fabio Geda<sup>12</sup> is a fictional account of the real story of Enaiat. The plot revolves around the migration of Enaiat from Afghanistan to Italy by crossing borders of various countries. The narration of Enaiat’s story takes place as a conversation between Enaiat and Fabio. Enaiat narrates his story starting from his travel to Pakistan with his mother at the age of ten. Enaiat’s mother leaves him in Pakistan and goes back to take care of her other children whom she has left in her village in Afghanistan. He begins to experience refugeehood and statelessness immediately after his mother abandons him for safety in an alien country. Enaiat, who later understands that his mother has left him for his safety, starts to work at Kaka Rahim’s place doing all the odd jobs given to him by Rahim. The crossing of his country’s borders forces him to support himself. Thus, statelessness becomes his identity, which remains indivisible throughout his life until he finds asylum in Italy.

*In the Sea there are Crocodiles* continuously reiterates Enaiat’s Hazara identity and showcases the double marginalization imposed on him: as a refugee having Hazara identity. Enaiat’s narration about the death of his father and the suppression of the Hazara community illustrates how the Pushtun hegemony and wars have devastated their lives. He describes the Taliban regime amidst his migration as the reason for his forced migration. His harrowing experiences with the Taliban demonstrate the condition of Hazaras under the reign of the Taliban. He says, “Taliban once slapped me because I didn’t have a beard, but I was only a child and even if I’d been a Pashtun and not a Hazara I don’t think I could have had a beard at

<sup>9</sup> Reece Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Spyros Spyrou and Miranda Christou, *Children and Borders* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Huynh, Bina D’Costa, and Katrina Lee-Koo, *Children and Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Fabio Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* (London: Random House, 2011).

that age.”<sup>13</sup> This explains how children were helplessly caught in the conflicts in Afghanistan. Further: “They shot him. In front of everyone. From that day on, the school was closed, and without school, life is like ashes,”<sup>14</sup> shows how children’s education was disrupted because of political upheaval. These incidents: killings; the death of his father; and the closing of schools, demonstrate how Hazara were oppressed by the community more than wars in Afghanistan.

Enaiyat faces ‘double marginalization’ when he begins his life in Pakistan as a Hazara refugee. He faces discrimination immediately when he becomes the reseller of the products for Zaman in the markets of Pakistan. Though he befriends Hazara children, the other Afghan refugee children disturb him at his job, due to his marginalized identity. They steal from him, mock him, and pick fights. He describes being a Hazara Afghan this way: “He took a broom and started beating me with the stick, very hard, without mercy. He hit me on my head and back. I ran out of the shop screaming, partly from anger and partly from pain, and the people who were there just stood around and did nothing.”<sup>15</sup> These lines narrate how children like Enaiyat are tormented for belonging to minority communities. Enaiyat describes how being a child refugee was more dangerous for him due to intersectional identity. He says Pakistani police also beat him for money and arrested him for living without documents. Moreover, the ‘double marginalisation’ is best explained when Enaiyat crosses the Pakistan border into Iran in a jeep. The description of “a fat, tousle-haired man”<sup>16</sup> secretly pushing him out of the truck shows the hatred prevalent against minorities like Hazaras, even in the worst of situations.

Enaiyat, who stays inside the shop of Zaman, decides to move to Iran because of job prospects. This is the second border he crosses after leaving his country of origin. Through Kaka Rahim, he gets to know the smugglers and travels with his Hazara friend Sufi. They make a safe journey to Iran by bus, train and jeep. Since Enaiyat and his friend Sufi do not have the money to pay the smugglers, they work for free for four months to repay their debt. After four months, they begin to earn by working on a construction site. Sufi moves to work in a distant place due to problems with the Iranian police, and Enaiyat joins him after getting caught by the police as well. Since the stone factory job is not for children, his leg is injured due to the hard work. His status as a refugee forces him to continue working while sick. His three years in Iran narrate the condition of forced migrants who have to live in an unprotected environment. Though Iran is a neighboring country to Afghanistan, the role of borders in exercising its sovereignty is revealed in the treatment of refugees, especially refugee children.

The real plight of refugees is expressed in the novel when it recounts Enaiyat’s experience of living in Iran. Enaiyat’s characterization becomes a lens to understand how a refugee child is considered first as a refugee then as a child. Several incidents in Enaiyat’s life demonstrate his resilience in the toughest of situations. One such experience with Iran’s police as narrated by him: “They shaved our heads in the camp. To make us feel naked. And so that, afterward, people would know that we had been in Iran, as illegals, and had been expelled”<sup>17</sup> demonstrates how refugees are continuously made to feel like outsiders. Further, the description of his treatment: “He slapped me across the face, hitting my cheek and ear. I hadn’t

<sup>13</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 63.

seen it coming. My cheek caught fire, my ear whistles for a few seconds. I had the impression it was swelling like a loaf of bread,”<sup>18</sup> demonstrates how Iranian police instigate violence upon refugees for entering their country. The lines “We all started running. They started firing with their Kalashnikovs. As I ran, I heard the bullets whistling past me,”<sup>19</sup> show the dehumanization happening to refugees after crossing the borders of their homelands. This shooting exemplifies the deprival of fundamental rights and the continuous fear in the life of refugees.

The increase in police violence and harsh living conditions for refugees in Iran compel Enaiyat to move to Turkey. Through one of his friends, he comes to know about the smugglers taking refugees into Turkey. He arranges the journey and buys necessities to take with him on the trip. The smugglers make them climb the mountains for twenty-one days in the freezing weather. His journey to cross the Turkish border is one of the hardest border crossings for Enaiyat because: “any strength we might have had to speak had drained out of us through our feet and our noses and hung in the clouds of steam that materialized in front of our lips.”<sup>20</sup> Enaiyat even takes shoes from dead people because his are broken. The human smugglers are cruel: “Wait, someone’s dying here, we have to stop and help him, but the traffickers (there were five of them) fired in the air with their Kalashnikovs.”<sup>21</sup> These lines indicate the dangerous journey undertaken by Enaiyat with smugglers to reach Turkey and reveal the dangers of trusting smugglers. Further, they make a terrible journey and lose people to the hostile weather. After climbing the mountain, they are made to go inside the hidden chamber of a stone truck for three days. Enaiyat and the other people inside the truck are taken out when unconscious.

Enaiyat’s journey into Turkey encourages him to enter Europe, as searching for a job is futile in Turkey. As he comes to know about Hazara children travelling to Greece, he joins them on the journey. He travels in a dinghy to enter the European Union. All his friends who are unaccompanied refugees embark on this journey; one of his friends is lost, due to traveling in an unsafe dinghy. The constant monitoring of European borders by border forces is expressed: “We were afraid to sneeze because we thought the coast guard would pick up our sneezing on their radar over the noise of the waves.”<sup>22</sup> The surveillance of the borders, including biometrics, and the consequent dreadful situation created among the displaced children, is narrated when Enaiyat is afraid to provide fingerprints; “They’d told me that in Greece, as soon as they caught you, they took your fingerprints, and if you were illegal you were screwed, because after that you couldn’t ask for political asylum in any other country in Europe.”<sup>23</sup> The above lines vividly demonstrate the harsh policies of Europe against refugees.

Further, Greece becomes a harder place to survive because of the lower job prospects and the unavailability of jobs to refugees. He sleeps in the garden of a lady who helps him with money, food, and clothes. With the money, he decides to go to Italy on cruise and reaches Italy. In Italy, he recalls his friend Payum, who has settled there. Through Payum, he learns about Marco’s family, which works to help refugee children. After he approached them, they

---

<sup>18</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 83.

<sup>21</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p.101

<sup>23</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, p.107

welcomed him into their family and helped him with his education. Enaiyat starts to attend the class and gets asylum to settle in Italy. Enaiyat's journey from Afghanistan to Italy is:

When suddenly my nose started to bleed: it was the first time in my life I'd had a nosebleed. I ran to the toilet to rinse my face. I stuck my head under the tap, and there I was, with my head bent over the washbasin and the blood flowing and – I don't really know how to explain it, but I felt as if it wasn't only the blood that was flowing out of me, it was everything I'd been through, the sand of the desert, the dust of the streets and the snow of the mountains, the salt of the sea and the lime of Isfahan, the stones of Qom and the sewage from the gutters of Quetta. By the time the blood stopped flowing, I felt great. Better than I'd ever felt in my life. I wiped my face.<sup>24</sup>

This passage summarizes his arduous journey, crossing the borders of several countries, and the effect it had on his body and mind. Further, Enaiyat convinces the officials by telling them he will become like the Afghan children in the newspaper they are reading, that his story would be a potential tale to exalt European humanism on refugee protection. Later, evidently, this leads to his gaining Italian citizenship. At the end of his narration, he exemplifies how he became one of the fortunate refugees and a benefactor of Western humanitarianism.

### ***Detention by Tristan Bancks***

*Detention*<sup>25</sup> tells the story of Sima's escape from a detention center in Australia. The novelist represents Australia's detention policies by narrating the life of Sima and other inmates. The novel speaks about Sima and Dan's a day long life. Sima, a Hazara in Afghanistan escapes to Australia along with her family to find asylum because of the uncertain conditions for Hazaras in Afghanistan. The novel begins with Sima and her family trying to escape from detention center because of the non-approval of their asylum claim. The strict detention policies make Sima and her family escape from the center by cutting the fence. Though everything happens as planned, Sima's sneeze makes the guard recognise the escape, leading to the arrest of the inmates. Meanwhile, Dan is an Australian schoolchild who lives near the detention center. They meet when Sima hides from the guards in Dan's school's washroom.

As Enaiyat had a life that guaranteed the independence of movement in the public sphere, Sima's life became strangled in the detention camps that easily separated non-citizens from citizens. The longing that Enaiyat had for school is absent in Sima's story because of the carceral life within the fences. Her desires revolve around experiencing freedom outside the fences. She says that: "She'll eat falooda, her favourite dessert at home – shaved ice topped with rosewater syrup, vermicelli noodles and qaymaq, which is cream, and chopped-up pistachio nuts. Sima hasn't eaten falooda in forever."<sup>26</sup> These lines elucidate the life that is totally absent for her and the life in the camp that makes her long for the food that is easily available to others outside the center. Her yearning for food demonstrates the ways in which refugee children's lives are devastated by the detention policies of the Australian government. Sima's life in the detention

<sup>24</sup> Geda, *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, pp.111-112

<sup>25</sup> Tristan Bancks, *Detention* (Australia: Penguin Random House, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Bancks, *Detention*, p. 25.

camps makes her life vulnerable, succumbing to the policies of the government. Her vulnerable position is due to how refugees are in: "...relationship to the political ... as a kind of "inclusive exclusion" [wherein they] are included in the discourse of "normality" and "order" only by virtue of their exclusion from the normal identities and ordered spaces of the sovereign state."<sup>27</sup>

Though Enaiyat's Hazara identity is continuously mentioned to explicate his 'double marginalisation', Sima's identity is narrated to explain the reason for her migration to Australia. She explains how she witnessed the killings of Hazaras and the way in which they escaped: "The cubicle was tiny, smaller than this one. Soon another family was jammed in with them. Seven people – four adults, three kids. They were in there for hours. The toilet was broken and brown water pooled around Sima's bare feet. She remembers the smell and the slimy feel of it between her toes."<sup>28</sup> This portrays how minorities like Hazaras in Afghanistan were targeted by extremists. Further, the violence that surrounded her is reflected through her continuous state of being afraid. Her fear and anxiety are exhibited: "She waits, mouth dead dry. Minutes slither past. Maybe he didn't see her. The boy. Or maybe he did and his teacher has called the police and they're outside the toilet block now. Five of them, with Kalashnikov assault rifles, like the Taliban back in Jaghori when they surrounded her village."<sup>29</sup> This shows the ways in which violence in her country of origin is continuously on Sima's mind. The text *Detention* rightly demonstrates how violent oppression is the main reason for the forced migration of Sima's family in particular and thousands of Afghans becoming refugees in general.

Though the theme of friendship is a frequent factor in both works, it is best expressed in the *Detention* novel. Dan's kind-hearted nature is narrated at the beginning of the novel when he tries to help the dog that has been tied. Dan, a slow learner, is placed in a particular class under the supervision of Miss Aston, who was a police officer before becoming a teacher. The sudden alarm in the school makes all the students and teachers quarantine inside their classrooms. Dan, who has brought the dog with him to school, thinks about the condition of his dog without food. The passage of time makes Dan worried about his dog. He pretends to go to the washroom to keep water for his dog. He finds out about Sima in the bathroom and tries to help her by informing his teacher. The friendship that is illustrated in the novel puts forth the idea of helping refugees in need. As both of them belong to two different global powers, the writer uses their friendship to humanize and deconstruct the disparities. Dan's helping Sima can be taken as the symbolic representation of East and the West, and their friendship and Dan's help visualize the necessity of the West helping the East in times of crisis.

Miss Aston, who helps Sima in the beginning, tries to inform on her to the school authorities. While staying in the cupboard, Sima thinks about detention and how she has accustomed herself to hiding. Being a refugee child, she continuously thinks about running because of her experience with border crossing: "She flashes back to the boat, nearly two years ago, crowded in by people on all sides, out of fuel, out of food, out of breath... She makes a silent vow that as soon as she gets the chance she's going to run as far from this school as she can."<sup>30</sup> These lines indicate how the crossing of various countries' borders has affected Sima.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. xiii.

<sup>28</sup> Bancks, *Detention*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Bancks, *Detention*, p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> Bancks, *Detention*, p. 66



Dan, who comes to know about Miss Aston's motive, escapes with Sima to his house. The police go to Dan's house after discovering Dan's motive for helping Sima. Dan's mother helps Dan to escape with Sima. They reach the bus stop to go to Sima's uncle's house. Dan buys a ticket with his savings and helps Sima to catch the bus as the guards follow them.

Though the novel *Detention* does not deal with international borders like *In the Sea There are Crocodiles*, it revolves around the detention camp in Australia. It shows the plight of its victims through the character of Sima. The protests by the inmates in the camps exemplify the adverse conditions and the stringent laws of Australia's detention camps. The incident where an inmate remarks about the installation of chips in the bodies of the detained refugees reveals the peak of surveillance mechanism in the detention camp.

He screamed that all the detainees had been secretly injected with a microchip in the night so that they could be traced wherever they go ... Since then, Sima checks her skin every morning as she wakes. She imagines the chip pulsing light-blue inside her and the same light-blue pulse being watched on a screen in a bank of monitors in a dark underground bunker. It sounds like science fiction but after what Sima has seen in the past few years, anything is possible.<sup>31</sup>

This passage shows how surveillance affects the bodies of refugees who are detained in the camp. Further, surveillance denotes the operation of exclusion politics in Australian detention camps. Sima's life in camp showcases the ways borders function in othering the refugees.

The functioning of the detention center in the novel aligns with Debarti Sanyal's study of refugee camps. She maintains: "The camp, as 'hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity', is 'the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space'; its emblem is the refugee, naked life stripped of political and juridical value, existing only in its unconditional capacity to be killed by sovereign power."<sup>32</sup> Sima's and other inmates' lives, surrounded by surveillance and with immobility forced upon them, explains the functioning of the Australian government in othering the refugees who have escaped from violence in their land of origin. Further, Dan stops liking Miss Aston because of her desire to inform on Sima to the authorities. Later in the class, Miss Aston asks Dan to read the passage about refugees to help Dan know about Sima's whereabouts. At the end of the story, Sima is shown living happily with her mother and sister in her uncle's house. Her father is still in detention because of his plan to escape. The escape and the protests of refugees from detention create awareness about refugees to the Australian government and people. Like Enaiat, Sima becomes a recipient of Western humanitarianism.

Enaiat's and Sima's narration of exile in the novels explains how it is "produced by human beings to other human beings; and that; like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people [like Enaiat and Sima] from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography."<sup>33</sup> Enaiat and Sima crossing borders and losing their country of origin make them lose their childhood and forcibly attain the identity of 'stateless child'. When Enaiat's

<sup>31</sup> Bancks, *Detention*, p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Debarti Sanyal, 'Calais's 'Jungle': Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance', *Representations*, no. 139 (2017), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London, Granta, 2013), p. 174.

exile as a refugee makes him an unaccompanied minor who is left to tend to his needs, Sima's exile with her family provides her with the emotional attachment from her family members.

The study of these two refugee children's lives necessitates to examine the vulnerable condition of refugee children travelling alone and with their families. As Chris Jenks points out, "childhood is to be understood as a social construct; it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society but which are incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting."<sup>34</sup> Enaiyat's and Sima's childhoods, too, are formed by their stateless identity. By taking a cue from Jenks, the refugee childhood is the product of a state of violence and is built upon the identity of statelessness. As Enaiyat's childhood as a refugee compels him to fight for his life by travelling from country to country, Sima's childhood forces her to fight for her freedom and life from the detention camps and the policies of the Australian government.

Enaiyat and Sima's acts in crossing the borders makes them 'immediate adults' rather than 'adults in becoming'. Huynh et al argue that "in the context of conflict zones, the distinction between a child and an adult is immediately blurred...[because] children in conflict zones are performing the roles of adults: as armed combatants, heads of households, paid workers, carers for relatives, peacemakers and community builders."<sup>35</sup> Though Enaiyat takes care of him in the totality of his life as a refugee child, he reminisces and longs for his lost childhood in Afghanistan. He describes about school in Pakistan and how he:

Liked it when the bell rang and the doors were flung open and the children came out into the yard, yelling and starting to play. As they played, I would imagine myself yelling and starting to play. As they played, I would imagine myself yelling and playing and calling out to my Nava friends ... I walked slowly on purpose, so that I could spend more time listening to the children.<sup>36</sup>

This longing of Enaiyat for school shows the vulnerability and unwantedness of refugees and refugee children. The loss of education for non-citizens is the nexus of borders and refugees.

## Conclusion

This article analyzed borders and their role in constructing the refugee identity and the refugee child identity in particular. As the borders are central to nationalist debates, the asymmetries between the nations on various aspects are pivotal to the study of refugees and forced migrations. The study of the central characters Enaiyat and Sima's migration provides a cope to discuss the lives of Afghan refugee children who risk their lives to find a safer place that ensures their future free of violence. The article explored the experiences of refugee children to infer how various national borders and host country's culture impact on their subjectivity and constitute their vulnerability. By drawing on the history of the Afghan wars, the article

---

<sup>34</sup> Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Huynh et al., *Children and Global Conflict*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Geda, *In the Seas There Are Crocodiles*, p. 29.

contextualized mass migration and provided grounds for understanding the compulsory mental shift in the character of refugee children from childhood to adulthood.