

Asylum Seekers: The Question of Hospitality from a Decolonial Perspective, Disrupting Ideas of the Nation and the National

Ana Maria Allimant Holas

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Introduction

Setting the Scene- (In) Hospitality

I Do not think that the doctrine of the equality of man was really ever intended to include racial equality. (Prime Minister Edward Barton, cited by York pp 30-31)

These words said by the Australian Prime Minister Edmond Barton during a Parliamentary debate in 1901 as he introduced the Immigration Bill to the House of Representatives. This Bill, introduced a 'Dictation Test' to 'coloured' immigrants arriving in Australia. I am situating this reflection about asylum seekers and (in) hospitality in the background of the first years of Australian Federation.

Background

I am interested in exploring how the knowledge and subjectivities about asylum seekers and refugees in relation to Australian citizens continued to be shaped by colonial and imperial differences as exemplified by 'Operation Relex' (Howard) a policy of 'turning back the boats', 'Operation Sovereign Borders' (Abbott) turning back boats 'where is safe to do so', 'Offshore processing' since 2012 asylum seekers arriving by boat have been subjected to offshore processing in Nauru and on Manus Island PNG.



Methodology

I am using a decolonial approach defined by Walter Dignolo as "a relentless analytical effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity" (Dignolo 2011: p,10)

The positioning of the first years of Australian Federation and subsequent policies, reveal an imperial and territorial epistemology characterised by race inequalities. It marked a racial indention of exclusion of First Nations Peoples that continues today.

These policies articulate (d) rejection inserting asylum seekers outside Australian Community bonds, constituting an unethical response.

Conclusion

If we find safety in the order that has been given to us, that is, we find comfort in the realm of oppression, suffering and death. Hence, we find shelter in our own death by negating the other and his/her difference we are negating our social coexistence, our bond to each-other given our unchosen cohabitation.

An ethical response entails a decolonial move which favours life and relationality with incarnated individuals, over the supremacy of abstract universalising, totalising and exclusionary divisions. The totalising Eurocentric stand of Australia towards asylum seekers and Australian citizens, silences and hides from view the ethical solicitation for recognition that asylum seekers present to us since their call for protection is a call for the opening of new affective routes of reciprocal exchange between asylum seekers and Australian citizens.

References