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## Sovereign Hospitalities?

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1. The indigenous person, the refugee and the new and old 'settler' sit in an awkward arrangement of relationship which is radically exposed through the reality of indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous sovereignty insists the question is asked: Who are strangers? The situation of the refugee insists the question is asked: Who is able to practice hospitality? All of these questions within Australia move between the imaginary of a continent simultaneously surrounded by beaches and shores.

## Imagining Shores

2. The 'beach' is the common figuring of the space between the sea and the land. In a popular Australian context we are said to define ourselves through the beach with its egalitarian sands and sunbaked, easy going bodies. But it is exactly this figuring of the space between sea and land proper that is absent from the ways in which that space is employed when the figure of the refugee in Australia is evoked. There are no sandy palaces of hedonistic sexuality and nor is there the rich flexibility of meaning in the spatiality of beach culture which Turner, Fiske and Hodge examine (1987, 53-72). When refugees are written and spoken of the beach disappears to be replaced by shores and borders. The sovereign nation as an all powerful but simultaneously all exposed entity is a cliché of nationalism. Within the rhetoric of a continental imagination and the 'threat' of refugees the accessible, endlessly welcoming beach disappears. In its stead the shores that are spoken of are vulnerable shores that must be kept intact and secured against the threat of un-negotiated penetration by strangers; Australia as a reborn virgin with an explosively exposed hymen.

3. This sexualised nationhood as maidenhood becomes embedded in particularly long histories when connected with the ideal of hospitality as Derrida (2000) has done. He relooks at the biblical story of Lot amongst others. Lot is asked by the men of Sodom to give up the two male angels who are strangers to him but to whom he has granted hospitality. He instead offers his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom who may treat them as they please. For Derrida this is a moment where 'Lot seems to put the law of hospitality above all, in particular the ethical obligations that link him to his relatives and family, first of all his daughters' (2000: 51). He also queries the ways in which this violent phallogocentric hospitality displays the full 'force of ipseity'. To take this story into the context of national sovereignties exposes the way in which the force of this radical hospitable selfhood is both dispersed and returns. It is dispersed through the traditions of organised immigration and citizenship and returns in the intermittent passionate outpourings of particular citizens to both stop or start the numbers entering 'their' ambiguous national home.

4. When Derrida asks: 'Are we heirs to this tradition of hospitality? Up to what point? Where should we place the invariant, if it is one, across this logic and these narratives? They testify without end in our memory' (p.155)- the answer via the context of Australia produces some curious readings. In the first place Lot, as a better known stranger, we might understand as both colonial and/or immigrant. Given the power of the men of Sodom to make and have their demands met the better translation would be that of a 'legitimate' immigrant meeting the demands of an anglo centre but this of course instantly ignores the reality of Aboriginal owned land. So we already have our biblical story being performed between various orders of strangers, all of whose claim to offer hospitality is radically uncertain or in terms of Aboriginal sovereignty, illegitimate.

5. If we answer Derrida's first question directly we 'Australians' are not the heirs to this biblical tradition of hospitality. The tradition 'we' are most familiar with is the White Australia policy or Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act. This is a tradition that more or less reversed the Lottion sensibility. As the bureaucratic formulation of a basic, racist desire to determine the racial makeup of the nation, the hospitality of the nation was understood as something only some could call upon. This meticulous hierarchy based on race and language was this modern nation's response to the possibility of other working strangers and in exchange for being worthy, the nation would make a limited response in terms of jobs, money and 'belonging'. But this very different tradition asks questions in turn of Lot. Would he have offered his home to two women? To harlots, to gays to any formulation of the undesirable, or at least ungodly of the time? And would he have offered his sons to the men of Sodom or himself? These questions are my Australian heritage- to ask what a particular person is worth. But if Lot as a loving patriarch (if such things are possible without diminishing 'love') makes a terrible heartfelt choice to allow his girl children to be packrapped rather than give up strangers he has offered hospitality to, the clearest Australian translation of such a tale would be that faced with strangers at our door we would rather sleep with our own children than allow connections with strangers. But that isn't quite right. Faced with the possibility of inviting into Australia just the right english speaking, hard working, anglo, 'known' stranger we were quite prepared to continue the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and to readily promote the breeding of more whites through our daughters, virgins or not. At the heart of this imagining is the shore as the border, not the beach. At the heart of this thinking is the combative machinery of a 'legalised' sovereignty uneasily aware of Aboriginal presence and Indigenous sovereignty.

### Enshoring the Nation

6. The rhetoric of threat and maintenance of unity in nationhood is very familiar. Its history is long and it is a 'classic', perhaps ubiquitous articulation of national identity. The rhetoric naturalises the idea that unannounced strangers; refugees, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and displaced persons are a threat to our national borders, particularly one 'girt by sea'. Simultaneously the 'threat' to our shores naturalises the idea that 'Australia' is a whole nation that has complete borders that can be protected. But to assume a national integrity is not easy within a 'settler' society like Australia and the role of impermeable border is also not an easy role for 'shores' to play. The shore, the repressed beach is after all an in-between space neither land nor sea, a threshold of becoming where strangers are made rather than met (Dening 1996). Colonial invasion limits the possibilities of the beach but does not resolve them or completely displace them.

7. Surrounded by sea the regulation of entry has always seemed so much more possible in Australia although that liminal space also exposes the tension of control. Granted by the constantly moving sea our seeming isolation from other nations and so the possibility of preventing others entry, the ever open ended sea is also an enormous space, impossible to completely control. And as every regulation keeps some people out so it keeps us in. This in turn leads to ever more regulation for those enforced borders make us believe that those who come in can't leave. Our very refusal of hospitality ties us, we hope, to land that we have not negotiated but invasion is not so easily resolved. Does the omnipotent national 'we' I have employed so far hold for the most recent newcomers? For how many generations is one a new Australian? Why is it only some arrivals are selected as human 'deterrents' to others who might follow?

### Contextualising Strangers

8. All nations are now experiencing what the Comaroffs have described as the Second Coming of Capitalism (2000, p. 291) or as we ubiquitously refer to it –'globalisation'. It has been described as a period where much has been done to assist the flows of capital world wide and correspondingly as a period when the movement of the labour displaced by these shifts in capital has become more and more controlled. Displaced workers may seem a very poor short hand for those people who have also experienced terrible terror and harm within communities they may once have called home but this too has been traced in part back to globalisation. There appears to be a clear relationship between 'liberalisation' even democratisation in some countries and the rise of violence against those who are seen sometimes suddenly and often very ahistorically as strangers or 'not belonging'. We have seen this in Tanzania and in Zambia, in Austria with Haider, Le Pen in France and in Australia with Hanson and the Australian major parties formulation of the 1992 policy of mandatory detention. As Geschiere and Nyamnjoh following many other authors, suggest, 'the rapidly accelerating flows of people, goods and images on a truly global scale not only lead to globalisation, they trigger equally potent tendencies towards localization' (2000, p.425).

9. I am painting this familiar global picture to remind you of the international parallels that exist with Australia's efforts to effectively exclude refugees from the nation. But while these parallels exist it must be emphasised that how each of these countries has gone about inventing and deciding who are the strangers to exclude has followed particular national histories and cultures as in the case of Australia. Coming to terms with those particularities is very important to not only arrive at a thicker description of what globalisation means for all of us and our intimate connection with those nominated as strangers but also because in the particular conditions of each country and situation should lie the particular conditions with which that desire to create strangers can be resisted and even displaced.

10. Globalisation (the global imagining) (and internationalism before that perhaps) positions, situates both the Australian and the refugee as a part of the same global group. This is important for Simmels (1950) sense of the stranger for he considers the idea of the stranger where humanness is disallowed to be a non-relation, for that stranger is not a member of a group which is Simmel's focus. The idea of the group is interesting for this paper because it allows an appreciation of the nation as a social group. For Simmel the stranger should be understood through spatial relations. They are both near and distant and 'a special proportion (of nearness and farness) and reciprocal tension produce the particular, formal relation to the stranger' (1950, p.408). Simmel sets out the argument that 'strangeness' is the moment when it is realised that the relationship considered unique is exposed to the realisation that there are elements of commonness which could be experienced with others and that this relationship has 'no inner and exclusive necessity' (1950, p.407).

11. To read that insight upon the nation might suggest that some Australians at least are jealous of the refugee. That is, the figure of the refugee carries the reminder that nationality is not an exclusive relationship, that nationality is necessarily a becoming. Others, many others, can have a relationship of similar intensity with Australia. The commonness that the refugee reminds Australians of is that this 'strange' refugee is also capable of such a relationship with the nation. At the same time Australians are simultaneously reminded that it may be possible for them to form such a bond with another nation. This tension between realising that others can become Australians by arriving and staying and that Australians too might form such a bond with another country has a particular intensity given the lack of a systematic acknowledgment of Aboriginal Sovereignty. Different Australians will feel differently about the timbre and force of their exclusive relationship with the nation. For many the spectre of forming another relationship with another nation is unthinkable and for others it may remind them all too much of relatively recent experiences of forming that relationship. For very recent arrivals there may be a version of the unthinkable exclusivity that the pressures of very recently becoming 'Australian' has produced. These very different positions will in turn produce very different readings of the refugee, the newest and perhaps most stranger of strangers. In Derridean terms the idea of the group or the individual is unnecessary because the stranger is always within, stabilising while simultaneously not, the subject. It is the movement between these positions that we see between sea and shore.

### Shoring Up Australia

12. In 1770 James Cook arrived on the shores of Australia. Unannounced, knowing no protocols he was a stranger in what he thought a strange land. His presence was quickly

communicated by the Eora and the Dharug peoples but the sense of what was said is lost to us. This single ship was followed by a fleet and soon a flood. A systematic dispersal of Aboriginal people occurred which used massacre, reservations, diseases and 'removal' of children amongst other techniques. The resistance of Aboriginal people was eventually transformed by the sheer multitude of non-Aboriginal people. This displacement of Aboriginal people was done under the grand colonial weirdness called terra nullius, land belonging to no-one, no-one that is until these strangers arrived.

13. This human flooding should have taken on all the mythic paraphernalia that access to a Christian tradition which includes Noah's survival would have given it, but this has never happened. Australia refuses to find its historical icons in the sheer numbers of its 'settling' invaders. The heroism of invasion had to be found in the individual (white) bushman and the battler in the outback not in the multitude. The multitude were imagined as simply filling up an empty land not overcoming a resistant indigenous population so to maintain the myth that no-one was here counter myths had to be produced about individual, lonely survival. We have therefore in the very foundations of colonial Australia two haunted elements- the arrival by sea and the possibility of more than could be imagined following. The shores of Australia are therefore the site of that original claim to belong simply by saying so. For those strangers who continue to arrive by plane but particularly those who come by boat there is in their arrival an un-settling echo of that colonial foundation.

14. But non-Aboriginal Australia's history of 'settlement' through arrival by sea should make with the arrival of new strangers by boat an over-arching commonality. Don't these un-announced strangers remind us of 'ourselves'? Aren't they also 'originary' pioneers? But who are 'ourselves'? In a truly multicultural society there would be no strangers. All communities would be represented, no-one could not belong. But we are a multicultural Australia and in the 'Australia' lies a version of nationalism that still privileges and centres the anglo. As Hage (1998) and Nicoll (2001) have articulated for us; the controlling 'tolerance' at the centre of 'mainstreamed' multiculturalism continues to privilege the anglo-celtic. Moreton-Robinson (2000) would call this I think a particular sort of Australian white race privilege. Anglo-Australians have not understood themselves as one more ethnicity, have not seen the utter 'whiteness' of 'our' institutions in the face of indigenous and 'ethnic' critiques.

15. The particular version of white Australia that had its origins in colonial Australia is most clearly articulated in our bureaucratic regimes. The very modernity of our nation rests upon the idea of creating citizens and non-citizens and so the making of who belongs and who doesn't- to do so you need a state system. For you cannot inhabit the position of citizen unless there is a state sanctioned governmentality which at least partially directs that citizenship. Decisions about who belongs and who doesn't are very complicated ones to make in a settler nation whose non-Aboriginal population has no treaty with the owners of the land and who depend upon our being-hereness to continue to be here. Without any formal engagement with Aboriginal sovereignty the importance of following form, of joining the queue, of following the law, who's law? becomes all. A 'legitimate' claim to citizenship is supposedly produced through such processes and this idea is certainly played out in how non-strangers talk of unannounced strangers.

16. The tabloid press has employed expressions like swamping, unstoppable tide and queue jumpers. The non-tabloids and government employ terms like illegal immigrants and economic refugees. Those detained at Woomera have been called 'scum' in a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald which in communicating ideas of disgust and something that floats on water has resonances beyond the writers effort to dismiss (SMH 2002). From Port Headland there also comes the most explicit invocation of the refugee as a dangerous contagion. When it was proposed that a group of refugee children from the detention centre could be bussed to the Port Headland swimming pool for a social outing this was opposed on the grounds that 'we don't know what they might have'. The municipal swimming pool, that fenced in water of social possibility is reduced to who is and isn't allowed through the turnstiles. This is not a new phenomenon as the late Charlie Perkins and Darlene Johnson would remind us. If we understand the municipal swimming pool as the beaches of the inland than we should not be surprised at the efforts to contain what that site might produce. Similarly the use of representations like illegal immigrant and queue jumper takes for granted that the orderly processes of becoming a known stranger are available to all, everywhere and upon this idea lies the rationale for detaining all strangers who have not arrived with a visa, that flimsy paper or electronic code that keeps you one side of the fence or the other. All of these representations and bureaucratic institutions formalise and continue an anglo colonial sensibility which exposes the new strangers to categories of deviancy and cries of unAustralian simply because they expose the white heat of Australian racism.

#### **The Refugee Who is Already Within**

17. The 'new' stranger in Australia bears the burden of representing not only what 'Australia' was but what we might become at the very moment when globalisation has done so much to shake any certainties about any idea of what constitutes a nation.

18. Only in the figure of the un-announced stranger and on the body of the refugee does the no-longer white Australian nation get to exorcise its own illegitimate colonial beginnings and the potential displacement of its anglo centre.

19. In this position the refugee is representative of white anxieties about an unsettled past and re-activates the spectre of non-white multiculturalism that potentially decentres the white and normative multiculturalism through the sheer numbers of arrivals. The fact that some of the new strangers are arriving by boat is particularly fraught. It is not enough to simply compare the numbers of refugees Australia takes compared to other nations because the logics of international best practice and other nations must always be carefully contextualised. To be simultaneously haunted by both a past and possible present is to suggest that the refugee cannot enter for they are already within. (Derrida, 125: 2000). They are the past, a supposedly frightening (in white hegemonic terms) future and a 'real' present. As temporal avatars, liminal crossers they accrue to themselves that range of fears outlined by Douglas and then Kristeva. With each temporal crossing, they are within and also without and so they become the abject. What else to do with such unspeakable symbols but incarcerate them, contain them and if possible expel them. In Australia the detention centres are always to the west of the eastern centre. In the western suburbs, in the central desert, in the far north west; perhaps we are making of these places what

Australia was once to England- sites of human disposal far, far from the centre.

20. One of the very dangerous aspects of the current context is that the means to contain these symbols within the modern nation have expanded rather than contracted with the declining status of the nation. Precisely because more and more decisions about economies and budgets are being decided by global flows of capital the role of the nation as granter of tenders to camps is expanded. The role of the nation state as camp guard has increased (Bauman 1998). Global flows of capital demand that only some categories of worker should be able to move freely. These include the executive elite and some technocrats and at the other end of the scale limited amounts of very poor workers who become the domestic workers for national elites. Otherwise the nation as defined through its national borders is made absolutely responsible for preventing the easy flows of labour across its borders. Within globalisation the territorial principle as Bauman (1998:67) calls it is no contradiction but of vital importance to larger flows of capital. This administrative border guarding has become the nation state. Because the nation has now given the particular task of holding refugees to private companies, as happens in Australia, the ethos informing the control of the refugee body is economically explicit. They are paid so much money for the efficient keeping of people, more money for no disturbances, bonuses for lack of media attention or critical incidents.

21. There is a presumed ethics in this. Look we may be haunted by our history but in the keeping of refugees where we keep them or how we keep them is just someone's business. Divided into money making tasks the banality of the evil is minutely distributed in ways that should alarm more than Ahrendt readers. As Taylor describes the relationship of those contracted by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to maintain the 'immigration (sic) detention' facilities thus, 'The attainment of outcome standards represents a cost to the contractor in terms of both money and effort' and it is no surprise to find that 'accountability mechanisms' are not effective in ensuring the human rights of immigration detainees (Taylor, 2000: 57 & 90).

22. The possibility of different policies are many. The most spoken of and obvious is the Swedish model which is simply to keep refugees in a secure centre (secure in this sense from the travails of their journey, secure in the sense of safe from threat) long enough to establish their identity, to never incarcerate children longer than a week and to release them into a community. The refugee has every reason to stay in contact with the community base as it is from there that information about their case flows and where jobs are listed. The idea of a community based program is perhaps threatening in another way to anglo-Australian nationalism. Without the fences declaring these folk are not us we will find they are exactly like many of us. It is not after all their difference that is so fearful in a multicultural nation but their sameness. The ability to 'pass' as one kind of Australian reflects the experience of diversity and simultaneously exposes what the anglo is not and what the anglo (has? will?) become. This performative incitement to recognise not self (the displaced Indigenous other) and the possibility of unending transposition (becoming one more ethnicity) threatens both division and dissolution to both the idea of a 'settled' Australia and the anglo-celtic white subject of multiculturalism.

23. There is no need for the radical kinds of hospitality that Lot perhaps personifies. In this world of globalised nations with nationalised memories, we need the more modest, reticent hospitality of people who may be passing by. This comes not from a sense of tolerance, of being securely in place to offer hospitality but rather from a postcolonial heritage based upon our own colonial lies. In this version of hospitality, non-Aboriginal Australians would ask that the refugee be perfectly at home for we are not. It is not a call to 'at homeness' but a constantly negotiated refuge. One step toward this is to reclaim control of the detention centres as government entities where education not money is one of the guiding principles and where an ethic of refuge informs what takes place. We older strangers are attempting to make a nation in this post-national moment through an appreciation of indigenous histories and a foregrounding of the doubtful category 'settler' nation. Newer strangers will also have to learn these things but that is after they have been fed and warmed and begun to tell us their story for what they might undo of our national paranoias.

24. Transforming the national mythologies that underscore the treatment of strangers such as refugees and asylum seekers should therefore begin with the nation itself. So how might we do this? First of all there needs to be concentrated and holistic relationships with Aboriginal communities and in particular those in which detention centres are set up. It is very important to be aware of the range of Aboriginal opinion about these issues but everytime the indigenous and the refugee come together a positive unsettling of Australia occurs. The Aboriginal Provisional Government is I think the only formal political group that supports an ongoing and retrospective ban on 'immigration' but this is not of course necessarily indicative of Aboriginal opinion across Australia.

25. At the same time the nexus between law and whiteness needs to be broken and this can only be done through a hospitality that is deeply ethical in what might be called a Derridean style. The importance of Derrida's formulation of welcome via Levinas for me is that 'hospitality opens as intentionality, but it cannot become an object, thing, or theme' (2000:58) Thus the sort of welcome that confirms the tolerant citizenship of the anglo-celtic is no welcome at all but an object of legitimacy. A welcome that is conditional upon proving the certainty, the truth of the visa, the origin of the stranger constantly confirms that these laws are true and reflect an Australian rather than Aboriginal sovereignty. Foregrounding Aboriginal sovereignty re-opens the bordered shores to the possibilities of the liminal beach. On the beach, rather than the shore lie the possibilities for non-Aboriginal Australia to experience a becoming of uncertain strangers.

26. This is the very least we non-Aboriginal Australians can do to save ourselves for it is only within the figure of the refugee that the hope of an Australia with integrity can come into play. Only through a constant openness and expressed hospitality to the stranger who is also ourself can we simultaneously decentre the racist imagining of the anglo-Australian and transform our relationship with indigenous Australia. There is no resolution in this. Only a constant negotiation between welcoming strangers, farewelling ourselves and discovering the possibility of integrity within our shores.

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