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Australia's "Colombo Plan": the Beacon of Western Knowledge in the Asia-Pacific Region

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In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Australian government initiated the Overseas Student Plan as part of the humanitarian program known as the Colombo Plan. By allowing "Asian" students to enter the well-patrolled borders of white Australia to acquire skills and knowledge useful to the 'development' of their own countries, Australia symbolically positioned itself as benevolent educator to its multiple Asian neighbouring others. At the same time, the Overseas Student Plan was understood as crucial to endear the goodwill of recently independent Asian nations, promoting political and trade relations ultimately favourable to Australia in spite of its racially exclusionary migration and population policies. In light of this historical contextualisation, this article demonstrates the discursive complexities underpinning the successive positioning of Asian countries as equal partners of Australia in the process of internationalisation of higher education. Further, it shows the pernicious persistence of the Australian colonial imaginary in shaping the understanding of Asian students as subjects essentially lacking the characteristics marking the epistemological superiority of the West. In so doing, it argues that the representation of Asian students as irreducibly different to their domestic counterparts relies on the historical construction of the knowledges of Aboriginal people and non-English speaking migrants as cultural impediments to their full inclusion in Australian educational institutions.

Keywords: International students, white benevolence, racial desirability, Aboriginal dispossession

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, successive Australian governments had sought to acquire political and economic leadership in the Asia-Pacific area

by augmenting trade and diplomatic relations with their neighbouring countries (Burke, 2006, p. 338; Oakman, 2010, pp. 178-217). On a practical level, this effort took place within the Commonwealth humanitarian project known as the Colombo Plan and materialised in the form of financial aid and an Overseas Student Plan. By virtue of the Overseas Student Plan, thousands of South and Southeast Asian students were funded to come to Australia to accrue the knowledge necessary to induce economic development and political stability in their home countries (Oakman, 2010, pp. 178-217). On a discursive level, this effort was couched within the standing trope of the 'White Man's burden', which amounted to the self-positioning of white Australia as an "authoritative 'master' that has the resources and *innate benevolent* character" to assist its geographic neighbours (Laforteza, 2007, p. 4, original emphasis). As the Australian External Affairs Minister, Percy Spender, claimed at the Commonwealth conference on Foreign Affairs which led to the creation of the Colombo Plan: "Australia was ready to make her full contribution to those of her neighbours who were threatened with acute economic distress." On this claim, other ministers attending the conference commented: "[they] were obviously impressed at Australia's vigorous approach to the whole of the South-East Asian problem. It had not been forced; *it came voluntarily*" (*The Sydney Herald Morning*, 1950, p. 2, emphasis added).[1]

Additionally, as Elaine Laforteza argues, the rhetoric of the 'White Man's burden', understood as a duty to "'colonise' and 'civilise' non-white people" (2007, p. 3), has amounted in Australia to an "ongoing process of management that is aimed at constructing a foundational claim for white sovereignty" (Riggs, as cited in Laforteza, 2007, p. 3). From this perspective, Australia's involvement in the Colombo Plan can be considered as an attempt to secure for itself an "authoritative white ontology of being and belonging" in both the land it dispossessed and the geographic area where it lays (Riggs, as cited in Laforteza, 2007, p. 3). It is not by chance that, on the occasion of the conference mentioned above, Spender specified: the "East could be rescued" only by Australia liaising with the "other member-nations of the Commonwealth and with some form of aid from the United States" (*The Sydney Herald Morning*, 1950, p. 2). Spender's claims can be thus understood as a symbolic assertion of the legitimacy of Australia leadership and its will to compete on an equal footing with other Western nations who had, likewise, political and economic interests in the region, namely the United Kingdom and the United States. To prove so, white Australia had to demonstrate it possessed not only an inherent benevolence but also, the natural custodianship of Western knowledge. If, as the then British leader of the Opposition, Clement Attlee, once stated: "the West has the skills which can unlock the door to the wealth of the East" (*The Sydney Herald Morning*, 1953, p. 3), Australia had to prove first to have the "skills" to be counted as part of the "West". Thus, the necessity for Australia to project internationally a sense of intellectual confidence, which was, as Rachel Burke indicates, epitomised in its self-representation as an authoritative "educator" of Colombo Plan students, who were infantilised as white Australians' "surrogate children" (2006, pp. 333-337).

[1] For further details on the contributions of Percy Spender at Commonwealth Conference on Foreign Affairs held in Colombo in January 1950, see: [Colombo Plan] Meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers, January 1950—Conference Papers A10617, 1950/1, NAA.

The Overseas Student Plan predates the current system of international education in Australia and, as a form of aid, it had lasted until the Hawke-Keating Governments transformed it into an industry in the mid-1980s (Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke, & Fraser, 1995, p. 7). Since then, international education has been conceived more as a form of trade and international cooperation than humanitarianism, and international students have advocated their rights more as consumers than students (Sebastian, 2009).[2] Yet, as this article will reveal, the self-representation of Australia as an authoritative "educator" has outlived the phasing out of the Colombo Plan and so has the concomitant representation of 'Asian' international students as "surrogate children".

By drawing on several conceptualisations of whiteness in Australia (Stratton, 1998: 1999; Hage, 1998; Perera, 2005, Nicolacopoulos & Vassilacopoulos, 2004), this article will argue that throughout the history of Australian international education, orientalist representations of international students have been employed to mark the epistemic inferiority of Asian culture and elicit cultural assimilation for non-white migrants. Moreover, I will illustrate how these representations have rested upon and thus reproduce, the ranking of non Anglo-Celtic migrants into a hierarchy of racial desirability based on their potential to assimilate culturally to white norms. In conclusion, it will demonstrates how this work of ranking is not new but symptomatic of the continued denial of the collective subjectivity of Aboriginal populations and their sovereignty.

Australia at the End of the Twentieth Century: "Asianise or Perish"[3]

On the occasion of the Tiananmen Square uprising in May 1989, 26,000 applications of Chinese nationals to come to study in Australia were put on hold for the fear that they could use their student visa as a means to obtain political asylum in Australia (Industry Commissions, 1991, p. 51).[4] This decision led to the financial collapse of many schools and colleges offering courses such as English as a second language and business alongside diplomatic tensions between the Australian government and the Government of Popular Republic of China. This crisis also severely damaged the reputation of the newborn export industry of international education of Australia. To rescue this reputation, the then Minister of Education launched a new educational policy in 1992. Popularly

[2] In his unpublished thesis, Eugene Sebastian argues that international students had succeeded in obtaining educational policy concessions by adopting and reinterpreting government language of liberalisation. After a few years of modestly successful mobilisation and campaigning, international students' collective actions began to be grounded on their increased economic importance to Australia rather than on the political and universal rights to education. For further details see: Sebastian (2009).
[3] Quote borrowed from Ang (1999).
[4] At the time, international students had to leave Australia to apply for permanent residency but they could request a *change of status*. Change of status meant the possibility for them, like any other holders of temporary visas, to obtain permanent residency without leaving the country if they satisfied the requirement of exceptional circumstances, e.g. marriage to an Australian citizen or relevance of their professional skills to the labour needs of Australia. For further information on this practice in the 1980s, see: Secretariat to the Committee to Advise on Australia's Immigration Policies (1987).

known as the policy of internationalisation, this new policy aimed to counter the "overseas criticism that Australia's approach was too narrowly commercial with insufficient recognition of student needs and of the benefit of international education" (Beazley, 1992, p. 5).

International reputation aside, the new educational policy was also part and parcel of the Hawke-Keating Governments' agenda to reshape "social identities and categories" of Australia in line with the economic objective of strengthening, once again, its position in Asia (Johnson, 1996, pp. 9-15; Stratton, 1998, pp. 200-201). On a discursive level, this agenda was inducted by articulating the value of cultural pluralism, then characterising the policy of multiculturalism, within the new neoliberal state priority of pursuing economic efficiency and global competitiveness. On a practical level, it led to the enactment of the 1992 policy of productive diversity, which sought to encourage Australian firms to capitalise on the cultural and linguistic diversity of their workforce to secure "increased innovation and creativity, employee retention, increased understanding of diverse consumer markets and an enhanced community profile" (Pyke, 2005, p. 2).[5]

Cultural and linguistic diversity were therefore represented more as an economic strength of the nation than as a threat to its social unity. In line with this representation, the policy of internationalisation constituted an attempt to acknowledge the cultural differences of international students. It prompted educational institutions to enlarge their programs of student and staff exchange (from Australia to other countries) and introduce "courses and teaching methods [that are] more internationally competitive through links with business and through agreements with overseas governments and educational institutions" (Beazley, 1992, p. 1). Yet, as Fazal Rizvi and Lucas Walsh argue, this attempt was destined to be ineffective in that it held cultural differences as monolithic and fixed cultural formations addable to pre-existing educational and organisational programs rather than as the results of ordinary pedagogical and administrative discursive practices which systematically privilege certain values, competencies and traditions of knowledge while marginalising others (1998, p. 9).[6] By refusing to acknowledge that cultural differences and identities are the historical product of "educational discourse structures" which seek to "normalise and legitimate certain existing patterns of power relations" (p. 9), the new educational policy merely contributed to the reproduction rather than reformation of the conditions of academic exclusion and failure of international students in Australia. As Rizvi and Walsh point out,

> Favoured ways of representing, speaking and acting, as well as favoured conceptions of knowledge and skills, are the cultural capital of such educational discourse structures which govern and control students' engagement with the curriculum. Indeed *the success of students often depends on the extent to which they can orient themselves to the dominant group's educational discourse*. Those

[5] For further details on the concept of productive diversity and its employment in Australia see: Migliorino, Miltenyi & Robertson (1994) and Cope & Kalantzis (1997).
[6] In the context of their article "Difference, globalisation and the internationalisation of curriculum", the authors refer to the conceptual distinction between diversity and difference by citing Homi Bhabha's position with regard to the limits of the liberal concept of diversity. For further details on the critique of the concept of cultural diversity, see: Bhabha (2006).

> who either do not understand or resist the dominant discourse become the failures of a system unsympathetic to difference. Some become excluded entirely. (pp. 9-10, emphasis added)

As anticipated earlier, international education was first introduced in Australia as a form of humanitarianism, for which Australia was accepting the 'burden' of helping its neighbouring countries via the bestowment of Western knowledge and skills. As Burke observes, the international representation of Australia as authoritative "educator" of the Asia-Pacific region was complemented in local metropolitan and rural newspapers with the one of white-Australian citizens as responsible parents of Colombo Plan students (2006, p. 339).[7] Conversely construed as "surrogate children", the students coming to study and live in Australia were depicted in the same fora as an undifferentiated group of grateful, passive and easily impressionable recipients of aid (pp. 339-346). These depictions bespeak of the long-standing Australian orientalist tradition of representing Asian nations and their populations monolithically as a passive and homogenous object of Western knowledge and intervention (see Broinowski, 1982). Orientalism is here understood as a symbolic order and set of perceptual practices that define the contours of the subjectivity of the 'oriental' other in such a way that encounters between 'Asian' students and their 'hosts' were guaranteed to occur under the auspices of an "uneven exchange" (Laforteza, 2007, p. 9). It is no coincidence that, so infantilised, the cultural heritages and knowledge traditions of Colombo Plan students were at the best represented as a matter of "anthropological curiosity" (Burke, 2006, pp. 340-341). The students thus were expected to adjust to the "Australian way of life" without any reciprocity of knowledge exchange (pp. 344-346).

This expectation signals the passage from a total exclusion of 'Asians' from the territorial and cultural borders of Australia to a temporary inclusion of them provided they adapted to the Australian mainstream culture. According to Jon Stratton, this possibility had emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War as a result of race being reconceptualised from a signifier of biological to cultural differences (1998, pp. 43-53). This redefinition can be also linked to Ghassan Hage's theorisation of whiteness as a form of cultural capital which migrants can accumulate through assimilation (1998). This expectation hence suggests that a partial inclusion of 'Asian' students in Australia had become possible provided that they deployed their education within the 'Australian way of life' as a means of minimising their physical racial visibility. In this sense, the depiction of Asian

[7] Contrary to the public emphasis on the humanitarian nature of the program, international students were always partly or completely privately funded. The program encompassed two types of international students: those who were entirely sponsored by the Australian Government, and those who were privately funded but paid reduced fees. Because both groups were allowed to enter and study in Australia to improve the living conditions of their countries of origin, they were generally both considered recipients of Australian aid. In any case, the number of private students who came to study in Australia under the Colombo Plan was far bigger than the number of government-sponsored students. These students were predominantly ethnic Chinese from Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong and were mostly enrolled in secondary schools and universities. For further details on this distinction, see: Nesdale, Simkin, Sang, Burke & Fraser (1995) and Megarrity (2005).

students as "surrogate children" stands for the intersection of orientalism with whiteness, hence their reciprocal specification, in a historical time where blunt state racist exclusionary practices had become unacceptable internationally (see Winant, 2004).

Taking Rizvi and Walsh's reflections on the limits of the new educational policy of internationalisation into consideration, it becomes relevant then to investigate how the orientalist legacy of the representation of 'Asian' international students as "surrogate children" has affected the way in which their cultural differences have been construed more recently within discourses regarding their pedagogy and administration. To do so, the next section will analyse the academic discourse of support services for international students, which became prominent during the transition from exclusion to political and economic validation of cultural diversity which characterised the educational policy of internationalisation outlined above.

Asian International Students and the Australian Western Will to Mix

In the years following the phasing out of the Overseas Student Plan, The International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges Ltd (IDP) began to organise workshops on international education to provide a platform for discussing "the challenges and the problems posed by the influx of full-fee students" (Williams, 1989, p. x).[8] As a result of one of these workshops, international education scholars and administrators were invited to submit papers for a collection titled *Overseas Students: Policy and Practice*. Edited by a former vice-chancellor of the University of Sydney, Sir Bruce Williams, this collection epitomises Australian universities' institutional response to the "challenges" posed by overseas students in terms of academic performance and learning style. In this regard, it is worth examining Bryan Burke's account of the problems and difficulties that international students were generally supposed to experience as they came to study in Australia (1989, pp. 73-86).

At the time of the publication of this collection, Burke was the coordinator of the International Student Centre of the University of New South Wales, as well as the author of several publications (1986, 1988) regarding "various aspects of the post-arrival experiences of overseas students, not least, academic adjustment and performance" (Jones, 1989, p.40). From this perspective, his account of the "difficulties commonly experienced by overseas students in Australia" (Burke, 1989, p. 73) is particularly illustrative of the way in which the representation of 'Asian' students as subjects in need of the supervision of white Australians came to be incorporated into the new neoliberal ethos of competitive economic efficiency by being re-articulated into the language of international students' "needs" and "support services".

[8] The International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges Ltd (IDP) is still active, and it is an organisation that formally represents and provides services for all public universities and private educational institutions subscribed to it. For further information on this organisation, see the IDP website: http://www.australia.idp.com/about_us/about_idp_australia.aspx

In his paper "Support Services for Overseas Students", Burke examines both "policy and practical issues" involved in the provision of such services by discussing in detail two sets of problems deemed to be specific to international students: lack of meaningful interactions with domestic students and academic adjustment (1989, p. 73). In discussing the first set of problems, Burke states that this is an issue faced in general by all students going to study overseas:

> The failure of visiting students to establish friendship with their host has been widely documented for foreign students in both Western and Asian countries. Visiting students not only associate almost exclusively with fellow nationals, but their close relationships are generally limited to their compatriots; relationship with host nationals tend to be restricted to formal and utilitarian contracts. (1989, p. 77)

The use of neutral adjectives such as foreigner and visiting seems to suggest that Burke approaches Asian and Western students as equals. Allegedly, both groups of students tend to miss the opportunity of establishing meaningful relationships with their hosts as a defensive mechanism employed to avoid re-adaptation difficulties upon their return home (Burke, 1989, p. 78). Nonetheless, this initial appearance of equality is immediately contradicted by a following passage in which Burke comments on the failure of visiting students to meet the objective of "developing mutual understanding and fostering good relations" between countries:

> In discussing international education programs, it is generally taken for granted that studying in another country is an effective way of developing mutual understanding and fostering good relations. However these values may be held more strongly by program planners and administrators than by the student participants. (1989, p. 78)

In explaining the cause of such a failure, the author distinguishes abruptly between Asian and Western students:

> Students from Asian countries tend to have a predominantly pragmatic view of their educational experience, seeing it primarily as a way to obtain a valuable qualification, improve their English proficiency, and gain some understanding of Western ways. By contrast, exchange students or study abroad students from Western countries typically seek interaction with the locals and want to develop greater awareness of the host culture. (Burke, 1989, p. 78)

Once again, an orientalist conceptualisation of cultural differences is employed to rationalise the lack of meaningful relationships between Australian 'guests' and 'hosts'. According to this conceptualisation, 'Asians'' cultural orientation to education is already known to the West and congruently reducible to a prescriptive explanation: 'Asian' students' indifference to genuine cultural exchange. It is obvious that this reductive explanation allows Burke to ignore the historical marginalisation of non-Western traditions of knowledges in Australian educational institutions. It is less evident that this explanation enables the author to displace successfully the responsibility of forming meaningful social relationships from Australian educational institutions and students to international students. This displacement takes place through a few metonymic slides. The first metonymic slide occurs when Burke equates an alleged Western will to interact with, and learn from, other cultures to the Australian international

education programs' planners and administrators' by simply indicating that visiting 'Western' students are "typically" willing to interact with host nationals and cultures. As a result of this first slide, both Australian educational institutions and students are uniformly excused from any responsibility just for being 'Western', hence culturally determined to establish meaningful relationships with their international counterparts. Conversely, the second metonymic slide occurs when Burke associates the failure of visiting students to establish meaningful relationships with their hosts with the purported 'Asian' pragmatic attitude mentioned above. Because of this attitude, 'Asian' students are indifferent to learning about Western culture and are thus responsible for frustrating the Western will to know and mix with other cultures as this is represented and embodied by both Australian educational programs' planners and administrators and students.

The metonymic slides from Western to Australian and from international to Asian are even more evident when the author discusses the second set of problems affecting international students: academic adjustment. In discussing this set of problems, Burke commences by stating that many scholars agree on the fact that a lack of English proficiency negatively affects the academic performance of international students (1989, p. 79). Drawing on Ballard's findings (1980), Burke reports that overseas students are commonly disadvantaged by an inadequate level of English proficiency in both academic writing and participation in class discussion. Burke also argues that overseas students are furthermore disadvantaged by their cultural reticence to question the authority of their teachers (1989, p. 79). Moreover, in further discussing the learning difficulties faced by international students in Australia, he writes:

> The language and communication problems of overseas students may be further compounded by different learning styles and *inefficient* approaches to study … Overseas students from countries with *distinctively different cultures* need to be alerted to some of the new learning situations to which they will be exposed in tertiary study. They need to develop listening and note-taking skills to cope with lectures, to understand and be able to use the library system, to learn more *effective* and *efficient* reading techniques, to learn how to structure essays, reports and other written assignments, to prepare for various forms of assessment and to understand laboratory instructions and procedures. (Burke, 1989, p. 81, emphasis added)

In this passage, the author slides from learning styles and traditions to approaches, skills, techniques, instructions and procedures. The slide from one set of concepts to another is not devoid of consequences. Whereas learning styles, traditions, and cultures are qualified as being either different or new, international students' learning practices and skills are consistently described as being either deficient or ineffective. From a conceptual point of view, styles and traditions of learning cannot be completely reduced to a host of skills and practices. Differences between epistemic systems cannot be translated exclusively in terms of effective ways of reading, taking notes or following instructions. In Burke's account, it is precisely the need for translation that is missing in that differences between styles of learning are conceived as lacks. As such, cultural differences do not need to be translated or mutually accommodated but must be overcome.

Yet in defining international students' countries of origin as characterised by "distinctively different cultures", Burke appears to be as inclusive as possible. In effect, all the cultures in the world could be understood as being distinctively different and, hence, have idiosyncratic traditions of learning and knowledge productions. However, it is sufficient to go back a few pages to notice how the author already narrowed the range of possibilities down to only one option: "Differences in the style and traditions of learning between *Western* and *Asian* countries frequently cause difficulty. Overseas students often find it difficult *to master* critical analysis, patterns of arguments and principles of relevance" (Burke, 1989, p. 75, emphasis added).

The slide from Australian to Western, and from international to Asian, is thus accomplished and so is the understanding of their difficulties within an orientalist conceptualisation of their cultural differences. They are in fact equalised to each other and reduced accordingly to a monolithic block of values imagined as oppositional to Australian educational and cultural ones. Positioned as bearers of a set of negotiable lacks, Asian international students can therefore, at the best, aspire to acquire those skills which have made Western traditions of knowledge universal: "critical analysis", "patterns of arguments" and "principles of relevance". It is not by any chance that Rizvi and Walsh have emphasised that only those international students who manage the expectation of unilateral cultural adaptation that are deemed successful (1998, pp. 9-10).

"Asian" International Students, Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Onto-Pathology of White Australian Subjectivity

At this stage of the analysis, it seems obvious to conclude that international students, at least until the Hawke-Keating Governments, were irrevocably understood as being 'Asian' and, as such, discursively positioned as being the irreducible other of their domestic counterparts. This conclusion is partially correct in that Burke's understanding of Australia domestic students is not as homogenous as it appears to be. Reading through his paper it is possible to observe that not all domestic students are understood as being equally equipped with "effective" and "efficient" learning techniques and practices. To elaborate, this section will focus on some marginal comments that the author provides with regard to domestic students. For instance, at the beginning of the "Support Services for Overseas Students" paper, Burke states that international and local students negotiate similar 'personal' problems in transitioning from secondary to tertiary studies. These problems are nonetheless aggravated for international students by their status as foreigner and full-fee payer students (1989, pp. 73-74). This opening contrast hence seems to reinforce the impression that Burke conceives of international and domestic students as two groups culturally irreducible to each other. Yet, his parsing of the specific needs of international students with respect to differences within the domestic student cohort reveals a complexity to the seeming domestic/ international student binary initially set up.

> Although overseas students confront similar problems of personal development, and experience many of the difficulties encountered by local students, there are obvious differences. These need to be given special attention if overseas students' academic progress and personal development is to be maximised and disruption kept to a minimum. (Of course the same applies to other groups entering our

> institutions with "special" needs or a different background such as Aborigines and migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds). (p. 73)

As the passage in brackets shows quite clearly, not all domestic students are conceived as being the same. This second category is indeed multiple. It comprises both students with "special needs" and "different background". The author does not specify what he means for "special needs". Nonetheless, we can safely assume that he refers to students who are differently abled and to students who come from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds. Likewise, he does not clarify what he means for "migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds". It is not clear whether the migrants he refers to are first generation migrants or their descendants, whether former British colonies such as India and Singapore count as an English speaking background or not. Fortunately, the author clarifies these ambiguities when, later on, in the same paper, he states that a university staff trained to "be sensitive to cultural differences in traditions, values, and expectations" of international students would be equally effective for addressing the difficulties faced by local students coming "from a non Anglo-Celtic background" (pp. 76-77). Clarifications like this one reveal how Burke ambiguously oscillates from indiscriminately contrasting the experience of international students against domestic students to selectively comparing their academic difficulties to those supposedly faced by local students who do not have an Anglo-Celtic background: Aborigines and non-white migrants. This oscillation, in turn, does the work of further defining the Australian academic tradition of knowledge as being not just Western but specifically Anglo-Celtic. This delimitation is not coincidental but symptomatic of the history of race relations in Australia starting from its invasion.

As Stratton argues, the category itself of Anglo-Celtic can be regarded as the result of such history.[9] In spite of being an historical fiction, this category has represented what is still understood as being the dominant culture in Australia and, as such, employed to divide the Australian population into whites and ethnics during and after the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism (Stratton, 1998, pp. 9-20). Elsewhere, Stratton also defines whiteness as "a constructed category, the meaning, and the content, of which have both varied considerably over time" (1999, p. 171). In line with Rizvi and Walsh's understanding of cultural differences and identities, this definition aptly emphasises how whiteness itself is the historical product of economic, cultural and social relations. At the same time, Stratton's dichotomic distinction of the Australian population into white and ethnic overlooks the multiplicity of ways in which diverse national groups have been and continue to be differently racialised and positioned within and without the geographical and socio-cultural borders of Australia. From this perspective, Hage's work on whiteness might assist us in understanding how non-white migrants, whether temporary or permanent, are not conceived by the

[9] Stratton prefers to use the category Anglo-Celtic to emphasise the later inclusion of the Irish into Australian definitions of whiteness in contrast to the original identification of whiteness solely with Britishness. The inclusion of the Irish marked an important shift in the history of the Australian Federation in that it furthered the distance that Australia, as a nation, had taken from the English 'Motherland'. For further details, see also: Stratton (1999, 2004).

state homogeneously and hence require different levels of assimilation labour (1998, pp. 53-67).[10]

Hage's approach to whiteness is more focused on the ways in which it is used in everyday life to determine national belonging than the historical one of Stratton. In light of this approach, Hage notices how whiteness can be considered as a loose array of cultural values, practices and physical attributes sanctioned as national (1998, p. 53). As mentioned above, he conceptualises whiteness as a form of cultural capital that non-white migrants can accumulate over time through assimilation (p. 54). Yet, as he highlights, the cultural capitals which migrants either bring with them or are born with in Australia are not the same but a priori assessed as being more or less assimilabile to an ideal Anglo-Celtic citizen. As a consequence, some migrant groups will always be regarded as being more foreign than others regardless the length of their stay or lineage in Australia (pp. 56-57). Most importantly, he emphasises how these same migrant groups will always be reminded that they are "like White Australians" instead of being "naturally White Australians" (p. 61). For Hage, it is this distinction which enables white Australians to maintain a position of dominance in the racially discursive field of the nation. Because of it, they are the only ones who can claim to naturally possess all the cultural qualities necessary to govern any other in the best interest of all. He understands Australian national identity then as a field of power where the Anglo-Celtic group has to struggle to "impose a specific national order in which they have a dominant position" (p. 65). This national order is, in turn, an idealised representation of the position of white Australians in the field of the nation and, as such, it is defined by Hage as an expression of a fantasy of white supremacy (p. 18).

From Hage's perspective on whiteness, we can begin to understand why Burke aligns international students with domestic students having a "different background". If we consider Australian academic traditions of knowledge as a form of naturalised national cultural capital we could then understand how the dominant group has to position both international and non-white domestic students as subjects who need to accumulate Western learning skills to be considered like Anglo-Celtic students. Yet, it still remains to explain why Burke represents Asian students' academic capital not only as "distinctively different" from the Australian one but also as "ineffective" and "inefficient". The consistent use of these adjectives to describe 'Asian' students' knowledge and learning practices betrays a moralising judgment of inferiority. Understandably, Hage's model of whiteness, focused as it is on nationalistic practices of spatial management, exclusion and inclusion, does not say much about how cultural

[10] Most recently, Stratton has complicated his distinction of the Australian population into white and ethnic by applying the concept of "honorary whiteness" to 'Asian' international students to argue that their increased presence in the upper and middle class does not undermine but further consolidate white hegemony in Australia. He argues so by showing how the bestowment of "honorary whiteness" is always premised on the acceptance of core Australian values by 'Asian' professionals and hence their 'white' status is conditional. Yet, he does not examine the discursive mechanisms through which their original cultural capital is rendered as non-Australian or less than Australian in the first place. In this sense, Ghassan Hage's conceptualisation of whiteness is more pertinent to grasp the nuances of racial identity and cultural stratification in Australia. For further details on the concept of honorary whiteness and its application to 'Asian' professionals, see: Stratton (2009).

capitals deemed different from the national one are assessed by Australians in terms of value, and whether they are ranked accordingly. From this perspective, Suvendrini Perera's (2005) work on whiteness in Australia may be more suitable to fully understand the consequences of the positioning of international students as 'Asian'.

In her article "Who will I become? The multiple formations of Australian whiteness", Perera unpacks the construct of Australian whiteness to retrieve the multiplicity of racial groups existing in Australia before and after the country became a Federated nation-state in 1901 and shed light on how all these groups were differently positioned within a "racialised scale of desirability for non-white labour that includes Aboriginal and Islander people as well as Chinese, Kanak and Indian workers" (2005, pp. 31-32). She contends that in Australia whiteness "was manifested as a palpable, material and eminently quantifiable category against which those to be excluded were measured, rather than one that has functioned as an implicit structuring presence" (p. 31). Most importantly, she writes:

> It is important to note that the definition and the measure of Australian whiteness was, from the outset, derived and asserted in relation to its multiple racial others, rather than to a single reference point [Aboriginal blackness]. Spatial as well as racial hierarchies came into play in positioning the subjects of the nation against its asymmetrical non-white others, indigenes and aliens. (p. 31)

Perera's definition of Australian whiteness as an identity category which content and value was "derived and asserted" in relation to a multiplicity of racial groups helps us to understand how the positioning of international students as 'Asians' not only amounts to a unilateral expectation of cultural adaptation but also functions as a measure of the value attached to their contribution to Australian universities.

Taking Hage's and Perera's definitions of whiteness together, it is then possible to conclude that the iterative depiction of international students' cultural differences in orientalist terms has served two main purposes with regard to their inclusion in Australian educational institutions and broader society. Firstly, it has worked as a mean to devalue their cultural capitals as well as an injunction to convert these capitals into more recognisable practices and techniques of learning. Secondly, it has contributed to position international students within a transforming hierarchy of racialised positions in which domestic students, like migrants in general, are already distinguished and differently valued in relation to students with an Anglo-Celtic background. Yet, it remains to explain how white Australians have managed to acquire, and maintain throughout time, the capacity to establish themselves as the yardstick against which to measure and differently rank the cultural desirability of any other racial group.

In this regard, Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos' work on the ontological conditions characterising white-Australians' relation to the land assist us in digging into their self-positioning as dominant alongside unravelling the deep-seated effects of the violent dispossession of Aboriginal people on contemporary relations between white and non-white migrants (2004, pp. 32-47). On the one hand, for these authors, Australians as members of a Western liberal order are encouraged to relate to each other as property owning subjects.

On the other hand, Aboriginal people have been denied this kind of subjectivity because of their continued dispossession. As a consequence, Aboriginal collective subjectivity has been rendered as non-Australian (p. 33). Nevertheless, white Australians "need to be recognised as rightful owners" of the land in order to "exercise orderly possession and control" over it (p. 33). Because of their occupation, white Australians cannot expect this recognition to come from the same people they have dispossessed. According to the authors, this paradox has engendered, and perpetuated over time, an ontological condition of anxiety, which they define aptly as "the onto-pathology of white Australian subjectivity" (p. 33). Historically, Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos argue, this recognition has come instead from a more "suitable 'other'", for example Southern European migrants, who they define as "white-non-white" or as "white-but-non-white enough" (p. 32). According to the authors, these migrants have been positioned as "the perpetual foreigner within the Australian state" to legitimise the authority of white Australians over the land and thus alleviate their anxiety (p. 32). In exchange of this recognition, Southern European migrants have been allowed to be acknowledged with a "white property-owning subjectivity with a not white-cultural identity" so that they can participate "in the social network of commodity circulation" (2004, pp. 45-46) but still depend on the white benevolent permission to stay in Australia.[11]

This conclusion strongly resonates with Laforteza's reflections on the trope of the 'White Man's burden' discussed above with regard to the Colombo Plan. Like her, Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos highlight the connection existing between benevolence and the anxieties surrounding white settlers' foundational claim for sovereignty in Australia (Laforteza, 2007, p. 3). This resonance, in turn, has the merit of further elucidating how orientalist descriptions of international students have intersected with ever-changing understandings of whiteness to carve out a space for them in the Australian educational institutions and broader society as imagined by the dominant white group. Moreover, Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos' theorisation of the onto-pathology of white Australian subjectivity allows us to appreciate fully the distinctions that Burke draws within the category of domestic students with a "different background" between "Aborigines" and "migrants from a non-English speaking background" (1989, p. 73). It is because of the continued rendering of Aboriginal knowledges as non-Australian and the devaluation of non-Anglo-Celtic migrants' epistemic traditions

[11] The authors also claim: "by recognizing white authority, the Southern European become fully complicit in the ongoing violent dispossession of the Indigenous people" (2004, p. 46). Similarly, Perera, writing on "sacred ignorance" and how this is cherished and reproduced by institutions, states: "I don't think that before my migration I ever understood in anything other than a superficial sense, or that I once thought seriously about, the internal and ongoing colonisation of Indigenous Australians by the settlers and migrants to this country. And I didn't understand that as someone who migrated here what I was doing was consenting to, and literally *signing on* to, system of colonisation. Not even my own experience of colonisation, on multiple levels, had alerted me to this" (2005, p. 33, original emphasis). As I myself was a temporary Southern Italian migrant in Australia, these two passages had informed my own positioning as an active participant in the ongoing dispossession of Aboriginal populations' sovereignty and land, which thus compelled me into questioning the academic division of labour existing between non-white/ white migrants' relations and Aboriginal populations/ white migrants' relations studies.

that white Australians have managed to position themselves as the exclusive authoritative source of Western knowledge in the Asia-Pacific region.

Conclusion

This article addresses the failure of the educational policy of internationalisation to tackle the cultural differences of international students in light of the history of race relations in Australia. It shows how this failure is not coincidental but the result of the investment that white Australians have into the dispossession of Aboriginal populations' sovereignty and devaluation of those cultural capitals which do not resemble the dominant Anglo-Celtic linguistic and cultural values. In so doing, this article gestures towards the necessity of establishing alliances between international students, non-white migrants and Aboriginal people in order to question the epistemological assumptions underpinning Australian universities and their authority overseas. If these alliances are established, international students in Australia will be more likely to escape the stigma of epistemic inferiority and enjoy equality beyond any tokenistic appreciation of their diversity.

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