

Item 4

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Intervention 4

This is written by Behrouz Boochani – a refugee on Manus Island and internationally acclaimed journalist and writer.

I would like to thank everyone for allowing me to talk with you from Manus Island. This is a great opportunity for me to say something about Australia's barbaric policy of exiling refugees. We are about 600 refugees that came to Australia by boat more than 5 years ago and then exiled to Manus Island.

We were in a real prison for over four and a half years. They closed that site and transferred us 35 kilometres away. After years of engaging in various forms of activism and writing about this policy, I understand that the border control regime has been established based on a colonial way of thinking.

The exploitation of Papua New Guinea and Nauru by Australia, in order to practice these atrocities is a form of colonialism. They exiled us here and are saying that they do not have a responsibility for the people languishing on the islands.

When someone dies on Manus or Nauru, they say it is the responsibility of the island, and not a matter for Australia to deal with. When New Zealand offers to take us {the refugees} off the island, Australia says we will not allow this to happen. I call this political hostage taking. In such circumstances, we are outside the scope of any {national} laws as humanitarian and international conventions are broken, but on the other side, we are all victims under {local} law.

The relationship between the concept of border, the concept of power and the concept of space are the main concepts in political geography and geopolitics.

I have witnessed many deaths, suicides and self-harm attempts over the past years. I have a profound understanding of the suffering experienced by the people of Manus and Nauru and how they have been damaged mentally and physically. It is more than darkness and cruelty. I know many people who have been separated from their families and children, others have children that have spent their whole lives inside a prison camp. I know many young people who have lost their dreams and wasted their skills.

I ask- How can a human, in this case a refugee, can be thus exiled where they have recourse to no law. In this situation, a human being is living as something between a human and another kind of animal. How is the Australian government able to keep 1200 innocent people, especially children, under these conditions in remote prisons for years in an age of revolutions in information technology. How can the government convince Australian society to maintain this policy, when so much damning evidence is available. How can the majority of the Australian public be silent on this barbaric policy. It is not the first time in modern Australian history that the government is perpetuating this kind of fascist policy. The Stolen Generations reflect what the Australian government has done and still continues to do to First Nations

people. The government has reinvented these barbaric policies at the beginning of the 21st century, but this time inflicted them upon refugees.

I urge the UNHCR as policy makers, to challenge Australias hypocrisy in this current legislation of exiling asylum seekers who arrive by boat indefinitely in offshore prison camps.

Written from Manus Prison