

## ***Introduction – On the Challenge of Migration: Critical Hermeneutical Perspectives***

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The time is out of joint; O curs'd spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right.  
(Shakespeare, Hamlet)

*At first glance, it could seem slightly out of place to dedicate an issue of a newly founded journal dedicated to hermeneutics – albeit to a critical strand of hermeneutics – to a topic such as migration, forced displacements or refugees. Indeed, for the lay reader, is not hermeneutics, at least methodologically, primarily concerned with the interpretation of texts? Let us concede, still at this first, naïve level, that such an approach might indeed look strange. But allow us to wager that it might contribute to grasp what is at stake and perhaps even change the terms of this fundamental debate. Indeed, when applied to an analysis of societies as such, including their political and ethical problems, it provides a perspective that is lacking in other approaches.*

*First, because a key lesson of hermeneutics is that no existing, historically constituted society is a tabula rasa that could, as it were, be ruled by a whole set of "invented" ideals, no matter how fair they might seem, and that every "revolutionary" attempt to start a political order from scratch ultimately ends up in "terror". Second, because a*

*closely connected lesson is that, in the realm of human action, (e)valuation is a constitutive principle. Regardless of the naïve, and sometimes even toxic attempts by (neo)positivism, virtually nothing in the practical realm (comprising ethical, political and social issues) is value-free. That much is asserted by key authors working at the intersection between philosophy and economics, such as Hilary Putnam (2004) or Amartya Sen (1987), when they put forward their analyses of the fact-value entanglement, but the same applies to a hermeneutical perspective on the practical realm.*

*The combination of the first two hermeneutical lessons allows us, on the one hand, to grasp the existence of shared collective traits, such as collective identities and their cultural heritage, including their partial sedimentation (to which Ricœur would call "ideological" in a constitutive sense) but also, on the other hand, to understand how, their existence and relevance notwithstanding, these must be prevented from becoming completely reified, as if, in virtue of a bad analogy pushed too far by an essentialist epistemology, identities came to be seen as being completely self-sustained and thus exclusive and hostile towards its "others". On the contrary, a social hermeneutics, and namely one that takes stock of Paul Ricœur's notion of narrative identity, understands the inherently fluid and mutable character of any collective identity.*

*What is thus the advantage of using a hermeneutic method to grasp social reality and even attempt to change it? Such a method, implicitly or explicitly advocated by, among others, Michael Walzer (1987), Charles Taylor (1994), Axel Honneth (2009) and Paul Ricœur (1981) in some of their writings (see also Marcelo, 2012), being non-ideal, is able to uncover the historicity of every social order, including its founding beliefs and, while acknowledging their importance in terms of the symbolic constitution of the societies and communities it guides, is also able to criticize them, precisely in virtue of the fact that is a*

*critical hermeneutics. This means that the conditions of belonging are not a priori deemed irrational but also, at the same time, that in order for them to be ethically justified, they have to pass the critical test.*

*Now, there are many ways in which this criticism can be exercised, and that range from the genealogical and immanent critique (seeing to what extent given practices or ideals have deviated, or not, from their alleged founding meaning) all the way to a transcendent criticism that compares given values, that are always historical and situated, with other, alternative possibilities. But this much is certain: a hermeneutical assessment of social reality is always constitutively open to other possibilities of meaning, be it in the form of a Gadamerian fusion of horizons, or a Ricœurian productive conflict of interpretations.*

*Now, if we draw some of the practical consequences of this critical hermeneutic paradigm when applied to social reality, we do realize its importance. First, in virtue of the practical perspectivism we just alluded to we come to the conclusion that one of its consequences is some sort of epistemic humility. Second, and more importantly, this humility is a reminder of the incompleteness of every viewpoint and thus a call for a shared common understanding in which we are, as it were, constitutively open to our others.*

*In other words, one of the practical consequences of the critical hermeneutical paradigm is that it actively calls for an intersubjective grounding of our own selfhood. Therefore, problems such as the ethical challenge of welcoming the other (of going from hostility to hospitality, as Kearney recalls – see Marcelo, 2017) in the many forms that hospitality can take, and to remove the impediments to it – including the critique of the exclusionary rhetoric put forward by xenophobic political leaders and grounded on a reified and sometimes almost solipsistic understanding of monolithic political or cultural identities – are intrinsically hermeneutic.*

*And this is why, we believe, it makes sense to tackle the problem of migrations from a critical hermeneutical perspective. As Nina Arif reminds us in her paper, which we allude to below, we are witnessing today the highest recorded numbers of displaced people worldwide. The problem of forced migrations is of course not new. People have been crossing borders, or attempting to do so, either for strictly economic reasons (including escaping famine) or other humanitarian disasters, such as armed conflicts, for centuries. However, the sheer number of displaced people today, the importance of the Syrian civil war, the drama lived by many asylum seekers that have died in the Mediterranean sea, and the dreadful reaction felt in many countries of the European Union, stoked by xenophobic right-wing populism, as Europe seems to place the security of its borders (in what been dubbed the "fortress Europe" approach) over and above solidarity and basic respect for Human Rights, brought this disgraceful situation to the fore.*

*As seen from a Western and, more specifically, European perspective, the "refugee crisis" (and by crisis we mean here not so much the number of people coming to Europe's borders, which is meagre if compared to other neighbouring countries of the Syrian conflict, but rather to Europe's shameful reaction to it) deepens an already-existing European crisis, felt at least since the Euro crisis and the way it displayed deep divisions between EU's member countries, and clearly pinpointed the lack of a mobilizing collective project. What is more, if we take a look at this from a more global perspective, with the rise of anti-immigration sentiments in many places of the world, the Brexit problem and the threat of new armed conflicts, it seems we might have the ingredients for a possible perfect storm coming. And the risk is that, amid all of this, those who will suffer most are already those who are worse-off; and these are, of course, forced migrants.*

*It was with this complex of problems as a backdrop that we set ourselves to organize this special issue on migrations. The issue is*

*mostly made up of philosophical contributions but also open to other, more empirical contributions, in order to make sense of the whole situation. The first two articles are invited contributions from social scientists who make use of philosophy in their work. Their papers allow us to take a hold of the situation from other viewpoints, namely the social sciences and direct work with migrants, and an analysis of the way in which the media wrongfully portrays immigrants, and that contributes to normalizing right-wing and xenophobic discourse.*

*The opening paper of this issue, Elsa Lechner's and Letícia Renault's "Migration Experiences and Narrative Identities: viewing alterity from biographical research" gives an account of the ethnographic work done by the authors with migrants on refugees. The authors draw on some key works on hermeneutics, such as those of Ricœur, Richard Kearney or Johann Michel, to highlight the very important task of giving voice to migrants and refugees' themselves. Lechner and Renault acknowledge both the intersubjective constitution of subjectivity, and the way in which identities are constituted, at least partially, in a narrative way. Accordingly, they draw on Ricœur's notion of narrative identity to depict how they interacted with migrants in "biographical workshops" they conducted in Portugal. Their practice and their reflection upon what they do is of the utmost importance in this context because forced migrants often lack both voice and recognition. Given they are not usually granted the status of equal partners in interaction (precisely because they are not part of the politeia receiving them, not citizens) they are, more often than not, not heard. As such, they come to be depicted by others, such as the media or politicians and not always under the most favourable light (to say the least). Therefore, one of the tasks that falls upon researchers on this problem is precisely to create the spaces and conditions for the self-expression of migrants, a process that sheds light on the responsibility of researchers themselves, insofar as giving migrants the*

*opportunity to share their own life stories is tantamount to granting them at least some basic form of recognition.*

*Some striking examples of the biased coverage that some media grant to migrants are given in Nina Arif's "Consenting to Orientalism when Covering Migration: How the British Media Dehumanises Migrants in the Context of the Syrian Civil War". Arif shows in what way right-wing discourses (sometimes populist or far-right xenophobic discourses) remain unquestioned even in liberal mainstream media, contributing for them to be accepted as "the new normal" and thus "manufacturing consent" as Chomsky showed. Arif ties this dehumanization of migrants, so widespread in the media, to the Brexit vote, fuelled by a misled fear of migrants. She also traces back this misrepresentation to the influence of an "Orientalist" view similar to Said's model, figuring the migrants as unwanted and exotic others who cannot or should not represent themselves, and who are ultimately seen, as is blatantly the case for Muslims, as threatening and violent. Providing some examples of this by putting forward a discourse analysis of the media coverage of the 2017 Westminster attacks, Nina Arif ultimately undertakes another important task for what Michael Walzer (1987) called the "connected critic": to provide people with the knowledge allowing them to deconstruct false narratives, which is also, of course, of the utmost importance in this time of fake news and populist manipulation, mostly bearing on migrants.*

*The next paper, written by Alexandra M. Moreira do Carmo and titled "A Crise da Existência e o Existencial da Crise. Ser para os outros fora do quadro do essencialismo" [The Crisis of Existence and the Existential of the Crisis. Being-for-others Outside the Framework of Essentialism] takes a step back and reflects upon the overall existential significance of the crisis. Alexandra do Carmo traces back the contemporary social crises, including the crisis of the Humanities and the refugee crisis (that displays a crisis of hospitality through the*

*demonstration of xenophobia), to a more original crisis which, according to her, has not yet been overcome. Drawing on Heidegger, Alexandra do Carmo puts forward a sharp critique of essentialism, understood as abstract idealizations that border on objectivism and, according to Husserl, draw science away from the lifeworld. According to Alexandra do Carmo, the migration crisis is therefore a sign of a deeper contemporary epochal crisis, which is an existential crisis and that prevents us from understanding and welcoming change and the people who, from the outside, bring it about. In order to grasp it and eventually overcome it she analyses, with Maldiney and the neurologist Viktor von Weizsäcker, the "existential of the crisis", namely the fear of the stranger, and calls for an openness to the transcendence it represents.*

*The final four papers all deal with this topic of how to host the stranger, ranging from the problem of xenophobia to the challenge of going from hostility to hospitality. Eduardo Morello's and Élsio José Corá's paper "Recém-chegados, Apátridas e Refugiados: Os Modos de Aparecer do 'Estranho' na Obra de Hannah Arendt" [Newcomers, Stateless and Refugees: Ways of Appearing of the 'Stranger' in Hannah Arendt's Work] dive deep in Hannah Arendt's work to probe the many ways of seeing the stranger that we can find in her philosophy. They detect two major ways of being a stranger, according to Arendt: as an inherent condition of all newcomers, and as a symbol of something frightening, when we are dealing with stateless persons or refugees. Examining the fragility of the latter, they explain how, to Arendt, this means they are deprived of their singularity (reduced to an absolute difference), their self-narrative and their place in the world, and the way in which this can be tied to a suspicion stemming from given political communities. They are thus also deprived of a proper welcome, unlike the newcomers upon whom hope is bestowed.*

*In turn, Vinicio Busacchi's "Why Those Who Disregard Foreigners Despise Themselves" offers a powerful take on the ethical, anthropological and social consequences of being hostile to strangers, and namely foreigners. Taking up a Hegelian inspiration, i.e., a striving for freedom and justice as emancipatory practices, Busacchi draws a close link between the way we treat others and our own self-development. One of the crises that he pinpoints runs deep: the peril of the collapse of democracy. A regime, and in this case democracy, is endangered when it ceases to ameliorate itself. Recalling the important, and often forgotten, notions of conflict and crisis in Ricœur's philosophy, Busacchi argues that they must be occasions for a renewal of democracy. But when, as so often is the case, the exercise of democracy is reduced to a mere formality, as happens in so-called liberal representative democracies of present times, and the pervasive ideology is blatant individualism, the possibility of populism, xenophobia and the like can be pushed to the extreme. This, Busacchi exemplifies with the way in which Italian media treats migrants in a pejorative way – as Nina Arif's paper does for the British case. And he concludes that, given each of us also bears within him or herself an inner stranger, to overcome prejudice against foreigners is also to do it vis-à-vis one's inner stranger; conversely, to despise the foreign other is also, mutatis mutandis, to despise oneself.*

*On the other hand, the final two papers focus on the more positive – albeit difficult – (im?)possibility of hospitality. Matheus Carvalho's text, "Alternativas para el Desafío Ético de la Hospitalidad: Un diálogo entre el cosmopolitismo, Derrida y Taylor" [Alternatives for the Ethical Challenge of Hospitality: A Dialogue between Cosmopolitanism, Derrida and Taylor] goes through a comparison between cosmopolitanism, hospitality and multiculturalism. Carvalho starts with a presentation of cosmopolitanism as entailing a right to hospitality insofar as it establishes "citizens of the world"; he pinpoints*



*the origins of the cosmopolitan tradition in ancient Greece and follows its thread until Kant and the right to hospitality. Afterwards, Carvalho moves to Derrida's deconstructive notion of hospitality, which is at odds with the Kantian emphasis on Law, insofar as the Derridean notion is strictly ethical and perhaps irreconcilable with the right to hospitality that is supposed to be instantiated in concrete laws. Finally, Matheus Carvalho comes to Charles Taylor's proposal of multiculturalism as a concrete political proposal to foster the welcoming of diversity within an anthropology that focuses on the dialogic construction of identities through processes of mutual recognition. For Carvalho, these three different and yet related possibilities can be possible justifications for the ethical duty to host strangers such as those that the refugee crisis produces.*

*Finally, Victor Gonçalves' paper with the title "Renaturalizar o ser humano para renovar o sentido de hospitalidade, entre Derrida e Nietzsche" [Renaturalizing the Human Being to renew the Meaning of Hospitality, between Derrida and Nietzsche] deepens the analysis of Derrida's proposal of unconditional hospitality, in the context of the Levinasian ethical heritage. Taking stock of some of the aporias present in Derrida's take on this issue, Gonçalves proposes to take up Nietzsche's account of a "renaturalization of the human" interpreting it as a post-humanist and post-nationalist hospitality. His wager is that Nietzsche's "amoral" stance, resulting in the depiction of a Übermensch that is, without doubt, postnational (given that it refuses any nationalist, culturalist or identitarian bond) could, in theory, use its self-overcoming instinct to found a new society of equal and free human beings which, as such, could be capable of a "poetic" or "unconditional" hospitality, in the vein of Derrida. In other words: self-ownership would, perhaps paradoxically, be a condition of possibility of a radical hospitality, one which operates without strict rules (i.e., without the concrete "laws" of hospitality that Derrida derided). In such*

*a scenario, all would be permanently foreigners, guests and hosts, given that national fault lines would no longer matter and this, hypothetically, would end with the asymmetry between citizens of a given polity and foreigners. Even if only as a thought experiment, one cannot overlook the possibility put forward by Victor Gonçalves, of a post-Nietzschean way to fulfil Derrida's (im) possible hospitality.*

*Ultimately, we dedicate this issue to the unheard and hope that by bringing together a range of different voices, we can help a little to amplify the voices of the migrant, the refugee, the asylum seeker, and her child and his father. We do this against the almost deafening rhetoric of exclusionary debate whether left wing or right wing. Such debate is conducted in ways that remind us of Popper's definition of science: he argued that, whereas it is impossible to incontrovertibly prove the truth of a scientific theory, that theory must at least be disprovable (Popper, 1959). If a theory is falsifiable it may be hoped that it is evidence based and may therefore stand a chance of being debatable, even if not useful. If a theory is not falsifiable then it is unlikely to have any claim to reality. Popper's theory is problematic and not really hermeneutical but it provides an illuminating analogy that helps us to understand why Salvini, Le Pen, Trump and others are so seldom challenged: their assertions are so disconnected from reality as to be unfalsifiable. This latter is the characteristic of the populist demagogues' assertions: their claims about migrants are so extreme and so unreal as to be impossible to falsify. Being thereby unrelated to reality they are therefore also very difficult to counter as they have no basis in truth, only in emotion and suspicion. These unevidenced narratives flourish in a setting such as the national British securitization agenda which establishes a backdrop for xenophobia and precludes free discussion (Scott-Baumann, 2017a). Such non-dialogic utterances on migration must be tackled, and this issue provides a range of different sources of evidence, different languages, different linguistic*

*registers and different ethical approaches to encourage educated communities to respond to populist assertions.*

*As one positive and prescient inspiration we draw upon Paul Ricoeur as a model for replacing populist discourse with balanced and critical hermeneutics. In his 1996 paper "Being a Stranger" (translated in Ricoeur, 2010) Paul Ricoeur argues three points; we should loosen our rigid insistence upon the privileges of national citizenship against the weak position of the asylum seeker. We should offer hospitality better than currently, whether in the form of asylum, tourist rights, immigration support or refugee status. However, he asserts that we can only achieve these changes once we are comfortable as strong and secure citizen-members of our own country. As so often with Ricoeur, these words from the late 1990s prove prescient twenty years later. With regard to his first point we should be prepared to soften the border between the outsider and the insider. Secondly the hospitality we offer is often paltry and functions to confine, demean and exclude the refugee and the asylum seeker: we should be more generous.*

*In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 all individuals have the right to a nationality. Ricoeur explains how the nation state has created silos that each citizen feels safe inside, except that we don't feel safe. He ends his paper *Being a Stranger* on this challenge: we will only be appropriately generous and hospitable to others, in the Kantian sense, when we ourselves understand and accept that we truly belong to our own nation and that we are secure in our European nationhood and citizenship, which is inherently supranational as well as national. For Ricoeur this means learning at least two languages and reaching out beyond our borders. However, as Lorey points out, the neoliberal approach exaggerates our precarity through securitisation of borders and of identity. This induces and increases our fear of economic ruin allegedly caused by the "other" (Lorey, 2012: 64).*

*A crucial aspect of the way we treat foreigners that is not considered in by Ricœur in this paper and to which we devote thought in this special issue, is the way in which the Western world somehow seems to believe it can be immune from the problems suffered by outsiders: other people suffer, and we often act as if there is nothing we can do about it. Other people become refugees and migrants, and we act as if it won't affect us. Other people are trafficked, but not us. None of this is actually true because we know from experience that we are capable of pathos and Vinicio Busacchi shows how we weaken our own personhood by our refusal to help those in need who are less fortunate than ourselves.*

*Criminal groups and sub criminal networks all over Europe are making a lot of money from migrants: they buy and take over migrants' bodies and their minds for sex and drugs and also for violent crimes including terrorism. We are complicit in this because we are allowing migrants to be preyed upon as a direct result of our rejection of them as viable human beings: many of them are penned like animals in holding camps, rendered subhuman by our negligence and prejudice and delivered up negligently and unintentionally to crime because no other option remains to them (Nadeau, 2018).*

*Ricœur, in the paper just cited above, writes as one who has steeped himself in government papers and policies, and indeed this was the case. In 1996 he sat on the Hessel commission on migrants, set up by Rocard, and wrote this piece as a direct result of his experiences. He has written it as a philosopher who is addressing policy issues with both philosophical and policy understanding, quoting Human Rights legislation and differentiating between different types of stranger, as found in French law. He was thus using different "registers". Linguistic "registers" differ depending on the tasks that we are asking of language and in "Being a Stranger" Ricœur combines and contrasts deep understanding of European thought, philosophical,*

*governmental and statist. This is true of some of the papers in this issue, using philosophical and social science registers to clarify journalistic ones.*

*The register we each use to communicate is of major importance and has assumed frightening moral freighting (even more than under usual circumstances), as we are putting together this issue of Critical Hermeneutics against a barrage of unceasing and vindictive invective from groups across Europe loosely known as "populist". Ricœur attributed ethical agency to our use of language and we hope to achieve this with this collection of papers; this moral imperative is definitely not heeded by the aggressive, non-dialogic tone adopted by populist demagogues and discussed by Nina Arif, and this makes it even more important for us to bring together the range of different registers that can and must be deployed across Europe to resolve the migration crisis at both a single state and at a European Union level. In this issue of Critical Hermeneutics we have brought together different voices, academic, activist and journalistic, in order to explore how a world that believes itself to be so civilised, can create such a cesspit of degradation and can then also believe that we will not be affected by it. Thus we have invited different registers, and some even differ within the same paper, as is the case of Vinicio Busacchi and Nina Arif: both use major thinkers to illustrate their positions and also discuss the statistics that become the sordid reality for migrants. Both writers rectify common misperceptions about the supposed harm done by migrants to their host countries.*

*Elsa Lechner and Leticia Renault in their research, got close to migrants to record their experiences, something which philosophers tend not to do. They use biographical research to capture the stories of those whose opinions are not asked for and whose voices are not heard: the migrants. The absent voice of the migrant is also charted by Nina Arif, who shows how the media dehumanise migrant stories by*

*anonymising and rendering subhuman those who dare to seek shelter in another land and, as Achille Mbembe elaborates, dare to submit to a death sentence meted out by those who should know better. Here we return to Ricœur's allusion to our existential discomfort with ourselves: if nations accept the diet of hate dished up to them by media and government, they are trapped in unfalsifiable narratives and dwell in uncomfortable unrealities in which they half believe that outsiders are dangerous. We must continue the debate that this issue has initiated, to bring together different evidence bases and different registers and different languages, to amplify unheard voices, to consider how governments can help and to develop Ricœur's balanced challenges to us so that we can learn about ourselves through learning about the other. Ricœur's work provides us with the frames for deploying different registers to illuminate each other (Scott-Baumann 2017b)*

*This is no easy task. It is a challenge and a wager. One that, albeit modestly, we hope that this critical hermeneutical issue helps to overcome.*

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