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Longing and belonging through migration: Otherness and empathy in theatre and philosophy

ABSTRACT

This article examines how theatre and philosophy may critically contribute to discussing empathy towards otherness in the context of the ongoing massive surge of migration across the globe. Drawing on concepts from philosophical works by Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson and Jacques Derrida, it investigates how different dramaturgical techniques and aesthetics – namely in Euripedes’ Children of Heracles (c.430 BCE), Roland Schimmelpfennig’s The Golden Dragon (2009) and Nikos Kazantzakis and Graça P. Corrêa’s Christ Recrucified (1954/2018) – address ethical-affective percepts such as empathy and hospitality in a theatre dealing with migration experiences.

KEYWORDS

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Longing and belonging, whose proximity in both sound and etymology is so dynamic in the English language – the first denoting to yearn for, the second indicating to pertain to, but both from the Old English root of *lang*, which means lasting – are *lasting feelings* often experienced by exiles, migrants and refugees because they are displaced and torn between worlds. We long for

those places where we belong, such as our home or *oikos*. We do not long for alien places where we feel rejected and thus do not belong to. Nonetheless, we can long for a place we do not belong to, which may in fact be totally unknown to us, if we are led to idealize it, especially if we imagine it as making us happy, or as taking away our 'pain' and giving us 'pleasure', in seventeenth-century Jewish Dutch Portuguese philosopher Baruch Spinoza's terms, as expounded in his treatise entitled *Ethics* (1677). Further, when we are welcome in foreign lands, we start longing for them as well; they become a part of our personal ecology. It is therefore not a simple question of origin. One longs for something that one loves; and love in a vitalist sense, or according to French philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of ethics, is beyond genetic filiation, family, ethnicity, nation and even species.

In this article I draw on philosophical writings by Jacques Derrida, Henri Bergson, and Baruch Spinoza to discuss how their concepts of otherness, empathy, hospitality and ethics may critically contribute towards theatre and performance studies in the context of the ongoing surge of migration across the globe. Although questions of language and cultural identity play a central role in dramaturgies dealing with concepts of otherness and empathy in relation to migration phenomena, I hold that the emotional-embodied-lived experiences of humans produced by displacement may be viewed as comprehensive through a philosophical lens.

In *Performing Statelessness in Europe*, Stephen Wilmer remarks how, despite the fact that in recent years the need for asylum has been increasing in the EU, the problem is not being solved by political means due to dissimilar languages-customs-identities; divergent constitutional and judicial traditions; and an inability of working together in foreign and security policy (Wilmer 2018: 2). In such a disheartening context, creative artists 'have been using theatrical performance to intervene in the political arena to offer insight and new perspectives' (2018: 2).

To contribute towards an understanding of this problem, in this article I investigate how three European plays and adaptations – namely Euripides's *Children of Heracles* (c.430 BCE), Roland Schimmelpfennig's *The Golden Dragon* (2009) and Nikos Kazantzakis's *Christ Recrucified* (1954, adapted for the Portuguese stage in 2018) – address ethical-affective notions such as empathy and hospitality in a theatre dealing with migration experiences. Whilst Euripides's tragedy asserts the need to both find and carry out, in any given society, a consensual ethics of hospitality towards migrants and refugees, Schimmelpfennig's play demonstrates how the incessant flight of people from poor and warring countries, and their enslaved conditions in more affluent regions of the world, are but an inevitable effect of neo-liberal global capitalism. Building upon such complexities, Kazantzakis reveals that this debate, so urgent for our times, is emotional and socio-economic, individual and collective, because human rights are as much about self-care as caring for others.

Feelings of longing and belonging are a crucial part of the wider economy of emotions, reflecting how human beings get attached to objects, experiences and other people, or how emotions circulate. Although etymologically derived from the Latin *movere*, and thus necessarily implying an action that triggers change, emotions are not only about movement but also about attachment. As Sarah Ahmed observes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*,

The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place,

or gives us a dwelling place. (12) So what attaches us, what connects us to this place or that place, to this other or that other is also what we find most touching; it is that which makes us feel.

(2004: 28)

Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism, Ahmed argues that emotions are not felt 'in' individuals or in the social (2004: 11); they 'do not positively inhabit anybody or anything, meaning that the "subject" is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination' (2004: 46).

However, as Michel Foucault suggests in 'The Subject and Power', a research into the different modes of objectivation that transform human beings into subjects does not preclude us from promoting 'new forms of subjectivity' distinct from the ones imposed upon us (1983: 226). Thus, although I concur with Ahmed that emotions produce surfaces and boundaries that delineate the individual and the social (1983: 45), that they may be transformed into fetish objects, such as the fetishization of the wound or the commodification of suffering (1983: 32) and 'can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination' (1983: 12), I also want to bring to this article the notion of emotion as a differentiated, sensuous and corporeal experience of a concrete lived-body that need not always be recast in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, nationality and other 'subject positions'.

In this sense I want to invoke Félix Guattari's thoughts on subjectivity, when he states that it is polyphonic and plural when it does not refer to the subject as an essence, a presence or a position. According to Guattari, subjectivity has no dominant or determinant instance that guides a *fixed subject* to *being-in-the-world*; differently, subjectivity is always in the making or in process, it is a *becoming-in-and-with-the-world*: 'One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette' (1995: 7).

According to Spinoza, affects are central to all ethical processes and outcomes: 'By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections' (1994: 154). Affects are 'active' affections/emotions that produce alterations and transformations in one's own mind-body, and that have the potential to increase or diminish the power of activity of the other's mind-body. Through a dramaturgical exploration of the three plays mentioned above, I suggest that active emotions leading to vitalist empathy towards otherness can engender micropolitical agency and produce effects upon the world. In the process of interacting with, and of welcoming the Other, not only do we re-invent ourselves but also resist normative forms of subjection by engaging in social transformation.

ON THE ANCIENT GREEK ETHICS OF HOSPITALITY

In *Children of Heracles*, Euripides praises the Athenian ethos (i.e. ethical disposition/attitude) for its generous tradition of welcoming exiles and refugees from other parts of the Greek world. First produced around 430 BCE, the play follows the fatherless children of Heracles and their protectors – the old man Iolaus and their grandmother Alcmene – as they seek asylum in Athens, whilst fleeing the city of Argos, whose King has vowed to kill them. Although they have been moving from city to city, and are refused asylum in all of them,

1. Other examples include *Antigone of Syria*, in which an all-female cast of Syrian refugees created a version of Sophocles's tragedy at Al Madina Theatre, Beirut, in December 2014. Funded by Unicef and the British Council, the project was coordinated by two refugee artists from Damascus: a theatre director and a playwright who wrote down the women's stories incorporating them into the Greek text (see <http://www.openartfoundation.org/antigone-of-syria>, accessed 1 July 2019).
2. Xenos is ambiguous in meaning: it can be translated as Foreigner (from another state) within a relationship of long-distance friendship or as Stranger with no implication of reciprocity or friendship.

the ruler of Athens decides to shelter the suppliants, not only because of his respect for their kin and his own honour, but above all due to a spiritual reverence for Zeus, at whose altar they have sought comfort. As he declares: 'A temple of the gods is an asylum open to the world', and it is the gods that 'check the insolence of those that prefer violence to justice' (Euripides 1938).

Significantly, the name of the ruler of Athens is Demophon, meaning 'voice of the people', and indicating that he represents the city ethos. His opponent is Copeus, a herald sent by Argos who criticizes the Athenian ethics of caring for children, old women and men, and that states: 'it is your Athenian way to take the weaker side, when it is in thy power to choose the stronger as thy friends [...] Come now, put argument against argument: what will be thy gain?' (Euripides 1938).

The suffering surrounding the condition of being separated from home, family, community and the gods of one's native land, the feeling of loss and physical uncertainty of existing without rights, constitutes the subject matter of Euripides's play. In effect, the politics of asylum was a powerful motif in the literature of Ancient Greece, at a time when (like today) the flight and refuge of people was a common occurrence, as armies sacked and burned cities, triggering the murder, displacement and enslavement of its inhabitants.

To discuss the ethics of migration today, contemporary theatres often turn to updating Ancient Greek tragedies. A case in point is Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Schutzbefohlenen*, inspired by Aeschylus's *The Suppliants* – first presented by 80 asylum seekers recently arrived in Germany via Lampedusa, at St. Pauli Church in Hamburg, 2013 – which emphasized the current plight of the dispossessed, legitimizing their need of hospitality.¹ When Peter Sellars directed *Children of Heracles* in 2004, he similarly had young asylum seekers from refugee camps in the EU embody the silent parts of the children. According to Stephen Wilmer, the audience was probably most moved by the fact that these actors had to return to the camp after the performance; that way the event conveyed the actual political reality of those who suffered most from the wealth gap and from globalization (2018: 30–31). These productions make a canonical text readable in a totally new way. By reappropriating assumptions at the root of western conceptions of citizenship from such ancient drama, they make audiences grapple with their conscience, and thus open up a reevaluation of contemporary practices towards migrants and refugees.

Writing on the politics of exile and asylum in Ancient Greece, Robert Gorman observes that, although common, 'the prevalence of the phenomenon did not lessen the sense of pity that onlookers keenly felt for such sad fortune, if only because they realized how easily such a fate could be their own' (1994: 423). The frequency of exiles and refugees occurring in Ancient Greece created a dilemma for potential hosts because they 'might be as much a threat to the city of origin as to the city of asylum' (1994: 408). Accordingly, asylum was only granted after much deliberation concerning both the justness of the suppliants' plea and the larger political implications for the host city. Athens also preferred the wealthier suppliants to the commoner, thus underscoring that its asylum policy was by no means due to humanitarian values (1994: 414).

Most remarkably, as Jacques Derrida elucidates, the foreigner, or *xénos*,² in ancient Athens is not always an absolute Other, making of hospitality a pact that implies reciprocity and commitment:

[...] the foreigner doesn't only have a right, he or she also has, reciprocally, obligations. [...] [F]rom the outset, the right to hospitality commits

a household, a line of descent, a family, a familial or ethnic group receiving a familial or ethnic group. Precisely because it is inscribed in a right, a custom, an ethos.

(2000: 23)

Moreover, the foreigner has a name.³ Hospitality is not offered to an anonymous new arrival or to someone who has neither name, nor patronymic, nor family, nor social attributes and who would consequently be treated as a barbarian: 'it is possible for them to be called by their names, to have names, to be subjects in law' (2000: 23). Thus the ethics of hospitality is limited and contradictory *a priori*, as there is no such thing as an unconditional hospitality (2000: 65). This paradox leads Derrida to a major doubt: assuming that hospitality should be linked to love, should we begin with the question addressed to the newcomer, what is your name? (2000: 27). Or else begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement/erasure, the effacement of the question and of the name? 'Is it more just and more loving to question or not to question?' (2000: 29).

3. The distinctions, similarities and overlaps among the terms *host*, *stranger* and *refugee* were the object of a recent debate of Performance Studies International in Hamburg 2017, registered in a collectively authored article by Will Daddario et al., published in *Performance Philosophy* (2017, 206–33).

A GLOBALIZED DISPLACEMENT

According to Derrida, the foreigner as barbarian or absolute Other is above all someone who does not speak like the rest, someone who speaks an odd sort of language (2000: 5). The language imposed upon such absolute others is by definition not their own, and that is the first act of violence (2000: 15). As the first and the last condition of belonging, language is also the experience of expropriation (2000: 88). As a result, all 'displaced persons' share two sources of longing: their dead ones and their language. On the one hand, they continue to recognize their mother tongue as their ultimate homeland: 'That was Hannah Arendt's response on one occasion: she no longer felt German except in language, as though the language were a *remains* of belonging' (2000: 88, original emphasis). On the other, they would like to return to the places where their buried dead rest, the key 'place of immobility from which to measure all the journeys and all the distances' (2000: 87).

In *Golden Dragon* (2009), by German playwright Roland Schimmelpfennig, the dead body of a non-legalized migrant from the Far East undertakes a long homecoming sea journey from his workplace in an unnamed wealthy city of the West. This postdramatic tragic farce consists of a single act, with most of its scenes taking place in a Thai-Chinese-Vietnamese fast-food restaurant and take-away named 'The Golden Dragon'. The five intervening actors are merely defined in terms of their gender and age – 'a man over 60, a woman over 60, a young man, a young woman, a man' – but the characters they play often contradict their personal attributes (men play women, young play old and vice versa). Thus, although they play the five illegal migrants from Asia working at the restaurant, they also assume the parts of restaurant clients, flight attendants and so on. Further, the actors also narrate most of the scene directions, as the play alternates between different locales: the restaurant kitchen and dining area, two apartment interiors of an adjacent building and a shop in the corner.

The main action revolves around one of the illegal kitchen workers, a young man suffering from an excruciating toothache but who cannot go to a dentist for fear of being deported back to the Far East. When the other employees decide to snap off the young man's tooth with a wrench, his family

4. Other plays by Schimmelpfennig include *The Woman Before* (2005) and *Arabian Night* (2001). The former is a ghostly tale of love relationships; in the latter five characters from the east and the west cross paths in a supernatural manner on a hot enchanted evening inside a residential tower block somewhere in Germany.

members appear inside the tooth socket to communicate with them. After the young man bleeds to death, his body is wrapped in a cheap carpet stamped with a golden dragon and thrown into a nearby river. It gradually decomposes and travels for several months (or perhaps years) across the sea, until his remains return to his native land. 'Hello dear honoured uncle', the young man says when what is left of his corpse returns home, 'I'm sorry, all the money, all those notes, everything you all contributed [...] you'll never see it again, I'm sorry. But I did the return trip for nothing, nothing at all, and all on my own' (Schimmelpfennig 2009: 84-85).

In *The Golden Dragon* human beings have become dehumanized and therefore feel practically worthless. Their objectification is underscored by the constant recitation of the numbers, names and contents of the dishes available in the fast-food restaurant:

THE MAN: In the tiny kitchen of the Thai/Chinese/Vietnamese restaurant it's cramped, it's very cramped [...] everything is cramped, a few square feet of tiling, twenty or thirty maybe, the gas cooker and the deep fat fryer, the work surfaces, the fridges, next door a little space for storage, a clock on the wall, from the Vietnamese wholesaler, I'd like to go to Vietnam, the coast is supposed to be wonderful.

THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY burns herself.

Number 13: Satay Sticks, chicken in peanut sauce.

(Schimmelpfennig 2009: 25, 38)

The restaurant's menu is extensive, featuring a vast array of dishes from different cuisines from the East. Such multiplicity, however, has become grotesquely oversimplified into a homogenous amalgam, offering a critique of the ongoing global commodification of people and cultures.

Like other works by Schimmelpfennig, the play is infused with magical realism.⁴ Hence, included in the play is a modified version of the well-known fable 'The Ant and the Cricket', whereby the cricket – a very young Chinese woman, also an illegal migrant – gets nothing for her art of dancing and chanting, and is forced into prostitution by the ants:

THE WOMAN OVER SIXTY:

The ants rent the cricket out to other ants. The ants lust after the cricket. They think she's vulgar, they think she's sexy, they get off on her accent, as much as the cricket can speak the ants' language. They've already taught her what they think are the most important words. To the ants, the cricket is a dirty slapper. The ants do what they like with the cricket. They take her roughly. They fuck her ragged, frequently one after another. In exchange the cricket receives something to eat afterwards. Bits of dead flies. But sometimes she doesn't get anything. Then the ants say the cricket should be glad she's got a roof under her head. They say the cricket should be glad the ants don't send her away. Back. Back into the snow.

(Schimmelpfennig 2009: 45)

The Golden Dragon is a complex evocation of a globalized world made up of marginalized characters: a portrayal of urban poverty, sexual violence and

exploitation, and of the plight of illegal migrants who are generally underpaid and live in conditions of enslavement in most western societies. As Wilmer observes, there is a striking resemblance between the plight of current refugees and that of many human beings who have been reduced to a life with no ethical value, or to what contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls 'bare life' (*nuda vita*), a concept in Roman law that allowed for the killing with impunity of people deprived of legal status (1998: 15).

The Golden Dragon is a reminder that by focusing our attention on those who are yet to arrive, we often lose sight of the rights of others who are already here. As Emma Cox and Marilena Zaroulia argue, the current migrant crisis 'ripples beyond "us" and "them" demarcations on ethnic or racial terms to expose other asymmetries of class and infrastructure', making evident that 'Europe's Others do not only arrive in boats from the East; they also reside in the Eastern or Southern countries of the continent' (2016: 144). In this sense, I suggest that the play links the extensive frequency of migration to social, cultural and physical globalized deracination, i.e., to the rising imbalance in the distribution of global wealth, and to the abuses of poverty triggered by political-corporate unconcern or apathy towards the 'minor' Other. In effect, displacement has become generalized in our times due to a neo-liberal financial logic that implements inequality along ethnic, social and gender lines and a continued exploration of natural resources, with extremely severe environmental consequences.

According to neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, human beings, like all mammals, are endowed with mirror neurons that fire not only when we actually do something but also when we see or hear somebody else doing it. This may be a biological source towards mimetic impulses, and towards empathy, which derives from the ancient Greek notion of feeling-into (from *empathia* = *em* 'in' + *pathos* 'feeling'), as opposed to apathy (*apatheia*), without feeling. Beyond the political and corporate apathy towards the 'minor' others that we are presently witnessing in the world, however, antipathy and hatred towards migrants is also being activated in the emotional domain, at the macropolitical and micropolitical levels, both consciously and unconsciously.

CREATIVE EMOTIONS AND OPEN ETHICS

Christ Recrucified, a play that I recently adapted for the stage from a novel by Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis originally published in 1954, adopts a Bergsonian stance regarding the migration phenomena that it portrays.⁵ The play unfolds in 1923 in a fictional Greek village named Anatolia that has been under Turkish rule since the armistice of the First World War.⁶ In this orthodox Christian community, every seven years the Council of Elders designates among the villagers those who will incarnate the biblical figures of the Passion of Christ mystery, to be enacted in the following Easter. Soon after they are appointed to embody such roles, the villagers representing Christ and his Apostles – shepherd Manolios (Christ), innkeeper Kostantis (James), postman Yannakos (Peter) and young proprietor Michelis (John) – witness the arrival of a crowd of extremely hungry Greek refugees, who were expelled from their village by the Turks and have walked for more than three months in search of hospitality. With the arrival of these refugees, the village becomes divided into two opposing ethical camps: between those who endorse a conventional 'closed morality' or 'static religion' and want to expel the refugees, and those who embrace an 'open ethics', or a dynamic mystical self-becoming, and desire to welcome them.

5. The play was produced by TEC-Teatro Experimental de Cascais, directed by Carlos Avilez, running from 29 June to 5 August 2018.

6. In 1923, Turkey and Greece signed the Treaty of Lausanne, agreeing on a 'mutual exchange of population', whereby all Greeks in Turkey were expropriated and deported to the geographically delimited territory of present-day Greece, including the Aegean islands, and all Turks in Greece were evicted and extradited to the geographically delimited territory of present-day Turkey.

By showing in a blatant way the vices of political and religious leaders, their manipulation of prejudice and encouragement of a nationalism that makes everyone the enemy of everyone else, *Christ Recrucified* offers a topical reflection on the rise of global populism and fundamentalism, and of the ways in which such ideologies instigate hostility towards Others. According to Baruch Spinoza there are only three primary emotions at the root of our ethical behaviour: pleasure, pain and desire. In Spinoza's words, 'hate is nothing else but pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause' (1994: P13, 162). Simply from the fact that we conceive that a certain object will affect us painfully, we will regard it with hate (1994: P16, 163) and when we conceive that the object of our hate is destroyed, we feel pleasure (1994: P20, 165).

In *Christ Recrucified*, it is hatred instigated by religious and political Elders that moves most of the villagers against the refugees and those who want to shelter them to the point of mass hysteria and public execution of scapegoats, a hatred nourished by the villagers' fear of becoming poorer or induced by their avoidance of 'pain' in Spinozan terms. As Sara Ahmed notes, xenophobic discourse produces passionate negative attachments towards others: 'Such narratives work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject' (2004: 43). Through a discourse of 'pain', the bodies of others are hence transformed into 'the hated'. This relates to what is being fostered in our world today,

Instead of turning against the financial powers, the new lower social classes support the far right, which encourages them to turn against the lower global social class, composed of immigrants and refugees. The lower classes against the lower classes is the formula of future conflicts, while astronomical sums [of money] move unperturbed on computer screens, from one financial center to another.

(Jensen 2016: n.pag.)

Henri Bergson's philosophy runs through the entire structure of *Christ Recrucified*. As Peter Bien argues in *Kazantzakis: Politics of the Spirit*, refugees rule the very structure of the plot: 'refugees – always on the move, always expanding their own reality – are the drivers of the continuity of vital energy, while [most] resident citizens resist change and represent the inverted evolution of matter toward decomposition' (2007: 50). Hence the work 'is governed in its deep structure by a vitalist theory of the world and human destiny' (2007: 50). This vitalist concept of a fluid self-becoming capable of producing intensities, as opposed to a permanent or fixed subjectivity, is at the heart of the *open ethics* Bergson proposes as the true foundation of human rights.

In his last book, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932, translated and published in the UK as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* in 1935), Bergson argues that 'closed morality' and 'static religion' need to exclude other social forms and moral values to ensure the 'survival' of the existing society. That is why closed morality is inevitably linked to war and to static forms of religion, which invent images of gods that ensure obedience and social cohesion. Contrastingly, an empathetic ethics inclusive of all human beings does not proceed from an affection towards exclusive groups, such as family and nation:

We observe that the three groups [family, nation, and humanity] to which we can attach ourselves comprise an increasing number of people, and we conclude that the increasing size of the loved object is simply matched by a progressive expansion of feeling.

(1935: 22)

According to Bergson, a closed society ethics, based on a closed attachment to family and nation, is partial to these groups, and hence dedicated to marking the distinction between insiders and outsiders and unmindful of the singularity of the other.

In contrast, an open ethics aims at a peaceful and 'open society' having as its source what Bergson calls 'creative emotions':

The other attitude is that of the open soul. What, in that case, is allowed in? Suppose we say that it embraces all humanity: we should not be going too far, we should hardly be going far enough, since its love may extend to animals, to plants, to all nature. And yet no one of these things which would thus fill it would suffice to define the attitude taken by the soul [...] Its form is not dependent on its content.

(1935: 27)

Whereas in 'normal' emotions, we first have a representation that causes the feeling (e.g., I see my friend and therefore I feel happy), in 'creative' emotional processes, it is the emotion itself that is a generative force (e.g., out of the joy a musician feels, she creates a symphony). An open society ethics stands for inclusiveness and takes on an added dimension of movement, creation and indetermination. 'Thus the opposition to "immobility" snaps into focus: the closed society excludes and immobilizes, whereas the open society includes and moves' (Lefebvre 2003: 90).

Customarily we view human rights as a protection of our human status. But Bergson contends that humanitarian action should not be simply administrative, but primarily ethical, because it implies self-transformation. What we need is not just that Human Rights be inscribed in moral and legal codes, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and of a massive amount of ensuing conventions designed to endorse and supplement it – whose assertions keep being overlooked and suspended by our closed societies during periods of war and social crisis. 'What we really need is a universal mode of love to take hold in the world', where love refers less to a particular relation to an object or a beloved, and more to an inner dynamics of the soul, of exaltation and welcome; 'Love is a disposition or a mood. It is a way of being in the world, rather than a direct attachment to any particular thing in it' (Lefebvre 2003: 93).

Alexandre Lefebvre remarks how Bergson was unique in considering open love as a creative emotion at the core of Human Rights:

Bergson thinks that the purpose of human rights is to introduce all human beings to a way of living in the world – he calls it love – untouched by hatred. [...] Bergson talked about human rights in terms of love rather than law, of emotions rather than practical reason, and most of all, he emphasized the role human rights play in ameliorating the self rather than helping other people.

(2018: 5)

7. For more on how theatre has been an especially powerful medium for advocating human rights, see Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (eds.) *Theatre and Human Rights After 1945: Things Unspeakable*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
8. Bergson claims that it is impossible to understand the other completely without becoming the other. Only art can overcome this impossibility because the work of art is an expression of the complete personality that can be grasped and experienced by readers/spectators (see *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, first published in 1889, translated as *Time and Free Will*).

Kazantzakis's *Christ Recrucified* evokes a similar idea through the characters of the shepherd Manolios and Katerina, the village widow turned prostitute. Various small scenes set in the domestic sphere, both in the novel and in my adaptation, offer visibility to publicly hidden female characters whose actions are marked by a fear that not only poisons human relations but also functions as a secret motor of authoritarianism so characteristic of patriarchal societies. Through Katerina and Manolios, however, who end up being sacrificed because they want to protect the refugees, Kazantzakis suggests – influenced by the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson, whose lectures he attended in Paris in 1907 – that matter and spirit are indistinct, and that there is an inescapable relationship between care for the self and care for other people, between personal transformation and general human protection. This thesis counters two fundamental assumptions in current human rights law, theory and activism, namely: 1) that Human Rights are not to transform people, but just to protect them when their rights are at risk of being violated and 2) that the object of Human Rights is Other less fortunate people, rather than also 'about caring for one's self' (Lefebvre 2018: 5). Theatre is a most empowering means of promoting such a ground-breaking view of human rights through the whole spectrum of performance, dramatic and postdramatic forms.⁷

CONCLUSION

The ever-increasing number of people in the world already uprooted or who are everyday being displaced – due to political, social, economic and environmental factors – raise the urgent necessity for humans to empathize beyond their own group, be it of family, community or nation state. This recent migration 'crisis' is an emerging issue worthy of public involvement, which defies theatre studies and art to engage in ways that may promote human bonding and mutual understanding through empathy towards Otherness.

Ancient Greek philosophy took the power of theatre seriously in terms of its ethical effects towards social sustainability through the way human beings felt and acted. So did Henri Bergson, when he argued that Otherness might only be fully understood through the intuitive and free creativity of art.⁸ Jacques Derrida held that 'an act of hospitality can only be poetic' (2000: 5). Through the critical link of the act of beholding, both theatre and philosophy engage in and with the world, cast light on human and non-human action, perception, performance and existence, and in the process enhance our understanding of otherness and self. Although ephemeral, theatre is a key and fertile terrain of ethical questioning where we collaboratively cultivate 'belonging-together' in an affectively engaged way; that is why, at a time like ours, when the situation in the world 'is so unpredictable and unthinkable, like a diffuse overcharge, that we are almost unable to keep up with the pace of events [...], we need to recover the theatre as a forum for debate' (Schimmelpfennig 2017: n.pag.). Indeed, at a time when intensifying global conflicts and inequalities trigger vast waves of migration and raise severe political and ethical problems, we are witnessing a corresponding rise of a contemporary theatre of human rights, through innovative forms of staging and playwriting, and a growing synergy between performance and activism.

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