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Immigration Interrupted

Btihaj Ajana

The article aims to provide an extended reflection on Michael Howard's (former Leader of the British Conservative Party) 2005 pre-election speech on immigration, in order to expose the violence and ethical corruption embedded within the political discourse and policies of immigration in Britain and elsewhere. It does so by referring to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy regarding figures of immanence which, in the case of immigration control, function through the will to absolute separation, technicism and the notion of mythical collective identity. As a response to this problem of immanence, the ethico-political thinking of Levinas and Derrida is invoked in an attempt to stress upon the necessity of a politics of generosity founded on ethical hospitality and total exposure to alterity rather than self-enclosure and fear of otherness.

Firm immigration controls are essential for good community relations. They are vital for the management of public services. And they are critical for the maintenance of national security. That's why a Conservative Government will set an annual maximum limit to immigration. (Howard 2005)

Measure is the name for the propriety of one Being to another, or to itself. (Nancy 2000, p. 177)

In recent years, the issue of immigration has pervaded contemporary political imaginary laying bare the other face of globalisation, the other logic of capitalism, and exposing the existential uncertainty that millions of people are facing today. Yet the political responses to the issue of immigration seem to rest merely upon the immanentist¹ vision of what Nancy (1991) calls 'absolute enclosure' manifested, for example, in the politics of borders and figures of measurement in which quotas and numbers are becoming metaphors for dignity and worth. Such responses attest to the policies of exclusion that the majority of Western courtiers are wholeheartedly embracing through what Zylinska (2004, p. 523) terms 'the biopolitics of immigration', producing taxonomies in which 'singular beings' are turned into classified categories such as the 'illegal immigrant', the 'asylum seeker', the 'refugee', the 'bogus', the 'detainee', the 'deportee' and

1. Throughout this essay, I shall use Nancy's term 'immanence' as a substitute for 'totalitarianism' in the sense that it is wider than the categorisation of a type of state or government.

so forth. These categories, whilst represented in most Western political discourses as emblematic realities of 'undemocratic', 'anti-freedom' or 'underdeveloped' states, continue to reveal the limits of Western sovereignty and expose the failure of modern governments to live up to their promises of bringing security and justice to the world.

Western governments are permeated with assumptions *vis-à-vis* the prevalence of freedom and democracy. These assumptions seem to be paradoxically and ironically giving the right to some to categorise, criminalise, demonise, detain, expel and exclude, whilst invoking virtues of fairness and tolerance: 'We live in a country which places great store on democracy, tolerance, fair play and freedom of speech... We will set an annual limit to immigration, including a quota for asylum seekers' (Howard 2005). This enduring paradox which animates the political discourse is indeed what reveals the hollowness of these claims (freedom and democracy), which are, after all, mere figures of speech, ornaments hanging on the politics of exclusion and regimes of domination. Such a paradox demands an *interruption* of these assumptions in order to rethink the question of immigration and reconfigure the notion of otherness that dwells at the heart of political philosophy.

The 'sense of panic', as Cole (2000, p. 24) has it, concerning the issue of immigration stems first and foremost from the tensions inherent in Western metaphysics of subjectivity. These tensions are apparent in the ways in which the notion of 'the citizen' is dialectically constructed as being both the universal (human being) and the particular (individual belonging to a specific state), which accounts for the concepts of freedom and individuality on the one hand and concepts of membership and commonality on the other. However, while these notions of universality and particularity are inextricably interwoven together within the fabric of 'citizen', they are also perceived within the political imaginary as being mutually exclusive (Coward 1999, p. 5). This synthetic separation legitimises the order of sovereignty and gives rise to a myriad spatial partitions, all of which feed into the politics of citizenship, in other words, the 'politics of particularity'.

Central to this politics of particularity is the principle of inclusion (of *good* particulars) and exclusion (of *bad* particulars) through which 'the idea of normative universality' (Zylinska 2004, p. 524) is established in relation to constitutive particularity. Particularity in a sense could be understood as the partitioning of differences and the demarcating of spatiality based on the 'universal' values of autonomy and self-governing, manifested in the notion of statehood. The production and formulation of *the* particular citizen within particular state is initially *performed* through modes of inclusion and exclusion whereby individual, communal and national identities are conceived of in terms of dichotomies of self and other, of inside and outside, of belonging and alien, and so on. The state, as such, represents itself as the locus *par excellence* of spatial particularity - territoriality - through the politicisation of its borders, the principle by which the concept of citizen is made possible. For without a state, the particular character of the citizen dissolves into universality (being *a* human) and without citizens, there could be no state (Coward 1999, p. 9). This interdependent relationship between state and citizens is in fact what produces the spurious needs and

rationalisation of division and containment which find their expression in the ruling of sovereignty. Such a relationship also explains why each time the question of immigration is raised by governments, there is a tendency to invoke the notion of 'people' i.e. 'citizens' in order to substantiate the will to exclusion and total enclosure, or what we may term '*absolute* particularity':

I think most people would agree that Britain has reached a turning point. They know that our communities cannot successfully absorb newcomers at today's pace. (Howard 2005)

However, this absolute particularity, or at least the hysterical politics towards which it is progressing, ignores that immigration controls (or indeed any form of closure) are 'like a dam; when one hole is blocked, another one appears somewhere else' (Hayter 2000, p. 152). This metaphor is illustrated through the practices of 'alternative migration' (so-called 'clandestine' migration), and all those whom, to borrow Arendt's expression, constitute the 'the vanguard of their people': those who expose the ethical bankruptcy of Western politics, those who force open the 'viscous spatio-temporal zone' (Balibar 2002, p. 83) (i.e. the border), those who refuse to succumb to the hindering of circulation imposed by rich countries, and those, who of course, are forced into embarking on hostile journeys in order to seek shelter or simply a better life. If such is the case, it is only because the world is a porous place, a place made out of relations where 'there has to be a *clinamen*[;] ... an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other' (Nancy 1991, p. 3). Absolute particularity ignores this logic of *clinamen*. It ignores the logic of relatedness. Instead, it lends itself to 'absolute immanence' whereby being-with, being-in-common, or in fact, *being* at all, are understood as that of which is constituted through the *organisation* of sameness (*immanentist politics*) or the *sharing* of common substance (*immanentist community*). Such immanentist figurations function at the level of self (state/demos)-enclosure, that is, the sealing of the inside from the outside by means of a total separation from any 'unwanted' and 'foreign' element that might permeate it. The politics of immigration stands as the quintessential example of such figures of immanentism: 'We will put in place 24-hour security at ports to prevent illegal immigration... Taken together our proposals will lead to a substantial reduction in the number of people settling in the UK' (Howard 2005).

It is worth noting at this point that figures of immanentism- politics of immigration in our case - are always presented as a project, in the guise of a work to be *accomplished* (Nancy 1991), be it in terms of preserving the absolute separation, the mobilisation of technology to do so, or simply the perpetuation of the mythical collectivised identity. At the level of absolute separation, the figure of nation-state, as it were, is constructed as an autonomous and unified entity whose ontological immanence is premised on sovereignty and self-sufficiency in such a way that the need for exposure (the *clinamen*) is regarded as obsolete. That is not to say, however, that the possibility of exposure is entirely eliminated from such figure. Instead, exposure becomes that which relates to exteriority only in terms of exchange value and flow of capital - in fact, this kind of exposure

is encouraged as it sustains the doctrine of free market and perpetuates capitalism - as well as the emerging modes of measurement which are also applied on human beings, such as quota for asylum seekers and points system for work permits and residence. Nevertheless, measure here is not only the quantifying of dimensionality (How many asylum seekers and immigrants should be let in?) - although this is often presented in some political discourses as the salient point, but more so, measure is the quantifying of 'responsibility' (Nancy 2000, p. 180) so much so that the question becomes not only 'how many?' but 'which?' (Which asylum seekers are 'genuine'? Which asylum seekers should one be responsible to? Which (skilled/needed) immigrants should be given the right to enter and reside? Which marriages are not sham? In short, which 'existences' are deemed worthy of living?). In such a context, measure becomes concurrently the embodiment of exposure as well as enclosure, both of which are, nonetheless, operated within the intentionality of absolute separation.

Before extending my analysis any further, I would like, at this point, to return to Nancy's argument regarding absolute enclosure in order to discuss the impossibility of absolute immanence and as such the non-viability of immigration control. According to Nancy (1991, p. 4) 'The logic of the absolute violates the absolute'. This statement alludes to the dialectical logic by which Nancy seeks to explain how individualism, that is, the absolute separation from the outside, is not only impossible, but also, self-contradictory. Self-contradictory inasmuch as for a separation to be 'absolute', it has to eradicate any contact with the outside by not only closing around what it has to enclose (e.g. spatial particularity - territory - which is yet exposed at its borders to another territory) but also, by closing around itself: 'The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all... to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone' (Nancy 1991, p. 4). But this double move of closure, according to Nancy, is self-contradictory. For when a closure closes around itself, it becomes that which is closed rather than the closure as such. The absurdity of this will to absoluteness may be illustrated here if we imagine how in order for a country to be absolutely separated, it must have border controls of its own border controls! As such and insofar as absolute separation is the predicate for absolute immanence, the latter becomes merely an illusionary utopia fostered by immanentist politics whose aim is to exclude all that which is not to be included in its immanentist state. The politics of immigration is in fact the realm where this utopia of immanentism finds its expression. But despite the escalating efforts to bring this utopia into realisation, governments are struggling in vain to control the freedom of movement for:

Migrants and those who facilitate their migration resort to staggering feats of ingenuity, courage and endurance to assert their right to move and to flee ... The question is how much suffering will be imposed on innocent people, and how much racism will be stoked up... before governments finally abandon the effort. (Hayter 2000, p. 152)

Let us now turn to the second aspect of the figuration of immanentism, technology. The will to absolute separation rests upon the investment in technological

apparatuses by which borders are controlled and bodies are scanned in order to establish their (il)legitimacy. Several countries are increasingly developing and implementing different modes of surveillance in order to measure, anticipate and prevent any intrusion of unwanted individuals. Face-recognition, iris scanning, fingerprinting, biometric cards, CCTV cameras in ports and detention centres, are all examples of the technologies of surveillance through which governments are expressing, implicitly if not explicitly, the imperative to administer and manage life, and subsequently exercise 'biopolitics'. Nevertheless, the biopolitics of immigration is not only the management of life but also the management of 'a waiting-to-live, a non-life' Balibar (2002, p. 83). For when technology interacts with biology (with the aim to categorise and differentiate), it creates what Foucault (2003 [1975], p. 255) calls 'caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower' so much so that the parameter of biological differentiation and categorisation becomes the currency for *life* (of those who have legitimate access - the belonging group, the healthy body), *waiting-to-live* (of those whose files are still being processed by immigration officers or in the Home Office),² and *non-life* (of those whose cases failed and they are therefore subject to deportation).³ The fact that technology is an aspect of immanentist biopolitics, is in itself an attestation to how the political has faded into a state of technicism (Coward 1999, p. 18) - a depoliticisation of society in the Agambenian sense - in which governments' policies and debates are merely technical discussions on the type of mechanisms to be deployed in order to protect borders, filter movements, eliminate infiltrations, and ultimately, sustain sovereignty by means of measurement and exclusion. Biopolitics, nowadays, is too pervasive, too subtle that borders are no longer constituted around the 'physical' but *actualised* in the taken-for-granted institutional-organisational-administrative processes; in the density and ubiquity of information networks. This perpetual actualisation of borders or what we may refer to as 'infinite bordering' is enacted into our very *ousia*, creating far-reaching implications on 'bodies that do *not* matter', bodies of those left to float in the Strait of Gibraltar, bodies of those left to die on the US-Mexican border, bodies of those who are, at this very moment, being raped, tortured and humiliated. Borders are becoming the epitome of Western hypocrisy: on the one hand, they embody visions of Western progress, civilisation and technological advancements. On the other hand, they are turning into mass graves, a monolithic disposal of dispensable bodies and unnecessary existences. This is the dialectical reality of borders!

2. They are either placed in detention centres where they are subjected to the gaze of constant surveillance or released (rather 'abandoned') without being granted permission to work or access to support. In most cases, they have to report to police stations on regular basis, while some even have to carry an electronic tracking tag/biometric Smart Card.

3. This category may also include '*les sans-papiers*' [undocumented people] as well; people who are living and working in constant anxiety and fear for not having the necessary residence or work permits. They are hence forced to succumb to exploitation, cheap labour and harsh working conditions. *Les sans-papiers* may also be included in the 'waiting-to-live' category - in fact, they keep oscillating between the two.

Moving onto the third aspect of the figuration of immanentism, we shall now discuss the ways in which the mythical collectivised identity is brought into play in order to justify, articulate and sustain the function of immanentism. The idea of collective identity is bound to the idea of 'common substance' which, in the immanentist discourse, is always represented as the essential bond between people and the foundational character of common identity. Common substance, as such, becomes the logic of institutionalisation in immanentist politics which sees itself as the organiser and guarantor of common identity. Yet the realisation of this communal identity takes place only at the level of 'articulation' (Nancy 1991) where the notion of 'common substance' is made 'immanent' to the idea of communality so much so that, in immanentist political figurations, it is never questioned but always taken-for-granted and perceived as 'common sense'. And to question common sense/common substance is to put at stake the very project of absolute separation and expose the inside to the irreducible outside. Immanentist politics, as such, performs its task of absolute enclosure by means of suppressing/reducing difference, regulating alterity and securing its 'imaginative community' (all being manifested in immigration controls). And when the other is 'needed' (skilled migrants/ 'Sector Based Scheme' migrants) or imposed (having to grant access to asylum seekers because of the signed international conventions), there is a tendency to enforce modes of assimilation - what is called 'integration' - so that this Other is absorbed into a homogenous totality in which its 'imagined' disturbance/threat is reduced if not eliminated: '... hard work, determination and a willingness to integrate propelled them [immigrants] forward... Britain has an enviable record of racial integration' (Howard 2005). Integration, in this sense, becomes a *work*, an *achievement* to be extolled as the virtue of 'good citizens' and 'good governments', all, while invoking principles of common substance and essential unity; 'That's what makes us so proud to be British' (Howard 2005). 'To be British' is, in fact, a testimony of how the myth of communal essence speaks through the political enterprise of immanentism and renders identity as a project, as the gathering together of absolute figures (citizens, states, institutions, communities, etc.) in order to *naturalise* the mythical character of collective identity; absolute 'being-such' (Agamben 1993, p. 2) or absolute 'suchness':

He recounts to them their story, or his own ... he is his own hero, and they, by turns, are the heroes of the tale and the ones who have the right to hear it and the duty to learn it. (Nancy 1991, pp. 43-4)

I come from an immigrant family...For centuries Britain has welcomed people from around the world...Many of them came to Britain with almost nothing and had to start again from scratch. (Howard 2005)

In myth, ... existences are not offered in their singularity: but the characteristics of particularity contribute to the system of the "exemplary life". (Nancy 1991, p. 78)

The enunciation of absolute suchness is only possible insofar as it relies on mythic, inaugural figurations that circumscribe commonality in such a way that

the 'invention', 'recital' and 'transmission' (Nancy 1991, p. 44) of myth become the sole foundation of identity itself and the means by which absolute separation is achieved. As such, one might compare political conferences, assemblies, campaigns, etc. to a scene of gathering in which the myth is being recycled and recited by telling stories about the genesis of absolute figures (citizens - including the assimilated migrants, state, etc.), how they came to be together and how they must protect their 'origins' and 'communal essence' from the intrusion of the outsider (the 'coming' immigrant). In (political) speech, the articulation of myth takes place when series of stories, shared values and beliefs are invoked in an attempt to ennoble that speech (*ibid.*, 48), substantiate immanentism and present collective identity as an absolute figure whereby citizens and state are situated within an enclosure. In such a process, myth transforms its mythic status into a natural one to the extent that it is no longer perceived as a myth but becomes the condition *par excellence* for belonging, politics or any other form of 'communitarian fulfilment' (*ibid.*, 69).

Thus far, we have seen how the figurations of immanentist politics are manifested through immigration controls by means of *spatialising*, *technologising* and *articulating* absolute figures within the political imaginary, giving rise to modes of inclusion and exclusion. Such figurations are problematic insofar as they are deeply ensconced within the determinism of sovereignty in which identity, citizenship, and belonging are reduced to and burdened by the illusive belief in a fixed common substance and a need to sustain a state of self-enclosure. To follow the thread of Nancy's assertions, it can be argued that what makes these figurations rather problematic is, in fact, their failure to address or at least recognise the question of what constitutes 'being-in-common' and their continuous attempt to conceal the inevitability of 'being-with', notions that are salient in rethinking the question of immigration.

Instead of regarding being-in-common as the gathering together of individuals who share some common property or essence -and in which the *clinamen* is removed from such gathering, Nancy (1991, p. 26-7) offers an alternative understanding of this concept. He asserts that being-in-common is first and foremost being exposed to alterity through a relationship of sharing, made possible by the Heideggerian notion of being-with (*Mitsein*) which goes beyond commonality and identity politics. Such an understanding, albeit abstract due to its breaking away from any spatial particularity, does indeed save individuals or rather *singularities* from the danger of communal fusion (witnessed for instance in the movements of fascism and Nazism) and the restraints of self-enclosure (immigration controls for instance). For in Nancy's conceptualisation, singular beings are not regarded as absolute figures of immanentist politics (i.e. citizens) but as beings whose experience of being-in-common is constituted through their predicate-free existential/ontological position of being-there (*Dasein*) and what they reveal to each other in their exteriority (which forms their interiority) and their multiplicity (which forms their uniqueness). The being-such of a singular being is irreducibly a being-with that draws its sense of 'selfness' from the existence of 'otherness' without, however, having to live up to a differentiating identity or a shared individuality

that would place it within the confines of categorisation i.e. suchness: 'such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property ... (the reds, the French, the Muslims)' (Agamben 1993, p. 1). Thus, the realisation or rather actualisation of being-in-common is only possible insofar as singular beings are 'whatever' (*ibid.*) beings (not having any *particular* identity) whose 'membership' could not be determined by or reduced to having/sharing 'common' characteristics. But a membership that can only be experienced at the moment of exposure to singularity, at the moment of its 'taking place' '...(which is itself without a place, without a space reserved for or devoted to its presence)' (Nancy 1991, p. 72). Exposure, sharing and being-with are thus constitutive of being-in-common in such a way that belonging itself becomes a 'bare' belonging stripped from any predetermined condition of membership (Agamben 1993, p. 84) or demarcated territoriality. It is a belonging where 'whatever' (singularity such as it is - and this 'such' is unidentifiable and fluid) belongs to 'whateverness' (unconditional being-in-common). Immigration, in this sense, can be regarded as an aspect of exposure, sharing and being-with, to which there could/should be no *fixed* limit or *neat* bordering.

But while it might be objected that this conceptualisation of 'being-in-common' is devoid of any *concrete* 'sense' of political engagement or agency, it is, nevertheless, important to attend to the way in which such conceptualisation sets the stage for the tensions inherent in the thinking of hospitality, which renders immigration not only a political question but also an ethical one. For when the issue of immigration is contemplated from an ethical standpoint, it becomes possible to reveal not only the failure but also the 'violence' embedded within Western politics (Metselaar 2003, p. 1). This political violence is epitomised in the policies of detention, the treatment of refugees, the proposal of asylum quotas, the forced integration, or even, the act of 'naming' ('illegal immigrant', 'asylum seeker', 'refugee', 'bogus', 'detainee', 'deportee', etc.), all of which breach the ethics of radical generosity toward otherness - in that 'violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves' (Levinas 1969, p. 21). It is, hence, the call for ethics that puts the question of politics into doubt and reconfigures the understanding of responsibility 'for the Other' (Levinas 1982, p. 95), for the 'Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself' (Levinas 1969, p. 39)⁴.

4. The remaining part of this paper engages with the notions of responsibility and hospitality by drawing on the philosophical writing of Levinas and Derrida. By juxtaposing Nancy's critique of the immanentist community and the insights offered by these two thinkers, it may be possible to read Nancy-with-Derrida-with-Levinas in a way that makes the *singularity* of their ethico-political project even more *plural*. This juxtaposition, nevertheless, requires one to take into account the differences between these thinkers, whether in terms of conceptualisation or in terms of strategies by which they seek to rethink, rework and 'un-work' concepts of community, identity and otherness. For instance, whilst both Derrida and Nancy recognise the need to resort to the (Heideggerian-like) visual-symbolic tactic of placing community under 'erasure' in order to remove it from its metaphysical determination, each of the two adopt a different approach for performing such an erasure: Derrida emphasising on the movement of 'crossing out' the concept through the 'deconstruction of fraternity' while Nancy

emphasising on the unavoidability of 'writing' the concept and the need for an 'interruption of myth' (see Morin 2006). In fact, the notion of 'fraternity' is one of the main markers of difference between Derrida and Nancy's approaches to the deconstruction of community. In *Voyous* (2003), for instance, Derrida expresses his concern with Nancy's 'naked' use of the term fraternity to name and determine 'la communauté, le commun, le partage de la liberté ou l'égalité incommensurables de tout un chacun' (Derrida 2003, p. 85). For according to Derrida, the concept of fraternity is a process of identification and homogenisation through which modes of inclusion and exclusion are performed, and aspects of difference are reduced and neutralised. Hence Derrida (pp. 87-8) asserts that:

Fraternalisme, confrérie, communauté confraternelle et fraternisante, on y privilégie à la fois l'autorité masculine du frère (qui est aussi un fils, un mari, un père), le généalogique, le familial, la naissance, l'autochtonie et la nation ... Alors pourquoi garder le mot de fraternité plutôt qu'un autre ?

It is for these reasons that Derrida relentlessly calls for the continuous deconstruction of the figure of the 'brother' and its embedded motives of affiliation and genealogy, especially 'quand leur croisement devient politique, quand on y politise un modèle, une figure, une hégémonie' (*ibid.*, p. 92). Yet one may argue that even if Nancy does not seem to be as rigorously/explicitly critical in his own use of the concept of fraternity and in his treatment of its transcendental dimension, his arguments vis-à-vis the interruption of myth serve the very same function of deconstruction Derrida seeks to perform and sustain (Morin 2006). For in interrupting the myth of communal origin and common substance, it becomes possible to disrupt the continuity of *mythical* configuration (or 'autofiguration' as Nancy (1991, p. 54) puts it) of nature and *natural* configuration of myth through the staging of myth itself, which thereby deconstructs the myriad mythical figures - including that of the 'brother' - upon which the notion of community is usually calibrated. (In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy (2000, p. 198) does indeed defend his position vis-à-vis the notion of fraternity: 'I agree, then, with Jacques Derrida's critique of fraternity in his *Politics of Friendship* ... But I must point out that I have also, on occasion, raised the question of Christian fraternity. Moreover, I have reversed my position again and again on the possibility of looking into whether fraternity is necessarily generic or congenital').

The difference between Derrida and Nancy's approach can also be seen in the way they conceptualise the notions of singularity, plurality and responsibility. For Derrida, responsibility is bound up with the irreducible, isolated and inaccessible singularity in the sense that it relies on this secret singular character - being alone and separated - at the moment of decision (Derrida 1995, p. 60). And since *tout autre est tout autre* i.e. every other is every other and every other is 'wholly' other, the relationship between the concept of responsibility and that of singularity leads to aporia and paradox. This is insofar as the introduction of the plural (or the arrival of the 'third') brings about the unavoidable sacrifice of other singularities in that one cannot possibly respond concurrently to the call of all other others.

Contrary to Derrida, Nancy rejects the idea that singularities are isolated and remote. Instead, he regards singularities as constantly being 'exposed' and 'open' to being-in-common - and therefore always being responsible by virtue of one's naked existence - so much so that what it is at stake for him is not 'how we might establish a bond between us, but rather ... how it is that we have come to consider ourselves separate in the first place' (Edkins 2005, p. 383). It is also in this respect that Nancy distinguishes the notion of the singular from the individual, for the latter is 'merely the residue of the experience of dissolution of community... the abstract result of a decomposition ... absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and as certainty' (Nancy p. 1991, p. 3). Whereas 'singularity never has the nature of the structure of individuality. Singularity never takes place at the level of atoms, those identifiable if not identical identities; rather it takes place at the level of the *clinamen*, which is unidentifiable' (*ibid.*, pp. 6-7). Thus for Nancy, Being is being-with, existence is coexistence, appearance is co-appearance, and the singular is indeed a plural (2000). Such an ontological reconfiguration, according to Nancy, demands 'a reconsideration of the very meaning of "politics" - and therefore, of "philosophy" - in light of the originary situation: the bare exposition of singular origins' (Nancy 2000, p. 25). As such, '[w]hereas with Derrida we are led to consider what binds us as singularities to other singularities, in Nancy our attention is directed rather to the impossibility of being on our own' (Edkins 2005, p. 383).

Nancy's reasoning about this impossibility of being on our own stems partly from his rigorous critique of what Hutchens (2005, p. 42) accurately calls 'closed immanence'; a critique whose premise is based upon the notion of 'sense'. For Nancy (2003, p. 12), '[e]xistence is the sense of

being' and this *sense* of being is in fact our very exposure to the world at the edge of the world. Not that the world and existence *have* a sense, but they *are* sense themselves insofar as 'the world is not the work of a God... but the space of the 'there is', its configuration without a face' (Nancy 1997, p. 156). Thus for Nancy, to speak of the sense of the world is only possible as far as one presupposes the existence of an outside Creator, and once this presupposition collapses, what remains is only the world *as* sense and sense as world. Here, Nancy is deconstructing the whole concept of creation and origin found in the Christian discourse, and he does so by tearing the concept away from 'the forms of transcendence, exteriority or otherness often presented by religious thought' (Hutchens 2005, p. 61) and placing it instead within the proposition that creation is the 'singular ex-position of being.. [it] is existence' (Nancy 2000, p. 17). This rethinking of the world and sense *with* and *through* sense remains very much in tune with the idea that being is irreducibly being-with and that '[b]eing in touch with ourselves is what makes us "us," and there is no other secret to discover buried behind this very touching, behind the "with" of coexistence' (*ibid.*, p. 13).

The implications of Nancy's rethinking of the world through sense carry over radically to his rethinking of community through being-with, distinguishing his thesis from the Levinassian articulations of community (found for instance in Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*). For instead of over-investing in the alterity of the other or 'exploring the possibility of a religiously accessible transcendence' (Hutchens 2005, p. 44) as is the case with the ethical transcendentalism of Levinas, Nancy insists on the idea that it is only through the experience of sharing and exposure at the edge of the world that community can be rescued from the violence of closed immanence, that it is only through the intertwining of sense and being-in-common that resistance against communal *fusion* is possible. Seen in this light, one may say that for Nancy, thinking beyond the dichotomy of immanence and transcendence is first and foremost *thinking sense*; sense that is 'coextensive with thinking as well' (*ibid.*, p. 61). And it is this vision that may lead us to some of the points of disjuncture between Nancy and Levinas. For in Levinassian terms, the notion of the Third is what 'represents the possibility of the third direction of a radical unconformity, which escapes the bipolar play of immanence and transcendence characteristic of being' (Caygill 2002, p. 146). Whereas, for Nancy, being(-in-common) is no third; 'There is no Me and You and a Third. Being-in-common stands for the fact that there *is no inter*' (Devisch 2006, p. 7). If everything '*passes between us*', it is not that the 'between' is a bridge or a connection (something third) that links me to you, but rather; the between is 'the stretching out [*dimension*] and distance opened by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning' (Nancy 2000, p. 5).

Nancy's rejection of the notion of the 'third' is mainly due to the latter's designation as a surrogate concept for 'God' or the 'trace of the divine Other' in Levinas' thought. For Levinas, the *beyond* of being is thirdness that is defined not in terms of alterity nor in terms of ipseity, but in terms of *illeity*. As succinctly put by Caygill (2002, p. 147), *illeity* is 'called at once to name the third mode of thought between philosophy and religion, to epitomise Levinas's critique of phenomenology, and to provoke the most unrestrained version of his ethics, and in extremity even to serve as one of the names of God'. So what binds one person to another, according to Levinas, is precisely the *illeity* of a God who passed and whose trace is to be found in the 'face': 'The face is for itself visitation and transcendence. But the face completely open can at the same time be in itself because it is in the trace of *illeity*' (Levinas 1981, p. 202). And it is for this reason that Levinas situates ethics in the 'face-to-face' relation. Nancy, however, is very sceptical of such articulations insofar as they are embedded within the post-secular thought in which the concept of God is understood and expressed in terms of:

explosion, dispersal, suspension ... as if "God" were in fragments, an Osiris dismembered throughout all of our discourse ['being', 'infinite', 'Other', 'community', 'poetry', 'art', 'sublime', 'love', 'desire', etc.]... In baptising our abysses with the name of God, we are guilty of at least two errors or two incoherencies: we fill in the abysses by attributing a bottom to them, and we blaspheme (in the true sense of the word) the name of God by making it the name of *something*. (Nancy 1991, pp. 112-3)

As such '[t]he temptation to find divinity "traced" in human experience, as if the god left a trace of itself (or a "trace of a trace") in passing (as in Levinas's famous formula) is one that Nancy insists must be avoided' (Hutchens 2005, p. 93-4).

But despite the marked differences between Derrida, Nancy, and Levinas, reading them together may prove more productive than reading them separately - especially in terms of the opening up of a possible political space for rethinking the *ethico-ontological* question of community and being-with.

In Levinasian ethics, responsibility does not exhaust itself in the 'deed'; in what one does for/to the Other⁵ (Levinas 1982, p. 96), but responsibility is primarily the evocation of response entreated through the Other's face, which allows one to enter into an ethical relationship with otherness. As such, one is *always* and *inevitably* responsible for the Other by virtue of his/her proximity to the 'face' of alterity which presents itself not so much in the measuring of spacing between singularities but rather insofar as it brings the subject into existence through the soliciting of speech and the embodiment of the relation of self to the Other. In taking account of the face, the Other can no longer be abstracted into mere 'graspable' categories of 'possession' (an asylum seeker, a refugee, a detainee, etc.) but moves into a dimension of expression in which 'the face resists possession, resists my powers' (Levinas 1969, p. 197) and, therefore, decentres subjectivity (Campbell 1999, p. 33) and disturbs the will to 'ignore' this infinite responsibility. Facial practices such as eyelid and lip sewing are illustrations of 'This bond between expression and responsibility' (Levinas 1969, p. 200) by which some of the 'asylum seekers' and 'detainees' assert their agency and make their ethical call heard.⁶ But perceived from the vantage point of politics, the response to this call would be merely that of obligation; the obligation to put an end to what is perceived in the (Western) politics as a 'barbarian blackmailing' that stirs up the anger of taxpayers (in other words, the 'belonging', 'good' citizens - absolute figures). Whereas, from an ethical standpoint, the very manifestation of this helpless plea would be in itself an attestation to the failure of politics - without which the self-inflicted bodily harm would not have occurred in the first place - and a demand for a response that goes beyond duty, morals and obligation i.e. a response embedded within the ethics of absolute hospitality and pure generosity.

This disjuncture between the political *totality* and the ethical *infinity* marks the abyssal *hiatus* between conditional (not only in the Kantian sense) and unconditional hospitality (Derrida 2000). For conditional hospitality entails a measuring of actions, a calculation of responsibility and a selection of those to whom one may/should be hospitable/responsible. This is indeed the political hospitality manifested, for instance, in what Cohen (2003, p. 72) calls 'economic elitism' found in the schemes of points system and work permits which function by means of filtering those who may economically contribute 'more to the public purse' (Spencer, in Cohen 2003, p. 73) from those who have 'little or nothing to contribute' (Cohen 2003, p. 73). Added to that the current 'Worker Registration Scheme' in the United Kingdom relating to nationals of the new European Union member states⁷ as well as the proposed quotas for asylum

5. Following the translation of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* by Lingis, the 'Other' here refers to the '*autrui*' (the personal Other, the you) whereas the 'other' refers to '*autre*' (another person).

6. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between lip sewing, violence, politics, and the concept of 'penal asylum', see Joseph Pugliese, 'Penal Asylum: Refugees, Ethics, Hospitality', http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol1no1_2002/pugliese.html.

7. Since 1 May 2004, nationals of the new EU member states (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) who wish to work in the UK are required to apply under the Worker Registration Scheme. It is only after working 'legally' for 12 months in the UK without a break that they are entitled to have 'full' rights of free movement like nationals of the Western European countries.

seekers. Ramifications of this political hospitality are damaging and violent in that not only modes of discrimination, inequality and exclusion are systematically implemented, but also, the absolute responsibility for the Other is negated and overridden by an exigency for reciprocity or a demand for repayment: 'we have offered a home to families who want to come here, work hard and make a positive contribution to our society' (Howard 2005). In contrast, unconditional hospitality is a response to the ethical imperative which precedes the realm of politics, philosophy and sociality. It is offered to anyone and everyone regardless of whether they are TB/HIV negative or not, whether they are skilled migrants or not, whether they would contribute to the economy or not, whether they would conform to the customs and values of the host entity or not. This notion of hospitality entails a responsibility that has no limits, no particularity, and an absolute openness to the Other that goes beyond any expectation, determination and knowledge. For 'hospitality is...an experience which proceeds beyond knowledge toward the other as absolute stranger, as unknown, where I know that I know nothing of him' (Derrida 2000, p. 8) - so much so that the subject becomes not a host but a 'hostage' to the Other (Levinas in Derrida 2000, p. 9) with no choice but to be responsible and hence hospitable. (However, this notion of being hostage to the Other is not to be regarded in negative terms for it is the alterity of the other and his/her call that shape one's subjectivity, incite one to think, to feel (Diprose 2002, p. 134) and to *become*). Thus, and to use Levinas' (1981, p. 98) allegory, which is probably derived from Nietzsche's (1997, p. 91) 'Ye love your virtue as a mother loveth her child; but when did one hear of a mother wanting to be paid for her love?', the ethical relation of self (in our case, this would be the State) to the Other becomes something akin to the relation of the mother to her foetus; an inevitable and, at times, excessive responsibility for which nothing is necessarily expected in return.

Nevertheless, 'Everything that takes place "between us" concerns everyone' (Levinas 1969, p. 212) and it is never a matter of one foetus only, one Other solely, but a question of otherness in its entirety. As such, as soon as the 'third' party (another other) comes to the scene, this absolute ethical relationship between self and Other is called into question, for the arrival of the Third complicates the status of the Other as being the only object of ethical responsibility and transfers this self-Other relationship into the political/juridical realm, and hence conditionality so that responsibility could be calculated, portioned and allocated 'accordingly' (such operations tend to be value and interest-driven). As mentioned earlier, it is the way in which conditionality functions by means of institutionalising, organising, standardising and universalising relationships that notions of singularity and alterity are betrayed and negated in the process of legislation and (de)politicisation creating a 'sociality that does not allow a generosity that would foster ... the improvement of survival of anyone other than those bodies that already dominate' (Diprose 2002, p. 171). Yet, this inevitable conditionality triggered by the arrival of the third is what indicates that hospitality could never be regarded merely from the vantage point of ethics (since in reality, the

'I' does not engage solely with 'one' Other) but also in terms of politics (by virtue of the arrival of the third who constitutes a multitude of others). Hospitality, in this sense, is concurrently straddling the ethical as well as the political sphere and in so doing, it reveals that 'the determinability of this limit [between the ethical and the political] was never pure and it never will be' (Derrida in Diprose 2002, p. 186). This statement suggests that despite the apparent hiatus between ethics and politics, there is no strict separation between the two after all, and that the realisation of an ethico-political hospitality is possible only insofar as one is willing to resolve or at least navigate the malleable bifurcation between that which embodies calculable and conceptual practice (politics) and that which embodies unconditionality and radical responsibility (ethics) without disposing of one in favour of the other. Such an act will intrinsically necessitate the *unworking* (Nancy 1991) of immanentism in order to attend to an alternative politics which takes ethics as its premise rather than absolute figurations of myth, technicism and enclosure.

Although it is often argued that Levinas as well as Derrida's unconditional hospitality cannot be unproblematically (or even possibly) translated into a political action (Metselaar 2003, p. 9) insofar as it is merely articulated at the level of the dual self-Other relationship rather than sociality as a whole (this being particularly true of Levinasian ethics), their vision is, nonetheless, salient in terms of provoking a radical transformation in social and political imaginaries and invoking the exigency of a 'politics of generosity that would foster rather than close off different ways of being' (Diprose 2002, p. 172). Such politics will not proceed from 'a hermeneutics of depth' (Rose 1999, p. 196) in which subjectivity is wrought around self-containment, self-sufficiency and self-determinacy, presented as a project to be accomplished. Instead, it might find its point of departure in the potential encounter with the other and the total exposure to *embodied* alterity. For it is the experience of encountering and being-exposed-to that infuses the crisis 'into the hyphen at the heart of the nation-state' (Coward 1999, p. 12) and undoes any immanentist attempt to essentialise identity, commonality and belonging. Whilst it is unclear as to how such an ethico-political vision may be put into practice (perhaps this 'not-knowing-how' would save this alternative vision from being turned into yet another figure of immanentism), it may be that the rejection, transgression and obliteration of immigration controls are to be regarded as the touchstone of this radical ethico-politics and an epitome of the necessary shift from politics of borders to politics of singularities where '*No One Is Illegal*' (Cohen 2003).

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