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Ashraf, Paulo and Me, or Where Heterogeneous Realities Meet

by Juha Suoranta

Introduction

University professor harbors illegal alien," screamed the headlines of a Finnish tabloid newspaper in the spring of 2009. That professor was me. How had we gotten to this point? Weeks earlier, I received an email from a former student from the U.S. who asked me to check on the situation of an unaccompanied and underage asylum seeker living in a reception center somewhere in Finland. I learned that the Finnish Immigration Service was scheduled to deport this person to his first point of entry to Europe, namely Greece. A quick Google search revealed that asylum seekers face appalling and inhumane conditions in Greece (same as elsewhere around the Mediterranean). It was clear to me that no one should be forcibly returned there, least of all a defenseless minor. Something had to be done quickly, but what? In this chapter, based on participatory action research and autoethnographic writing, I reflect on my attempts to protect the under-age refugee and help him avoid deportation to inhumane conditions. In addition, I ponder our dialogical togetherness in this structurally and practically complex and confusing situation and our struggle for the radical dream of starting a new life in a new and strange country.

Paulo, an Exile and a Traveler

As I decided to help the then-unknown youngster, Paulo Freire became my spiritual mentor in coping with a situation filled with uncertainties. Freire and his family lived in political exile in Chile in 1964 to 1969, then for a short period in the U.S. before moving to Europe for a decade (1970–1979). These years abroad strongly impacted Freire's educational and political thinking (See, e.g., Kirkendall, 2010; McLaren, 2000).

Freire and his family were forced to leave their native Brazil after left-wing president João Goulart was ousted in 1964 in a right-wing coup d'état. Goulart had appointed Freire as his advisor to develop national literacy programs in January 1964, but his tenure was short-lived. Freire was arrested and accused of being a communist, among other false allegations; of course, nothing could be proved. For Freire, however, these interrogations and uncertain days in police custody marked a turning point—or Jaspersian *Grenzsituation* (limit or ultimate situation). Freire realized that interpreting the world—not to mention changing it—required an understanding of history and its direction, a philosophy of human beings as makers of history.

What does the history of human beings and their societies stand for? Who creates and writes history? For whom or on whose behalf is history made? Freire knew that history would not end in a military dictatorship. The death of one dream—a democratic socialist Brazil with critically reflective people—did not mean hopelessness but rather the birth of another dream. Whether that new dream would come true next year or only in the next century was impossible to say. However, Freire realized that he should dedicate his life to the struggle for social justice and freedom for all people. He also acknowledged that he would not be able to wage this battle alone but had to do so together with the people (Lake & Kress, 2013; Suoranta, 2019, pp. 88–89; Kirylo, 2011, pp. 54–55).

There were 3.5 million refugees worldwide in 1964, Freire and his family being among them; by 2019, that number had increased twentyfold to 71 million.* All of those who were forced to flee their homes faced the same fate as Freire. They were not able to sink into despair but instead had to find their place in a new country and often struggled materially, spiritually, and practically for their lives. Sociologist Richard Sennett (2011, p. 48) has stated that, although the "exile," the "immigrant," and the "expatriate" (along with the "refugee" and the "asylum seeker") are names for the different reasons for displacement, "the result of such displacements seems, today, a fate in common." In their particular situations, all displaced people must confront, in their own ways, ultimate conditions that usually stay unnoticed in daily life, as German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) observed:

In our day-to-day lives we often evade them, by closing our eyes and living as if they did not exist. We forget that we must die, forget our guilt, and forget that we are at the mercy of chance. We face only concrete situations and master them to our profit, we react to them by planning and acting in the world, under the impulsion of our practical interests. But to ultimate situations we react either by obfuscation or, if we really apprehend them, by despair and rebirth:

* http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview, https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

we become ourselves by a change in our consciousness of being. (Jaspers, 1951, p. 19–20.)

Freire's time in exile and working abroad was a prolific one. His journeys to different countries were not only material but also philosophical. Freire developed his intellectual, spiritual, and practical calling and general direction in life: whether to sink into hopelessness and self-destructive resentment or to put his mental and physical energy towards "negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the 'given'" (Freire, 2018, p. 99). In the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s, he decided to continue his calling in literacy work with peasants and workers and, as he said, "opt for revolution" (see Simpfendörfer, 1989, p. 153).

Ashraf, an Asylum Seeker

The young Afghan whom I met in Finland, Ashraf Sahil, had been forced to flee his home in Quetta, Pakistan, due to fear of the Taliban. The latter is a religious fundamentalist group that targets "wrong believers," especially those who belong to the Hazara people, like Ashraf. The message that I received triggered a frenzied search for more information. I phoned Ashraf's legal representative in Finland, who was responsible for exercising Ashraf's rights and advocating for his interests. The legal representative said that everything that could be done had been done. Unfortunately, the expulsion order was to be executed the next day. "It's a last-minute rescue operation, then. If you can't help him, then maybe I can," I replied. I decided that I could not close my eyes to injustice and needed to act. In this situation, recalling the words of Jaspers, I had to react through rebirth: to become myself through a change in my consciousness of being—that is, to transform from an armchair sociologist into an activist scholar.

After numerous phone calls and Google searches, I finally discovered Ashraf's whereabouts and contact information. In the phone call, I introduced myself and tried to make myself sound trustworthy. I told him that I wanted to help and advised him to stay away from the refugee reception center if he wanted to stay in Finland. The police could arrive at any time to pick him up, possibly even that evening, despite the deportation being scheduled to occur on the following morning. The wisest course of action was for him to jump on the train and travel straight to Tampere, my hometown.

Ashraf was hesitant—why would he not be?—and did not know what to do. Should he stay in Finland or head for Norway, where it was more straightforward to obtain asylum than in Finland? I did not know the answer, but I repeated my offer: he was welcome to come and stay with me. I would offer

him shelter and temporary refuge from the authorities. Ashraf was conflicted, as his mother had advised him not to trust anyone. As Viitanen & Tähjä state in their report: "Don't believe them, if someone offers you chocolate or a roof over your head" (Viitanen & Tähjä, 2013, p. 58). "I must be crazy," Ashraf thought on the train as he traveled towards a man he did not know. As stated by Viitanen & Tähjä: "When I saw Juha at Tampere railway station, I felt relief. His clothes were worn and his glasses old-fashioned. One trouser leg hung over his boot, the other was inside. The sight made me trust him." (Viitanen & Tähjä, 2013, p. 61).

While still a young boy, Ashraf and his family had fled the Taliban, leaving behind the village in Afghanistan where he had grown up. They took up quarters in Quetta, Pakistan, and initially stayed with another Afghan family. It was very cramped, and the neighborhood was dirty and smelly. The Taliban ran most of the schools. Ashraf eventually attended a class taught in Urdu, a language that he did not understand at first. As the threat of the Taliban started to grow slowly but steadily, his family decided to send Ashraf to Iran. A somewhat familiar story followed. He took a bus to Turkey and crossed the mountains on foot. Human traffickers then drove Ashraf across Turkey in a truck. He set off from the Turkish coast in a rubber dinghy and ended up on one of the Greek islands. There, Ashraf was arrested by the Greek police and detained in a prison cell. He and a band of his peers were transported to Athens with a deportation order stipulating that he was to leave the country within a month. He did not stop there but traveled across Greece in the back of a trafficker's truck and ended up in Italy. From there, his journey continued through France, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, finally bringing him to Finland (See also Viitanen & Tähjä, 2013, p. 57–58).

When people today wonder, often with disdain, why these underaged children are sent away from their homes into the world, I would like to answer them with the words of a character from the Romanian-born director Radu Mihaileanu's film *Va, vis et deviens* ("Live and Become," 2005). In the movie, this character says, "Isn't it true love when a mother sends away her child to save the child's life, knowing full well that she may never see the child again?"

Over the next few months, we worked tirelessly to find a solution for Ashraf, winning our first victory when we realized that the police had never sent Ashraf's papers to the Finnish Immigration Service as required by protocol. Thus, the officials temporarily halted the deportation. The new decision gave us time to think, calm down, and travel in Finland. Ashraf went to visit friends in Turku on International Workers' Day (May 1). I advised him that in

Finland, many people partied and drank too much and that he needed to keep his guard up.

Being Together

Being with Ashraf was a complex and confusing experience for both of us. Practically speaking, Ashraf's situation was too precarious, and our relationship was asymmetrical. Ashraf lacked all of the identifying emblems of nationality, which confer fundamental rights that are all too self-evident even to the most abhorrent and reprehensible of "natural-born" Finns. Furthermore, Ashraf faced the difficulties that all newcomers do in adjusting to a culture with a silk-thin social veneer, which cloaks a pervasive outlook of indifference and parochialism. The sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (2003) used the term "double absence" to describe the immigrant's struggle with identity and social dislocation. The common fate of newcomers is to be caught in the middle: no longer part of the old world, but not yet part of the new one. As foreigners, their "relations with others are not limited to consociates and contemporaries" (Berger & Luckmann, 1975, p. 48) but are also connected "to predecessors and successors, to those others who have preceded and will follow [them] in the encompassing history of [their] society." The generational bond can often make their position difficult, as evidenced by Ashraf's memories of his first days and weeks with me in Tampere:

> I sit on Juha's sofa and don't know what to do next. I've never lived alone before. In Afghanistan and later in Pakistan I was always with my family. I had people to talk to in the Turku reception centre too. Now I'm quite alone, and it's scary. I have phoned Pakistan. When my brother heard how I'm doing, he said I mustn't tell the others the truth. I wasn't going to tell them because I don't want to burden my parents with my troubles. All I can do is to go over my life to myself. (Viitanen & Tähjä, 2013, p. 56.)

According to Sennett (2011, p. 69), the pressing business of becoming a foreigner is not a matter of being caught in the middle of old and new cultures but rather of "[dealing] creatively with one's own displaced condition, [dealing] with the materials of identity the way the artist has to deal with the dumb facts which are things to be painted." Freire invented himself by traveling and experiencing the differences in the world; in doing so, he understood his position better than before: "It was by being confronted with another self that I discovered more easily my own identity" (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 13).

For Ashraf, being a foreigner was a different and much more fragile experience. To this day, as I write these words and ponder our days underground, I admire his resilience and ability to adapt in the face of adverse conditions, overcome various obstacles, learn new things, and stay active in troubled times.

I did not have enough knowledge or skills to help him gain resilience nor emotionally or spiritually cope with his precarious conditions. My focus was on Ashraf's material needs: protecting him from the state authorities and essentially keeping him safe in Finland. Yet, he managed to cope with the situation, though I later learned that he was haunted by nightmares and constant fears of being caught. He was afraid that the police would find him and that he would be deported, empty-handed, to the streets of Greece or Italy.

I pondered Cain's question ("Am I my brother's keeper?") throughout our journey. Early on, I had promised that I would not leave Ashraf in trouble and would do my utmost to guarantee his safety in Finland. I supposed that I thought as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1999) did when he stated the following:

> Of course, I am my brother's keeper; and I am and remain a moral person as long as I do not ask for a special reason to be one. Whether I admit it or not, I am my brother's keeper because my brother's well-being *depends* on what I do or refrain from doing. And I am a moral person because I recognize that dependence and accept the responsibility that follows. The moment I question that dependence and remain as Cain did to be given reasons why I should care, I renounce my responsibility and am no longer a moral self. My brother's dependence is what makes me an ethical being. Dependence and ethics stand together and together they fall. (p. 72)

From a structural and juridical point of view, Ashraf was defined as an illegal and undocumented immigrant. From this perspective, Finnish immigration laws—along with corresponding legislation in other countries—represent structural violence, a form of violence that "is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Applying such laws to vulnerable people such as Ashraf may place them in harm's way. In Ashraf's case, the police wanted to arrest and deport him; for this reason, we needed to stay underground. I had all of my freedoms as a Finnish citizen, but I felt burdened as his helper and "my brother's keeper."

Border Imperialism

The immigration question has been at the core of the world's political agenda for decades. In recent years, right-wing populists have used a Manichean dualist rhetoric to stoke conflict. Building on political conservatism, right-wing populism has created a form of social amnesia and uncritical thinking. Furthermore, as South Asian activist Harsha Walia (2013) demonstrated, capitalist states have—largely as a result of political pressure from the far-right—launched new measures to "protect" their citizens from immigrants, whom populist leaders have labeled "outside evils." In consequence, nation-states have strengthened

"border imperialism." The latter has four defining characteristics "within the matrix of racialized empire and neoliberal capitalism" (Walia 2013):

> First, the free flow of capitalism and dictates of Western imperialism that create displacement, while simultaneously securing Western borders against the very people who capitalism and empire have displaced; second, the process of criminalizing migrants through their construction as deviants and illegals, which also ensures profits for companies that receive contracts for border militarization and migrant detention; third, the entrenchment of a racialized national and imperial identity with its gendered contours that has specific embodied and material impacts locally as well as globally; and fourth, the legal denial of permanent residency to a growing number of migrants to ensure an exploitable, marginalized, and expendable pool of labor. (p. 75)

At the level of everyday life, an intersubjective world that people share (Berger & Luckmann, 1975, p. 37), border imperialism relates to different social, political, and administrative positions, especially with regard to paperless and undocumented people. In essence, these positions are power relationships; thus, they must be analyzed by examining the interplay between the terms of those relationships (Foucault 1993, p. 168). Border imperialism is produced in these varying relational practices and tiers of power. The following hierarchy is one way to classify such relational tiers of power in terms of forms of immigration.

The top tier consists of state bureaucracies with ideological apparatuses and legislations. It includes the politicians who pass the laws, the courts that apply these laws, and the authorities that enforce them. At this level, an immigration officer, a police officer, and a social worker perform their work according to orders and regulations. The media, with reporters as moral inquisitors and potential watchdogs of the power elite, are located on the next tier. On the same level, there is the Finnish Lutheran Church, which has strong ties to the state and which, perhaps for this reason, stumbles between the secular and non-secular domains, uncertain of which lord to serve. Further down on this hierarchy are the few non-governmental organizations that serve as non-formal advocates for immigrants.

At the grassroots level, there are people such as myself who work for the cause as volunteers and free agents. These people occupy a "grey area" by offering advice, taking interventive action, and even resorting to civil disobedience if and when necessary. The immigrants themselves are hidden away in dark chambers, deep underground. On the one hand, border imperialism dictates that they live paperless in precarious conditions, without proper housing, social security, health care, and education and often vulnerable to exploitation by employers. On the other hand, as asylum seekers, immigrants must stay in

reception centers and passively wait to hear about whether they will receive asylum or be deported (see Suoranta & FitzSimmons, 2020).

The Necessary Third Principle

From a general perspective, asylum seekers form a particular group in that they are guaranteed the right to asylum from persecution by international conventions. Although this general principle is formally accepted, affluent nations are for various reasons reluctant to fulfill their responsibility to take in asylum seekers. These reasons vary from fear of social problems associated with refugeeism to economic counterarguments. Ideally, asylum seekers should have some unique skills in order to be accepted and obtain a residence permit. Philosopher Peter Singer (1990, p. 252–253) has compared this *ex gratia* ("by favor") immigration principle to membership in a club that exercises the right to determine its membership (where "members" are chosen based on particular skill sets, assets, or interests). The *ex gratia* approach seems to be the current orthodoxy in Western immigration policy and border imperialism.

Singer examined the *ex gratia* principle from a consequentialist perspective, weighing actions and their consequences. Consequentialists assess the impact of refugeeism from the viewpoint of all those affected. There are two kinds of consequences. *Definite consequences* are the immediate consequences of one's actions. *Speculative consequences* are, in turn, the possible outcomes of one's actions. The Finnish immigration debate is often fueled by hate-mongering, right-wing populism and based on pure speculation, if not outright lies.

As I applied consequentialism to our situation, the following principle felt right to follow: all suffering and loss of life resulting from a lack of necessities or adequate protection are preventable. Furthermore, if such casualties and suffering can be prevented without causing a commensurate degree of loss or grief, then it is simply immoral not to help. To put it more plainly, "First premise: Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad. Second premise: If it is in your power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything nearly as important, it is wrong not to do so" (Singer, 2009, p. 15; see also Singer, 2011, p. 200).

If these were the ultimate first and second principles to follow "to prevent something bad from happening," then what would be the necessary third principle to make something good happen—an act that would ensure that Ashraf could stay in Finland? Although I am a professor of adult education and think that I am (and sometimes pretend to be) an expert in educational matters, it took me months to realize the apparent third principle: education is the only sustainable road to a decent living in Finland. It is the best way for an immi-

grant to become as full a participant as possible in Finnish society—or any other society, for that matter (see also Pinson, Arnot & Candappa, 2010). It is ludicrous to let people waste away in refugee reception centers or live precarious lives as undocumented people in a perpetual state of uncertainty.

After an intensive search, we found Ashraf a place to study at the Vammala Vocational School in the southwestern Finnish municipality of Sastamala. As we discussed this opportunity over dinner before the beginning of Ashraf's term, I emphasized that the best way to get ahead in Finland (or a similar Western society) was to study and obtain a degree. I highlighted that schoolwork was rarely easy for anyone and that everyone had to put in the necessary effort and continue working at it. Saying this out loud suddenly made me aware of the self-evident cultural conventions governing "how things are done" in my country. In Finland—and perhaps this is now a global (and possibly colonialist) narrative—a person is expected to do something "valuable" with their life, such as obtaining a formal education. Ashraf listened quietly, and I could tell that something was troubling him. As we drove back to his apartment, I tried to comfort him. "I understand how everything seems difficult right now," I said. I advised him to think of that moment as the "second chapter" in his settling in Finland. I continued: "Everything will be fine as soon as you get the hang of the language and the new school. Just give it time." During his studies, Ashraf (2010) wrote about his life in the Finnish national newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*:

> I was seventeen when I first arrived in Finland and applied for asylum. I felt my future would be decided here. At the moment, I feel safe. I can travel from town to town without fearing for my life. Since starting vocational school, I have been happier and more hopeful. I have been leading a normal student life. School is getting easier day by day. I'm learning new skills and broadening my knowledge. My prospects look bright, and I am grateful to Finnish society for supporting me. I like the Finns very much. I'm getting to know lots of people. This small town, this school, and my classmates and teachers have become part of my life. I get on well with my fellow students. We share all our experiences, both good and bad. Although they sometimes seem rather quiet and withdrawn, I feel like I'm part of the community. Things were very different back when I was facing deportation under the Dublin Regulation. It was a tough time. I didn't get much sleep until it came out that the authorities had made a mistake. I didn't realize how hard it was to cope without my parents. I wished they were with me, and my life was easier. Things got a little better after I made friends with some Finnish families. I'm still waiting for a final ruling on my asylum application, and sometimes the waiting gets to me. Although I'm in the same precarious legal situation as many other asylum applicants, I'm happy with the rights and opportunities I have been given. To borrow the words of my favorite poet, Saadi: 'The children of Humanity are each other's limbs... when one limb passes its days in pain, the other limb cannot remain easy.'

Eventually, the migration office granted Ashraf a study permit: a "B-class permit" that conferred on him the right to live in Finland during his studies, but no social security or any other study benefits enjoyed by his fellow Finnish-born students. However, after several appeals, the Supreme Administrative Court finally granted Ashraf permanent residency on humanitarian grounds in the spring of 2011.

Where is He, Where are They?

The political climate in Finland dramatically worsened in the 2010s. As people's economic prospects have grown bleaker, so has the backlash against immigration and immigrants. In hard times, it is all too easy to presume that economic welfare is the sole right of the privileged few—that is, only Finnish citizens. This overlooks the fact that both Finland and citizenship are social constructs that could and should be reinterpreted in the context of global solidarity.

Fortunately, despite the worsening political atmosphere, Ashraf graduated as an information technology technician in 2013 and began a permanent job in a car factory a year and a half later in Uusikaupunki on the west coast of Finland. In 2012, he had traveled to Pakistan to see his parents; on the same trip, he met Nazeefa and they eventually married. Both of their families had been exiled from Afghanistan due to the Afghan Civil War in the 1990s. After several failed attempts, Nazeefa was granted a residence permit in 2016 based on family ties, and she moved to Finland to reunite with Ashraf.[*] Notably, she quickly taught herself the Finnish language at a local library; the next year in 2016, she began studying for an English-language Bachelor's degree in nursing at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences in Pori. As a nursing student, Nazeefa was allowed to work at a local health center after she had completed 140 out of 210 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. The program lasted for three and a half years, and she graduated in August 2020 as a qualified nurse.[†]

On July 15, 2020, my spouse Anna and I were sitting on our home terrace in Tampere with Ashraf and Nazeefa, who had come to visit us. I asked them about their wishes and hopes for the future. Both of them said they would like to continue studying. Nazeefa hoped to extend her health care expertise and become a physician one day. In contrast, Ashraf expressed a desire to study logistics and industrial management. They were saving money for an apartment

* As stated on the Finnish Migration Office website, "family members of a person who is residing lawfully in Finland can apply for a residence permit in Finland based on family ties. This process is called family reunification. The family member who is already living in Finland may have moved to Finland for work or studies, for example, or may have been granted asylum in Finland." https://migri.fi/en/family-reunification

† In the following video, Nazeefa describes the degree program in nursing (starting from 1:35): https://youtu.be/3Ev5Tc8s2yE

and sending regular remittances to their parents in Pakistan. After a while, the real surprise emerged, as Ashraf and Nazeefa announced that they would become the parents of twins at the end of the year. Suddenly, as I heard the news, our shared decade-long history flashed before my mind's eye, and I thought that actions indeed had consequences. As Cléro (2012, p. 5) elegantly put it, "social space is Zenonian: it is impossible to know where heterogeneous realities will meet or cross paths."

Conclusion

In the troubled months spent with Ashraf in 2009, I drew strength from the circle of people who formed a support network around us. Although I could not ignore the comments on the internet describing Ashraf as my "toy-boy sex slave," demanding my resignation, and suggesting that I should be packed off to Afghanistan, I stubbornly stuck to my beliefs—which became strengthened in the process—that from then on, there would be two dimensions in my being in the world: on the one hand, my academic profession and identity (sociological theories and methodologies) and, on the other hand, my activist work and identity (i.e., active investigation and intervention to address inequity, wherever it may arise). On that note, I fully agree with Poulus (2020, p. 210, italics in original) who stressed that "we *must* employ autoethnography as social activism. The natural outgrowth of the critical turn in autoethnography—its next evolutionary moment—is, I think, an *activist* turn."

In the Finnish public debate, some commentators said that I "saved" Ashraf—a somewhat confusing statement, not least from an existential point of view. It would not be exaggerating to say that, in terms of opening my eyes to the world of asylum-seeking and immigration at large, Ashraf saved *me* as much as I perhaps helped him (both financially and in his interactions with Finnish society). The lessons that I learned in the process were fundamental, both professionally and ethically. I realized what Freire's core ideas of the theory-practice nexus means as "the universal ethics of the human being" (Freire, 2014, p. 52), and what he meant by student-teacher's and teacher–students' reciprocal learning relations. In addition, the experience of helping a person who was living in uncertainty expanded my social and sociological thinking and my understanding of an ordinary person's opportunities to act and resist.

I respect the "hermeneutic cultures surrounding Freire's discourse in the Anglophone context of his philosophies' uptake" (Barros, 2020, p. 169), but I must confess that, to me, Freire speaks more as a radical, worldly educator ready for political action and ethical intervention—as a thinker-practitioner who "understood education as a companion to organized resistance"

(Aronowitz, 2013, p. 7) and emphasized the political role of education and educators. As Freire wrote, "there are no neutral educators. What we educators need to know is the type of political philosophy we subscribe to and for whose interests we work" (Freire, 1985, p. 180). His legacy as a revolutionary philosopher of praxis served as an ideal and an example to me; I try to cherish it in my praxis as a university teacher and an activist of sorts. Thus, I dare to hope that my encounter with Ashraf was a political and educational reinvention of Freire's thinking and action that he expected to be his lasting legacy. As Freire put it: "The best way for you to understand me is to reinvent me and not to try to become adapted to me. Experience cannot be exported; it can only be reinvented" (Freire, 2014, p. 17).

As historical beings, we live under structural and political forces, which we cannot control. However, to some extent, we can try to take them into account in our efforts if we admit that "'illegal immigration' is essentially a legal, political and social construct. It is a label defined in a particular time and place, which is used or removed, by those in position and power. It is critical that we recognize it as such" (Geddie, 2013, p. 5). As human beings, we are not bureaucrats, after all; therefore, as Foucault (2002) put it, we should "leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order" (p. 19).

The encounter with Ashraf became our shared *Grenzsituation*. As I attempted to solve our problems with the authorities, I recalled Freire's experiences in the diaspora and his premise that the pursuit of full humanity "cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity" (Freire, 2018, p. 85). I had decided from the start not to participate in the public debate on immigration or asylum-seeking. Instead, I exercised a pedagogy of action and let my actions speak for me. I knew that engaging in debate would not help Ashraf's dire situation but, at worst, could provoke those who opposed humanitarian immigration and, in their black-and-white world, hate "foreigners" on any grounds. I decided to exercise critical pedagogy in practice, which has also been labeled social activism and public sociology (see Burawoy, 2004; Oldfield, 2015; Schaffer, 2014).

As I recall my years of hope and struggle with Ashraf, I wish to conclude with the words of the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2001). He once argued that "we all have a small margin of freedom, so each of us must do what little he or she can do to escape the laws, the necessities, the determinisms." I believe that I did my share with Ashraf to escape the laws, the necessities, the determinisms—as did he.

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