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Mihaela Mihai, Edinburgh University

The Caring Refusenik: A Portrait¹

Forthcoming in *Constellations*, pre-proof version.

Abstract

Reconciliation refuseniks are considered ‘spoilers’ of the effort to mobilise compassion in the wake of systemic political violence. This paper deflects this accusation and, building on feminist theory, advances the notion of caring refusal, one motivated by a commitment to and care for the plurivocality of the collective hermeneutical space where political memory is forged. The caring refusenik demands a lucid reckoning with grey zones of moral and political duplicity, usually obscured by ‘grands récits’ of reconciliation. Inviting public reflection on ‘rhinoceration’ – to borrow Eugène Ionesco’s metaphor for the breakdown of communication, ideological contamination, self-deception, adjustment, and accommodation to systemic violence – the refusenik problematises the political continuities left untouched by neutralising master narratives. To give concreteness to this proposal I introduce Norman Manea, a Jewish Romanian intellectual, whose work constitutes an enduring, caring refusal. His interventions help identify the virtues and the location from where caring refusal is both possible and effective as a political practice.

Introduction

Reckoning with the past is a complex, multi-directional hermeneutical exercise, involving both memory and the imagination: it includes sifting through and interpreting events, practices and actions such that the past can be read in relation to the present and the future. Certain ‘grands récits’ of reconciliation colonise a community’s hermeneutical exercise, closing off the political space of meaning where different visions of ‘what happened’ could be expressed and contested publicly. The ideological hijacking of reconciliation makes the object of a complex and insightful literature (Norval, 1998; Schaap, 2004, 2008; Moon, 2006; Hirsch, 2013; Khoury, 2017). I follow in these thinkers’ footsteps by focusing on a particular aspect of the potential ideological over-

¹ This paper was presented at ECPR Oslo 2017 and at a workshop on ‘Resisting Reconciliation’ organised by colleagues from Monash University, I thank all participants for their valuable suggestions. Special thanks are owed to Mathias Thaler, Mónica Brito-Vieira, Maria Alina Asavei, Maša Mrovlje, Bogdan Popa, Nadim Khoury, Andrew Schaap, Paul Muldoon and Lukas Slothuus. The journal’s editor and anonymous reviewers provided excellent comments. Work for this paper was financed under the European Research Council Starting Grant 637709.

determination of reconciliation: this paper is interested in those visions of reconciliation that obscure the area of wide-spread ideological contamination and complicity with systemic violence.² This area is often strategically erased from master historical narratives. As I show below, post-Vichy France, South Africa post-apartheid, Argentina after 1983 can all be counted examples of contexts where the imposition of the official story – however justifiably pragmatic at the time – marginalised alternative, contestatory voices and left the grey zone untouched for long periods. Conveniently palatable accounts are often manufactured and publicly sanctioned in view of sustaining a glorious – if tragic – view of the past and outlining a luminous blueprint for the future. However, in their absolutist intransigence, such visions risk maintaining the community’s hermeneutical space closed, reproducing the very practices and relationships of exclusion – economic, political, cultural – that led to violence in the first place.

Bringing together insights from the rich literatures on hermeneutical oppression and care ethics, I propose to interpret the refusal of such ‘grands récits’ as the expression of a caring commitment to nurturing a plurivocal political-hermeneutical space, protecting it from becoming closed-off. On the one hand, theorists of hermeneutical oppression (Alcoff, 2010, 2015; Maitra, 2011; Pohlhaus, 2012; Origgi, 2012; Dotson, 2011, 2012, 2014; Medina, 2013) help account for the complex social, political and economic mechanisms behind the exclusion of certain narratives about the past from collective meaning-making processes. The silencing of certain voices and visions has been of ongoing interest in feminist (Lugones, 1987; Hornsby & Langton, 1998; Alcoff, 2000), critical race (Mills, 1998, 2007; Collins, 2000), and postcolonial theory (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 2013; Mignolo, 2009; Santos, 2014). This extensive body of work also contributes to understanding the impact of exclusionary hermeneutical relationships on the communities involved.

On the other hand, care ethics helps develop the idea of caring refusal and highlights the long-term value of resisting too facile visions of reconciliation, visions that high-jack the space of debate. Care ethics scholars have articulated the ontological presuppositions, the virtues and prerequisites of care beyond the space of the home and public institutions traditionally associated with caring. Feminists have long extrapolated the value of care to tackling environmental degradation (Diamond & Orenstein, 1990), peace-making (Ruddick, 1995), terrorism and domestic

² By ‘systemic violence’ I mean the complex apparatus of repression that authoritarian and totalitarian states set up for securing absolute power. These include specifically repressive institutions, such as the political police, but also the legal system, the medical profession, the educational system, and the mass media, often subordinated to the goal of stifling all forms of dissent.

violence (Held, 2010), global structures of marginalisation, humanitarian intervention, global poverty and security (Mahon & Robinson, 2011; Robinson, 1998, 2010, 2011, 2013), law enforcement and prison management (Stensöta, 2015) or anxieties associated with globalisation (Pulcini, 2013). This paper builds on these scholars' work and proposes that the openness – plurivocality and kaleidoscopicity – of processes of memory-making and political renewal constitute important objects of care. Caring for this openness will sometimes require rejecting certain occluding master narratives that colonise the space of deliberation.

The main argument advanced here is that caring for a plural space of memory – a space where various visions of the future are also articulated in relation to 'what happened' – requires the inclusion of accounts about the structural underpinnings of violence within the conversation. In refusing obscuring projects of reconciliation – that leave untouched violence-genic forms of social relationality – this labour of care aims to foster inclusive political-hermeneutical relations between the members of the community, who almost never share a uniform view of the past. The hope is that complex, competing narratives of the past can emerge from a more balanced space of intelligibility, preventing its monopolisation by any 'Final' affirmation of 'The Truth'.

How does caring refusal manifest itself? To give concreteness to the juxtaposition of caring and refusal, I use Norman Manea's work and outline the caring refusenik's portrait.³ Manea is a Jewish Romanian intellectual who lived through both extreme right- and extreme left-wing dictatorships in his native Romania. This experience allowed him to think critically about how societies often replace one monolithic, uncompromising ideological view of history with another, failing to accommodate alternative, differently positioned narratives. Importantly for this paper, he also witnessed the after-effects of these hermeneutical closures in post-1989 memory and reconciliation narratives. His work offers us ample material to exemplify how the caring refusenik performs her risky work.

The first part of the paper introduces Eugène Ionesco's 1959 play, *The Rhinoceros* and his metaphor of 'rhinoceration'. It constitutes a good entry point for theorising the slow processes of authoritarian ideological contagion and widespread complicity with systematic violence. Ionesco also warns us that such processes are not without remainders. In dialogue with the literature on hermeneutical injustice, I focus on the hermeneutical faces of 'rhinoceration' and its recalcitrant legacies. I then move on to a discussion of the theoretical resources care ethics provides for an

³ I use the term metaphorically and generically, to depict somebody who refuses to accept a settlement or a norm.

account of caring refusal in relation to exclusionary hermeneutical relations. I propose that the plurivocality of memory and future-making processes are a suitable object of care. Finally, I draw the portrait of an archetypal caring refusenik, as it emerges from Manea's work.

On Rhinoceros

The Rhinoceros (1959) by French-Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco (1909–1994) captures a society's ideological contamination and gradual slide into complicitous accommodation to systemically violent regimes, characteristic of 20th Century's authoritarianisms. I propose to read the play as an account of how the plural space of meaning and the hermeneutical relationships underpinning it are destroyed, through the gradual substitution of political conversations with incomprehensible animal noises – a reference to the intolerant proclamations of authoritarian ideologies. Nobody is perfectly immune and, importantly for this paper, the play also problematises the sequelae of such transformations. Rhinoceration is one of the thorniest, most uncomfortable challenges for memory-making projects, often pushed under the historical carpet. This enables the continuation of certain political-hermeneutical exclusions, of absolutist tropes and habits, reflected in problematic blind-spots and obstructions within political memory. It is such continuities that often motivate refuseniks in their caring rejection of simplistic visions of the past.

The play narrates how all but one of the inhabitants of a provincial town turn into rhinoceros. Act I begins on a Sunday afternoon, with a conversation between friends, Bérenger and Jean, on a café patio. Bérenger is a misfit, who cannot 'get used to life' and who resorts to alcohol to alleviate his *spleen*, while Jean embodies the perfectly adjusted citizen. He loves his job and embraces his daily routines unquestioningly. As various other characters go about their daily business in their vicinity, suddenly, a rhinoceros gallops by, raising a cloud of dust and momentarily alarming everyone. After a minute of shock and awe, things slowly fall back into place. Everybody goes back to what they were doing before this bizarre apparition, when another animal passes by, trampling a cat. Although outrage accompanies this second incident and a clerk suggests that the authorities should intervene ('how can it be possible in a civilised country?'), the characters sustain a dreamlike, obsessive conversation full of clichés, about the correct species of the animal: was this an Asian or an African rhinoceros?

As the play progresses, we understand that humans are turning into rhinoceros. More and more people get green skin and grow horns. Ionesco intimates that the transformation is not entirely

outside one's control; it is nothing like an accident, but more like a choice one makes from within one's social situation. Personal ambition, class, political commitments, a corrupt sense of solidarity and cowardice gradually lead to a reversal of norms: rhinoceros begin to appear beautiful, strong, noble and harmless. If you are not a rhinoceros yourself, you only need get out of their way when they crisscross the town in herds at great speed. Everyone has a friend, a colleague or a relative among the rhinoceros – which makes it difficult to formulate a joint position on their destructive presence: social allegiances and identities feed and render rhinocerosisation normal. Complicity and accommodation emerge as relational phenomena, underpinned by the destruction of a plural space of meaning and the replacement of speech by animal roars. As Bérenger realises in Act II: 'Everyone's in the same boat!'⁴

Whereas townsfolk get used to these massive animals galloping around, Bérenger grows fearful, anxiously observing his friends either turn into beasts or become excessively tolerant towards them. He is berated for his intransigent insistence on the distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'speech' and 'trumpeting' and his refusal to adjust and 'be happy in spite of everything'. His urgent desire to 'do something about it' is insufferable, and so is his feeling of responsibility: 'Sometimes one does harm without meaning to, or rather one allows it to go unchecked.' (Act III). He 'spoils everything' with his 'bad conscience', he is a 'neurotic with no sense of humour'. He stubbornly repeats that he will not accept the situation, that communication is impossible with the animals.

He is told 'rhinocerositis' is a temporary epidemic and that those transformed 'will get over it.' Crucially for this paper, Bérenger remarks: 'But it's bound to have certain after-effect! An organic upheaval like that can't help but have...' (Act III) By the end, he is the only human. After a moment of ambivalent despair, he 'snaps out of it'. His cry 'I'm not capitulating!' ends the play.

The Rhinoceros is autobiographical: Ionesco was born to a Romanian father and a French-Jewish mother, whose family converted to Calvinism to avoid French anti-Semitism. He emigrated to Paris in 1942, when a military dictatorship ruled Romania, fighting WWII on Germany's side. Before leaving, he witnessed the increasing popularity of the extreme-right party, the Iron Guard, whose nationalistic hallucinations infected part of the intelligentsia to which he belonged.⁵ The play is a direct comment on being seduced by totalitarian ideologies and thus becoming a

⁴ Quinney remarks that in both French and English the plural of 'rhinoceros'/'rhinocéros' is identical to the singular (2007, p. 48). To this reader, this symbolises the relationalities underpinning ideological mobilisation.

⁵ For an account of his journalistic work in the 1930s Bucharest see (Lupaş, 2014).

perpetrator, an accomplice, or a bystander in relation to authoritarian regimes that replace meaningful, plural dialogues with the trumpeting of intolerant visions. It is a fable for the slow, yet certain process of sliding into ideological conformism and accommodating oneself to systemic violence in a climate of monovocal, deafening trumpeting. Later in his life, Ionesco hinted the play spoke to the extremes of the left as well.⁶ A lucid reflection on violence's societal underpinnings, the breakdown of communication and meaning, and their replacement with oppressive mystifications, it continues to be relevant today. The high cost of refusing 'rhinoceration' and a warning of its after-effects emerge as key themes. Bérenger sees the animals' advent as a clash between humanism and 'the law of the jungle', an encounter between two species who cannot dialogue.⁷ Humans' gradual invocation of the 'Truth' of the beauty and nobility of 'Nature' silences the refusenik. He is alienated – emotionally and epistemically – from both rhinoceros and humans: he can understand neither the animals' trumpeting and nor his friends' willingness to renounce human morality and meanings. Bérenger knows that such radical changes must have repercussions: at the end, he is trapped in his home, surrounded by hundreds of rhinoceros who stare at him through the windows. What will happen with these rhinoceros once the epidemic is over? And what can the Bérengers of the world do when that time comes – provided they survive?

Widespread ideological accommodation to and complicity with systemic wrongdoing raise one of the most difficult challenges for societies dealing with a painful past. *Rhinoceros* magisterially reveals how complicity is mediated by ideology ('trumpeting'), power structures and forms of sociality that normalise wrongdoing. Routinized, unreflective patterns of complicity or *series* of complicitous acts support stable structural violence. (Kissell 1999; Celermajer 2009; Applebaum 2010) Individuals are socially embedded, relational beings, located within a temporally and intersubjectively experienced social world, with which, in a deep sense, they are inescapably complicit.⁸ This embeddedness renders them vulnerable to that world's ideological hi-jacking, to the colonisation

⁶ Ionesco used the play to criticise the French under the Occupation, but also French intellectuals' fascination with Stalin. (Quinney, 2007) Moreover, Bérenger provocatively wonders if the epidemic originated 'in the colonies' (Act III).

⁷ A critic could object to the use of animalisation as a metaphor for the collapse of meaning. Would reducing ideologically blinded people to animals not preclude any engagement with them? Because he focuses on the loneliness of the resister Ionesco does not give us any clues how, but the transformation is reversible. Moreover, in their rhinoceros' state, the townspeople maintain signs of human individuality (e.g. the Logician continues to wear a straw hat) and they can communicate with certain humans (for example, Mr. Boeuf, although already a rhinoceros, can express tenderness towards his wife). I thank Mónica Brito-Vieira and Maria Alina Asavei for the invitation to reflect on this point.

⁸ Analysing intellectuals' role in apartheid South Africa, Sanders (2002) proposes two senses of complicity. First, complicity inherent in sociality, which apartheid destroys by setting people *apart*. Second, discrete acts of complicity, for which individuals can be held accountable. While I find the distinction useful, I argue that there are some forms of sociability that we can be held responsible for because they can cumulatively and insidiously contribute to catastrophic wrongdoing. 'Rhinocerised' sociality is one example.

of its hermeneutical space by rhinoceros. Through rhinoceritis, abuses against certain groups become habitual and permissible, part of the everyday repertoire of social interaction. Thus, violations often go on unhindered for long periods (Crawford, 2007; Miller, 2008; Pankhurst, 2008). Moreover, because, as Bérenger concludes, ‘Everyone’s in the same boat!’, the closing of the hermeneutical space is perpetuated beyond the re-founding moment by master narratives of reconciliation that strategically obscure generalised rhinoceration.

Most frequently, political accounts of violence leave the structural-relational background of violence out of the picture.⁹ For example, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission valued the healing potential of encounters between victims and perpetrators, mostly neglecting ‘rhinoceration’ (Leebaw, 2011). Accounts of the systemic nature of apartheid – political, economic and epistemic – were side-lined and rendered inaudible by the TRC and its strategic celebration of ‘the rainbow nation’. In a climate where the language of reconciliation was imposed as the only language for discussing apartheid, where admitting to having been a rhinoceros got perpetrators off the penal hook¹⁰ and public forgiveness emerged as a test of good character, revealing the limits of the TRC’s vision meant assuming the risk of being labelled a ‘spoiler’. The South African case is not exceptional. In post-WWII France, rationalising myths of *résistencialisme* – term coined by Henry Rousso to describe the myth of a unified Resistance (1987) – sidelined alternative, less flattering accounts. For decades after the war, the stability of *résistencialisme* prevented a meaningful opening of the hermeneutical space of political memory and the reckoning with widespread French anti-Semitism and *attentisme* during the Occupation. The Argentine ‘theory of the two demons’ is yet another example: the metaphor of the ‘two demons’ (referring to right wing militaries and left wing subversives) was used widely to depict the ‘Dirty War’. It established a problematic equivalence between the parties to the conflict and dislocated the conflict from its social embeddedness, placing it outside society. It therefore absolved of any responsibility those who lived prosperous lives, turning a blind eye to clandestine torture and executions centres dotting the country.

These examples illustrate how hermeneutical erasure works. A community’s selective habits of historical remembering reflect various groups’ unequal access to processes of meaning-making

⁹ Khoury recently discussed the shift from ‘grand’ to localised narratives in Late Modernity and has argued for retaining some features of grand narratives for our post-metaphysical times. (Khoury, 2017) I argue here that localized narratives can also be problematic in their selective inclusion of voices and ‘truths’, thus contributing skewed, self-interested, over-determined and intolerant ideas to a community’s pool of meanings.

¹⁰ Amnesty covered state agents who committed crimes for ‘political reasons’ – in defence of apartheid – and who testified publicly.

(Fricker, 2007), which is itself a function of these groups' relative social, economic and political positionality within the community. Shameful episodes and certain inconvenient groups' voices are deleted from political memory – from history manuals, public museums, monuments, rituals. Due to the risk they pose to a community's hegemonic self-understanding and to the distribution of power and privilege, widespread complicity and accommodation to systemic violence is frequently obscured from official memory. The cost of such manoeuvres cannot be underestimated: while the discomfort and destabilising potential associated with confronting these unsavoury elements is avoided, rhinoceric forms of thought and behaviour – as well as their structural underpinnings – get reproduced over time, while the opportunities for meaningful democratic debates over the past are foregone. The memory actors who insists on problematising the grey zone are shunned – the label *Nestbeschmutzer* (nest fouler) is unwaveringly applied to them – and various strategies are deployed to delegitimise their claims.¹¹ In trying to silence them, the spaces where productive friction between different perspectives can yield alternative meanings are closed-off. (Medina, 2013).

This paper rejects the *Nestbeschmutzer* label and proposes instead to read such practices of contestation as expressions of caring refusal: the work of dissenting memory nurtures – rather than treasonously befouling – a plural space of memory-making. The caring refusenik challenges the political and practical continuities left untouched by the official sanctioning of neutralising projects of reconciliation. Avoiding both sentimental lamentation and morally inflexible invocations of a complete 'Truth' – that risk replacing one form of rhinoceric trumpeting with another – she cultivates a self-reflective, humble clarity of vision. She is weary of any totalising vision of the past and mystification that neglects the recalcitrant sequelae of rhinoceritis. To unpack the refusenik's risky labour of hermeneutical care, I now turn to care ethics in search for theoretical tools.

Caring for the Hermeneutical Space

In their often-cited definition, Tronto and Fisher state that care is 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.' (Tronto & Fisher, 1990, p. 40) In this section, I

¹¹ The third section introduces several such strategies. For a discussion of this label in practices of artistic contestation in relation to historically skewed narratives, please see my (2014)

embrace this extended view of care, which transcends the private as well as social policy areas that deal directly with caring (for example health or education) to propose a new, more general, but still relational object of care: the hermeneutical space of a community and the relations that constitute it.

There are several aspects of (certain strands in) care ethics¹² that make this philosophical perspective a useful tool for understanding what is at stake in refusing skewed visions of the past. First, care ethics presupposes a relational ontology: it opposes Kantian accounts of atomistic individuals, conceiving of humans as always embedded in concrete, complex relations of mutual dependency and attachment (Gilligan 1982; Tronto 1995; Bowden 1997; Sevenhuijsen 2003; Walker 2007; Held 2007; Stensöta 2015; Dingler 2015). These relations constitute us as individuals and so human agency and responsibility – including complicity – can only be understood by taking relationality seriously, in its political, economic and hermeneutical dimensions. Dependency and vulnerability are not aspects of human existence to be overcome, but an inextricable part of that very human existence. (Dingler, 2015; Robinson, 2011) Returning to this paper's objectives, complicity with violence can only be understood relationally, aware of the fact that most people – if not everyone – is 'in the same boat'. Moreover, hermeneutical relations – within collective meaning-making – are an important part of the social webs we always find ourselves within and we are dependent on others to have our voices heard. Reversely, we are vulnerable to practices of hermeneutical exclusion. The space between us can collapse when the imposition (trumpeting) of a certain vision silences alternative accounts.

Second and relatedly, building and maintaining relationships is the goal of care. Taking the relationality of human experience seriously means that living well requires us to care – broadly speaking to nurture, sustain and protect (Robinson, 1998; Ruddick, 1995; Tronto, 1996) – these relationships. Embracing the relational theory of human agency and cultivating a concern for the quality of relations brings communication to the fore, including the need to attend to breakdowns in communication, whenever they occur (Bowden, 1997, p. 173). However, not all relationships are worth nurturing and protecting, some need discouraging and transforming, as care ethicists have clearly argued. Fiona Robinson writes

¹² Those which allow for the extension of caring practices beyond the limited space in which it has historically developed.

... an ethics of care must, in the context of social and practical relations, seek to uncover the relationships which exist among and within groups while, at the same time, maintaining a critical stance towards those relations... This, in turn, involves a thorough understanding of how relations are constructed and how difference is perceived and maintained through institutions and structures in societies. (Robinson, 1998, p. 30)

Caring must confront the conditions and complex relationships that create the suffering it addresses, whatever its nature might be. It requires that we excavate the source of exclusions in socio-political structures of oppression. Interestingly for this paper, we need to have a deep knowledge of how these structures have oppressed and silenced certain individuals and groups within our communities to nurture different relations. Citing Robinson again,

When an ethics of care is combined with a critical examination of how structural features of institutional relations enable or deform the abilities of all concerned to hear and to be heard, an ethics of care can combat exclusion and oppression ... (1998, pp. 46–47)

Refocusing again on the main task of this paper, we need to carefully listen so that problematic hermeneutical exclusions do not inform collective political memory-making, especially given the risk of resilient rhinoceration, i.e. of widespread susceptibility to trumpeting rather than dialogue. Caring for the plurivocality of the hermeneutical space requires a sustained fight against the stamping out of competing accounts of the past and for the cultivation of inclusive hermeneutical relationships between subjects.

Third, caring presupposes several virtues¹³: sustained attention to the need for caring, taking responsibility, meeting caring needs and responsiveness to communication coming from the object of care. (Tronto, 1996) Caring is concrete, culturally specific and historically variable (Tronto, 1996, p. 149). It can also involve frustration, conflict and getting hurt as ‘care relations are rarely reciprocal’ (Conradi, 2015, p. 122). Good care involves an ongoing commitment to the *labour* of care and a set of characteristics: thoughtfulness, patience, deliberativeness, good judgment, self-knowledge and knowledge of the situation one cares for. (Ruddick, 1995) The availability of adequate resources for caring – material and intellectual – is essential. These features structure practices of care, such as mothering, nursing and friendship, but also political practices of

¹³ For an account of why care cannot be merely a virtue, see (Held, 2007). Robinson also writes: ‘care ethics asks not only *why* should I care, but also *how* should I care, and how can I best promote caring personal and social relations among others.’ (Robinson, 1998, p. 29).

hospitality,¹⁴ i.e. welcoming refugees and supporting marginalised groups. This paper thus sees caring as the sustained preservation and nurturing of ‘the social ties that bind groups together, ... the bonds on which political and social institutions can be built.’ (Held, 2007, p. 31) In the wake of rhinoceration, these bonds need special care, targeting the space of meaning between differently positioned individuals and groups:

If recognising vulnerability is the indispensable precondition for orienting the subject towards taking care of the world, nevertheless this does not just mean defending survival. It also requires us to ask a qualitative question: *what* world do we want to build as responsible subjects? (Pulcini, 2013, p. 13)

Lastly, caring requires vigilance over the ever-present twin dangers of contamination and rejection. Contamination defuses the power of caring to transform the relations it targets: caring requires a form of commitment that, while emotionally anchored, remains lucid and avoids falling into both uncritical sentimentality and intransigent invocations of an alternative exclusionary ‘Truth.’¹⁵

These three features of care ethics enable us to see the caring refusal of ‘grands récits’ of the past as the expression of a commitment to nurture, sustain and protect a hermeneutically open space of memory. Hermeneutical exclusions silence certain voices and accounts from collective processes of meaning-making. They are frequently the result of active – though not always conscious – efforts not to acknowledge the existence of different voices and visions. (Medina, 2013, p. 31) This is often the result of a *need not to know*: knowing would destabilise a certain identity, including collective identities, which lie at the centre of this paper. Moreover, it would undermine distributions of social, economic and political privilege that inform and reflect that identity. As the examples of South Africa, Argentina and France mentioned above show, the erasure of certain inconvenient and shameful episodes from political memory in the name of trumpeted, selective views of ‘Reconciliation’ are a result of the more or less deliberate failure to improve hermeneutical inclusion.¹⁶ However, Mills has persuasively shown that we do have some agency to work on our

¹⁴ Bowden includes citizenship as a site of practices of care but does not extrapolate beyond issues related to welfare policy. (1997)

¹⁵ Discussing responses to globalisation, Pulcini (2013, p. 14) describes the subject who cares for the world while avoiding both heroic individualism and identitarian reification.

¹⁶ This imposition was challenged by various types of memory actors – former resisters, activists, victims’ families, artists, public intellectuals – in all three cases, with mixed results. The literature on France’s struggles with memory make the object of a massive literature. For key texts, see (Rousso, 1987; Marrus & Paxton, 1995; Wieviorka, 2014). The initial enthusiasm about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was tempered by the realisation of what was left out from the pragmatically crafted official record. (Asmal, Asmal, & Roberts, 1997; Wilson, 2001; Leebaw, 2011; Sitze, 2013) Civil society organisations in Argentina engaged in protest and legal

hermeneutical environment. (2007). I propose that the caring refusenik takes up this responsibility – a responsibility she shares with others – and provides what Spivak poignantly calls ‘patient epistemological care’ (Spivak, 2013, p. 519, n. 57). Crucially, Spivak’s syntagm emphasises that redress cannot emerge from episodic attempts: it requires a dedicated effort to eradicate the ‘monocultures of the mind’ (Spivak, 2013), counteract the reproduction of intolerant trumpeting, and nurture multiperspectival visions of the past.

This will not be a painless exercise – and it will be all the more valuable for the discomfort it causes. Comfort is complacent and it cannot be the goal of care, not without qualification. Caring is motivated by a deep commitment to the well-being of the community, often by love for the community, but this does not exclude conflict. Opening prematurely closed books, excavating the structural underpinning of violence, revealing its relational nature and the impact of ideological contamination – are often rejected as treacherous manoeuvres to taint the ‘Nation’ or the ‘People’ by those who are bound to benefit from the stability of such an image. Because she is part of the relations that constitute it and has good familiarity with their history and organising structures, she appears as a traitor – a Nestbeschmutzer. The rejection of care ranges from dismissal to stigmatisation, marginalisation and ostracism: caring incurs certain costs and involves risks to the carer’s legitimacy and standing in the community.¹⁷

To give concreteness to the abstract idea of caring refusal, I turn to Norman Manea’s work. Manea dedicated himself to rejecting problematically selective projects of memory-making and the oppressive hermeneutical relations they perpetuated. He targeted rhinoceration and its sequelae in the hermeneutical space he belonged to. Following a brief, contextually embedded biographical sketch, the paper analyses two modalities of caring refusal – his fiction and his essays on political memory in Romania.

Norman Manea: A Life of Caring Refusal

Norman Manea is a Romanian-Jewish writer born in Bukovina, a Romanian province, in 1936. During 1930s and 1940s the virulently anti-Semitic, extreme right movement and its party, the

mobilisation to reverse Alfonsín’s and Menem’s compromises with the military. I discuss the Argentine case in (Mihai, 2014, 2016). In the broader project to which this paper is subsumed, I aim to analyse instances of hermeneutical caring from each of these three countries, for they all abound in such figures.

¹⁷ In cases where many of the former regime’s henchmen remain in positions of power, they can pose a threat to the carer’s own life. The severity of the risks can only be contextually judged. I thank an anonymous reviewer for inviting me to clarify this point.

Iron Guard – the forces that inspired Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* – engage in atrocities against the Jewish population. During WWII, a right-wing military dictatorship – aligned with Germany – deports Moldavian and Bessarabian Jews to camps in Transnistria, which German-Romanian armies had occupied. Manea is expelled with his parents at the age of 5, a painful formative experience, most vividly captured in two of his stories ‘Proust’s Tea’ and ‘The Pullover’ (2016a) and in his autobiographical work, *The Return of the Hooligan* (2016b).¹⁸ The family returns to Romania in 1945 – just as the totalitarian, Soviet-sponsored communist regime was consolidating its power. As an adolescent, Manea briefly feels the lure of communism, but is soon disenchanted by its terror and ultra-nationalistic slippages. He initially trains as an engineer to avoid the political subordination of the literary world, though writing is his passion. After the 1960s, when the regime partially ‘relaxes’ its policy of eliminating dissenters, he publishes several volumes, using post-modern codes to smuggle socially and politically critical material past the censorship. In parallel, he criticises certain ideological trends, which trigger the regime’s punitive response.

At the age of 50, persecuted by the secret police for his writing and unable to continue living ‘a dissimulated life’ alongside the many rhinoceros surrounding him, he flees – eventually settling as a professor and author at Bard College. The exile was an extremely painful decision (Manea, 1999, 2016b): in leaving his country he left a world and a language he was deeply attached to: ‘the linguistic shock of exile was, for my sensibility, a kind of second “Holocaust.”’ (Manea & Cotter, 2003, p. 164). However, even from afar, he continues to toil for the pluralisation of the hermeneutical space through publications and interviews, now addressed to a wider public, which included the Romanian diaspora, itself not immune to nationalist mystifications. His works published from exile trigger virulent public debates especially after 1989. As I try to show below, this work betrays the unwavering commitment of the caring refusenik.

This commitment is manifest in his entire oeuvre, but particularly in his fiction and essays. Through his writing, he effectively thematizes the continuities between the fascist ultra-nationalism of the 1930s and 1940s and the communist ultra-nationalism of Ceaușescu’s regime, which had absorbed extreme right’s principles. The reproduction of ultra-nationalist rhinocerations excluded alternative visions of the past, present and the future, colonizing the community’s space of meaning. Moreover, it perpetuated exclusionary ideas of belonging, reflected in the policy towards minorities. The official history, taught in schools and displayed in museums, erased Romania’s participation in the Holocaust. A narrative about the country’s ‘liberation’ from the ‘fascist yoke’

¹⁸ All translations are mine.

by the Red Army was conveniently propagated: there was no reckoning with the military campaign alongside Germany, the potent anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s and its murderous effects within and beyond its borders (Comisia Internațională pentru Studierea Holocaustului în România, 2004). The state institutionalised a xenophobic myth of national re-founding, casting a dark shadow over Jewish, German and Hungarian Romanians. (Copilaș, 2015; Verdery, 1991) After 1989, these myths don't disappear: instead of marking a fresh start, the post-communist period reproduces old exclusionary ideas and relationships. The space of meaning refused to pluralize, and it is to this reality that Manea dedicates his attention, trying to pry open prematurely closed books. He also points out – historicizing, not moralizing – Romanians' complicity with and involvement in these subsequent rhinocerations: 'everyone was in the same boat'. His lens is sharp, but his perspective is always historically aware, sociologically informed and painfully reflective. His caring labour was grounded in self-knowledge and the knowledge of the space of meaning he shared with others. In what follows, I discuss how his care plays out in his essays and fiction.¹⁹

Essays

Manea's repeated public attempts to problematise the replacement of one form of rhinoceration with another span across several decades. While still in Romania in the early 1980s, he targeted the resurrection of fascist ideas in one of the regime's most visible public intellectuals' work, C. V. Tudor. He discussed publicly – assuming important risks – the conflation of left and right ideologies, the gradual masquerading of public debates, the anti-Semitic turn in the press and the loss of intelligibility caused by the official wooden language. In response, Tudor tried to silence Manea by pressuring various repressive institutions to have his writings banned. For his lucid observations he was called 'extraterritorial', 'cosmopolitan', 'traitor' and 'American spy' – typical anti-Semitic slurs, that only confirmed his diagnosis. While the party distanced itself from Tudor's position, anti-Semitism continued to inform official policy towards Jewish Romanians, 'invited' to emigrate to Israel. In exchange for a sum of money paid (*per capita*) by the Israeli government they could leave (Ioanid, 2015): ethnic purification was made lucrative.

Manea himself was 'given' this 'opportunity' after he wrote about the elements of fascist rhinoceritis melding harmoniously with Ceaușescu's version of national-communism into a stifling, official monologue, trumpeted by officials and intellectuals, artists and ordinary citizens, too terrorised, too comfortably co-opted or too numbed to oppose it. He decided to stay. In a

¹⁹ The work of care I propose here can take a variety of forms, writing is just one of many. Political activism, rigorous historical research and legal mobilisation aiming to pluralise the space of meaning can also constitute practices of care.

1981 interview published in a provincial magazine, *The Family* Manea discusses how the imposed monovocality of public opinion, of literary production, published output and mass media forecloses the possibility of authentic engagement between an artist and her public. Such uniformity makes intellectual creativity impossible and annihilates the public's capacity to make discerning judgments.²⁰ In particular, he targets certain official newspapers' xenophobia, drawing a direct connection between national communism and the extreme right of pre-WWII. Most importantly, he warns about the nefarious effects intellectual and political intolerance have on the public. Manea targets individual writers and their chauvinism only for their being symptomatic of bigger problems: his main concern lies with the kind of hermeneutical relationships that can be nurtured between citizens that do not share an ethnic or religious identity, a vision of the past and hopes for the future.

This interview troubled the authorities with its diagnostic lucidity. The carer took important risks to discourage problematic visions of who counted as citizen and who could speak publicly and to show that the image of the future projected by the ultra-nationalist communists replicated the exclusions of the fascists. His most effective interventions, however, are essays published after 1989, analysing the sequelae of rhinocertis beyond the fall of the Iron Curtain. They are more effective because they did not need coding to avoid censorship – they appeared in US and Romanian newspapers in the 1990s.

Manea devotes arduous efforts to explaining publicly why we must refuse the founding myths of 1989 – just like he refused those of 1947.²¹ He rejects the second erasure of the Holocaust and the absolutist prioritisation of the Gulag in the emerging national narrative. This political manoeuvre allowed, once again, the seamless reproduction of xenophobic discourses and exclusionary relationships into the post-communist period. (Cugno, Manea, & Camiller, 1997; Molesworth, 1997; Shafir, 2000; Stavans & Manea, 1997) The national myth imposed after 1989 focused on the communist crimes against the members of the democratic parties, and on the victimisation of the entire population. The immediate target of the successor regime were top officials, while the state apparatus and the multiple rhinoceros who kept it functioning were mostly left untouched.

This political settlement – sponsored by the National *Salvation* Front (my emphasis), itself a successor to the Communist Party – was coupled with the uncritical rehabilitation of certain

²⁰ The incendiary claims made in that interview are included in the volume *Despre Clowns/About Clowns* (2013)

²¹ In 1947 all parties were dissolved and their leaders purged by the Communist Party, supported by the Soviet Union.

intellectuals of the 1930s, many of whom Ionesco knew personally and had already included in the herd of rhinoceros: Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, and Constantin Noica were rediscovered and canonised. For their work in the history of religion and philosophy, Eliade and Cioran had obtained international fame after WWII. The Romanian intellectual elite wanted to reclaim them for the Romanian culture, to signal the country's natural place in Europe. This took a careful editing of their political biographies, especially their association with the extreme-right Iron Guard. (Shafir, 2000) Manea took on the task of a careful, patient and civil engagement with the proponents of this exercise in revisionist historical recuperation, highlighting the incompatibilities between their skewed vision of the past and the desire to transition to a democratic future.²² While he discusses these intellectuals' shameful political biographies, his aim is not simply to discredit them or to antagonise their unreflective canonisers. Working contextually, Manea traces genealogically the origins of xenophobic ideas in the 19th C and the political institutions' incapacity to deal with the demographic pluralism resulting from Romania's territorial gains after WWI. He is concerned with historical processes and path dependencies, missed opportunities to pluralise the hermeneutical space and the effect of these occlusions on the future of democracy: the integration of the enemies of democracy within the cultural canon rendered difficult the cultivation of inclusive visions and political relationships after 1989. He shows these ideas' structural embedding and intergenerational reproduction in the national institutions and common sense. While detractors read his interventions superficially and unfairly as an unpatriotic Nestbeschmutzer's character assassination projects, this paper argues that they reflect an attempt to render visible the devastating effects enduring rhinocerotis can have on the present and the future of the community.

As the post-1989 political and intellectual elites fell prey to the old habit of exclusionary trumpeting, Manea injected some contestability in the closed hermeneutical space, trying render it hospitable to a plurality of views and voices about the past. To the resilient legacies of nationalism, he opposes the recuperation of interwar democratic thought. His essays invite a more discriminate and encompassing approach to collective meaning-making practices. In doing this, he performs the patient labour of nurturing the plurivocality and kaleidoscopicity of the public space, assuming the costs of frustration and rejection.

²² I am relying here especially on the essays collected in *Despre Clowni/About Clowns* (2013) but also interviews he gave to various outlets, e.g. (Ungureanu, 2012).

Fiction

Manea's fiction deploys powerful artistic devices to problematise rhinoceration. It is impossible to do justice to his vast oeuvre here. Instead, I focus on one novella that I argue best captures his insightful concern with the collapse of meaning and attempt to challenge it.

Published in 1981 in Romania, 'Biografia robot' ('Identikit Biography') addresses the continuities between the extreme right and extreme left rhinoceration by humorously outlining the biography of a communist activist, written in a wooden language that simulates the style of both party propaganda and secret police reports. Deploying humour, Manea turns the language against itself to trace the effects of intolerant trumpeting and the difficulty of overcoming it.

During his youth, the aspiring revolutionary 'oscillated between extremes, from the right to the left and back again to the right' until he finally found the path towards the 'one true revolution' (2011, p. 66). As a journalist, he aligns his newspaper, emblematically called *The Trumpet*, to the party's goals and insists on writing all the editorial articles himself. He displays 'a principled, intransigent attitude. During party meetings ... he stands out for his harsh rejection of the others' attempts to question the party line or their indulgence towards grave deviations' by plotters and seditionists. 'He tirelessly leads a campaign against conciliation, liberalism, petty bourgeois tendencies' (2011, p. 80) He earns the nickname 'the Corporal', 'not because of the obtuseness with which he interprets instructions ... but because he always enunciates his orders and rebukes while frowning, probably unconsciously, and rudely, in a hoarse, shrieking voice.' (2011, p. 81) The 'Corporal' changes many jobs in different branches of the socialist economy and works for various local publications, always distinguishing himself through his obdurate ideological zeal. He even lands a post with the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch, whom he helps navigate the ideological context – this is Manea's job at the Orthodox Church's happy collusion with the regime to protect its properties and privileges. Before retirement, we find the 'Corporal' in an office job, working as a financial inspector in a branch of the state's savings trust. Though old, he retains the strength of his commitments: he is angered by the younger generations' lack of revolutionary enthusiasm, by their loss of the necessary 'fanatical faith' (2011, p. 104). He presents his boss with a proposal that the winners of the trust's yearly lottery to be allocated not by chance, but according to political and moral merit to the most hardworking and dedicated party members. The old activist does not want to leave anything to chance in the class struggle.

Studying this character through a temporally dynamic perspective shows both the malleability and the stability of rhinoceritis. The Corporal's identikit initially instantiates the harmonious melding of the extreme right (he leaves his paternal home to join the Foreign Legion) and extreme left ideology (he dedicates his mature years to the communist party), as well as his incapacity to tolerate pluralism and dissent. Humour emerges from the use of the party's linguistic tropes against the very purpose for which they were devised: propaganda and control. Manea manipulates the rigid set-phrasing typical of regime speak to reveal the activist's rhinoceritis, thus subverting the legitimacy of his epochal mission.

Humour is also used to capture the state's control over time, which it renders predictable through the twin process of fixing the future as 'Golden' and the co-optation of large groups to the state's revolutionary mission. At the Institute of Futurology – a metaphor for the entire country – the new director wishes to expand its research scope. (2011) He does so by diversifying the pool of collaborators. Alongside the mathematicians, psychologists, physicists, medics and jurists, the director recruits a dactylographer, a taxi driver, a restaurant manager, a kindergarten teacher, a novelist, a human resource manager, a gym teacher, a customs officer and a bank inspector – a reference to the broad professional spectrum the duplicitous swamp encompasses. In suggesting that some of the new members had had different, elite professions before WWII Manea alludes to the co-optation of former 'class enemies'. During their meetings, the members discuss 'the future, i.e. something inexistent. In any case, something that does not yet exist. That is to say, heaven.' (2011, p. 73) This is an oblique reference to the Golden Age of communist prosperity and progress, announced on TV screens, in newspapers and history textbooks. Contesting this vision would have had grave repercussions. To prepare for heaven, the Institute's members study topics such as 'dissimulated behaviour', 'militarism in the kindergartens', 'the partial truth: between principle and practice', 'sport as therapy and diversion', 'suspicion and surveillance' 'manipulating discontent' and 'the synoptic of captive happiness'. (Manea, 2011, p. 61). Manea conjures these topics by humorously altering themes from communist propaganda materials. The system, however, has some cracks: first, a short story entitled 'The Taedium Syndrome' – a direct reference to the ideological stultification of the nation – somehow makes its way on the agenda, giving rise to excited reactions. Second, a visit to the psychiatric hospital shocks the institute's members as the patients demonstrate a lucid, nuanced perception of reality. The director makes sure such deviations are combated and that discussions revert to accepted themes.

The novella captures the collapse of Romanian hermeneutical space through the fixing of the scope of the possible: the future can only be heaven. Ideological deviations are severely sanctioned. Rhinoceration's chameleonic nature emerges clearly, affecting all strata of the social world, though some are exceptionally acerbic. The hijacking of language is simultaneously revealed and undermined through Manea's precise humour, which destabilises the petrified party speak. Most importantly for this paper, the almost complete colonisation of the public space is made apparent with its complex co-optation mechanisms.

Having reconstructed these caring interventions, let me zoom in on several aspects of this sustained work. As we saw in the previous section, caring must avoid condescension or reproach, and embrace humility, reflexivity and sustained concern.²³ Crucially, it must rely on a deep knowledge of problem – in this case, the historical sources of rhinocerotitis. Manea's fictional and journalistic works avoid moralising and individualising what is essentially a political problem: while individuals' ideas are discussed symptomatically, they are always contextualised within broader historical and geographical contexts and processes. Manea works in panoramic mode, trying to understand the complex social mechanisms that lead to rhinoceration and the mystification of history. His essays are written in a graceful and balanced tone, firm but not virulent. Stylistically too, Manea refuses rhinoceration. While his novella might be read as a biting satire, I argue he focuses on the activist only as a prop for his critique of the collapse of meaning. His depiction of the members of the Futurology Institute is compassionate, discriminate and contextual, disclosing both the overwhelming power of the state and the spaces – however small – of resistance.

Caring presupposes that knowledge of the object of care must be accompanied by self-knowledge. Once his work was published, Manea became aware that his perseverance in trying to be a writer constituted a partial form of duplicity with the order. He reflected on the risks of contamination and admitted openly that other writers had been more heroic: he self-critically discusses his limited opposition to the regime. (Cugno et al., 1997) His pointing to the rhinoceration of most social strata is underpinned by a perpetual process of soul-searching – lest he should himself fall prey to the moral 'viscosity' of decades of authoritarianism, green and red.

²³ Bohle discusses honorary witnesses' practice of attentive, anticipatory listening of testimonies by survivors of the residential school system before the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He argues this practice performs two contradictory roles: 'it makes space for claims and stories which might yet exceed hegemonic narratives, and re-presents those claims as part of the public discourse they come to shape.' (2017, p. 261) I believe this be read as another modality of carrying out a patient labour of care for an inclusive hermeneutical space.

Reflecting in his own positionality, Manea understands himself as a writer-citizen, whose work always involves hazards and difficulties, of which he is painfully conscious:

I really believed in this double, complementary integrity: that the writer should remain, in his work, faithful to the artistic criterion and, in his social life, he should keep his social moral fortitude in confronting the lies directed by the manipulators of public life. This was never and nowhere easy. (Stavans & Manea, 1997, p. 104)

Manea hopes that a complete account of the past is impossible, which is for the better because thus there will always be room for ‘uncertainty, questioning, discovering, room for literature.’ (Stavans and Manea, 1997, 105).²⁴ Contributing to the space of meaning by injecting uncertainty and questioning all too facile, stifling accounts of history requires sustained emotional attachment, which must not, however, degenerate into sentimentalism:

‘[S]chooled early in the traumas of dislocation and dispossession, of foreseeable and unforeseeable danger ... I can no longer stand the old role of victimhood. It sickens me. I try as much as I can to avoid becoming a specialist on lamentation.’ (Manea & Cotter, 2003, p. 164)

His compassion for the object of his care – the relationships between citizens and the plurality of the space where they meet – is evident as, though not devoid of conflict, his caring is never cruel: his interventions are non-hierarchically pedagogic. In his fiction and in his essays he sees citizens as ‘human beings, imperfect and vulnerable to hope’ living in ‘one of the most cunning and sadistic’ systems that ever existed and that ‘knew perfectly how to ... manipulate them.’ (Cugno et al., 1997, pp. 123, 127) In his novels, essays and short stories, he caringly engages with the pernicious effects of a grotesque, circus-like existence, in which everyone slowly becomes complicitous, most frequently because of a dire lack of alternatives.

In an interview from 2012, he says: ‘I do not believe that the writes should take on the role of the prosecutor ...I think he writer’s mission is to understand. To understand the criminal, the oppressor, in general human experience.’ (Ungureanu, 2012) A complex understanding of the object of care, and not moralistic judgment, is necessary. Observing the deterioration of human relationships and the affirmation of meaningless, official trumpeting of ‘Truth’, Manea assumed a

²⁴ For an account of the positive value of ambiguity in relation to reconciliation, see (Schaap, 2008).

personal responsibility to nurture plural and inclusive relationships, taking on the (most probably) Sisyphean labour of challenging skewed, mystifying accounts of history.

The complex work of this refusenik cannot be exhausted within the space of a paper of this size. The hope is that sufficient evidence has been produced to justify the value of Manea's work for thinking about the refusal to reconcile. He exemplifies how one can caringly reject grand narratives that keep the hermeneutical space closed, amplifying the enduring effects of rhinoceration. Rather than conceiving of his interventions as 'spoiler acts', I suggest they nurture the pool of meanings that we can – and should – rely on in reckoning with the grey complexities of the past and their reverberations into the present. The refusal of facetious, obscuring projects of reconciliation and 'Truth' – that leave untouched violence-genic forms of social relationality and stigmatise doubt – is how this care labour aims to immunize the body-politic against future epidemics of rhinocertitis.

Conclusion

This paper drew the portrait of the caring refusenik of grands récits of political memory. It has relied on Ionesco's metaphor of 'rhinoceration' to capture the destruction of a hermeneutical space and the replacement of its rich pool of interpretive resources by ideological roars. Denying rhinoceration altogether or invoking stability, social peace, glowing futures of reconciliation and flourishing, national re-founding myths provide selective inventories of the past. More importantly still, they fail to open the hermeneutical space to dialogue, thus reproducing habits of intractable mono-vocalism. The repercussions can be felt within processes of politically 'fixing' the memory of totalitarianism. Using Romania as a case study, I sought to highlight the sequelae – substantially in terms of the reproduction of certain ideas about the 'Nation', and formally in terms of its total colonisation of the space of memory. Building on care ethics, this paper has foregrounded the valuable, strenuous labour of refusing any narrative that even remotely sounds like trumpeting.

Manea is a caring refusenik, whose concern for the politico-hermeneutical space he inhabited endured for decades. His writing and public interventions amount to a sustained labour, that sought to foster meaningful dialogue and preserve nuance in conversations about subsequent founding myths and settlements. He did not waver, despite the suffering he experienced when his care was rejected. Crucially, rejection made him more reflexive about his strategies of caring, his own duplicity and contamination risks, as well as the limits of care inherent in his positionality. Manea's deep, emotionally anchored commitment to the rich world of meaning his language

supplied, his awareness of what it took to forge political-interpretive relations that could withstand rhinoceration, and his lifelong dedication to cultivating such relations make him an exemplary caring refusenik.

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