

## **Workshop report on *The Phenomenology of Refuge and Belonging***

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Refuge and belonging are lived conditions that have always carried great significance and require greater attention than ever. In vexed contexts of populisms and ever hardening national borders that have given impetus to embolden a visible and vocal right-wing politics, it is therefore critical to rethink how refuge manifests. Indeed, these developments demonstrate in a rather blunt manner the danger of objectification of refuge and notions of belonging. Hence, this workshop was an attempt to radically rethink refuge and move beyond its emergency-centric conception to begin creating narratives to counter this politics through a critical phenomenology and restore the individual to the centre of these problematics and shift the tenor of present debates.

The workshop was an integral part of the Future Talent Award and Guest Research Visit to the Institute for Philosophy at Technical University of Darmstadt of Dr. Nayana Bibile of the University of Sydney and is motivated by Dr. Bibile's research focus on developing a Phenomenology of Refuge. Organised by Prof. Dr. Sophie Loidolt, Chair for Practical Philosophy at Technical University of Darmstadt, it brought together participants whose scholarship is inspired by Hannah Arendt.

The focus on Hannah Arendt is particularly salient as Arendt herself was a refugee, and her scholarship entails important means to theorise what it means to experience statelessness, homelessness, worldlessness. Moreover, Arendt's essay 'We Refugees' discusses issues and problems of exile of Jewish people as a result of their persecution in WWII. The widely known proclamation on the 'right to have rights', that is to belong to a political community, emerges from these reflections, Arendt was very critical of the various forms of 'universalisms' that have proven insufficient as effective measures ensuring their own upholding, i.e., the humanity of those needing refuge has always put such abstract, universal notions of 'humanity' in its many guises to question, because such definitions ignore the human being as an infinitely conditioned being in plurality, worldliness and intersubjectivity of human existence. Of course, Arendt's analysis stems from the 1950s and 60s and yet remain relevant to date; therefore, a task that all of the contributors shared was to think with Arendt and transfer her insightful scholarship to current contexts.

The motivation to explore this research area stems from the transformation of societies across the globe that has resulted in the extant notion of 'refuge' being challenged by the gradual dissolution of clear distinctions of contexts where it applies. Additionally, shifting

responses have at times resulted in irrational outcomes incongruous with recognised notions of refuge, although they do have roots in history. These transformations have inspired an imperative to rethink our understanding of the very idea of refuge, of what it entails, how it is actualised and lived. Approaching this by developing an intersubjective phenomenology of refuge vis-à-vis Hannah Arendt's plurality creates potential to inform and advance current debates.

This workshop assembled an interesting combination of scholarly backgrounds including anthropology, architecture, cultural studies and philosophy, and attracted a sizeable group of attendees, all of whom generously contributed to discussions of the various papers and helped stimulate rigorous debate. The speakers were Nayana Bibile (University of Sydney, Australia), Marieke Borren (Open University, Netherlands), Sophie Loidolt (Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany), Maria Robaszkiewicz (University of Paderborn, Germany) and Ashika Singh (London, United Kingdom). The meaning of (forced) migration experience and the challenge of seeing beyond the emergency and resultant prioritisation of material needs was at the core of the contributions. The workshop commenced after a brief introduction to the rationales and inspiration for the necessity to rethink, interrogate and reconceptualise refuge and how phenomenological approaches and especially Hannah Arendt's intellectual oeuvre are relevant to this emergent research field of a Phenomenology of Refuge. Accordingly, it is imperative to move beyond current, impoverished frameworks towards a thinking of what it means to be constitutively (dis)located and this reconsideration of 'refuge' seeks to redefine refuge not as legal, categorical, boundary-crossing or material emergency events or points in time, but as intersubjective encounters, contingent events in plurality (Bibile). Perspectives ranged from architectural/spatial implications of shelter and humanitarian aid provision (Singh) to proposals for acknowledging migration as normal part of biography in everyone, as one of many lifechanging experiences (Robaszkiewicz). Spatiality and mobility of racialised bodies were explored from an angle of white mobility (Borren) and an ontological view of the ambiguity of belonging explored together with Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt (Loidolt).

The breadth of creative engagement with the workshop topic was indicative of the relevance and potential for interesting research exploration, further underscored by the vibrancy of discussion that engendered much constructive commentary – very much in an Arendtian spirit, formed in vigorous exchange amidst intellectual camaraderie.