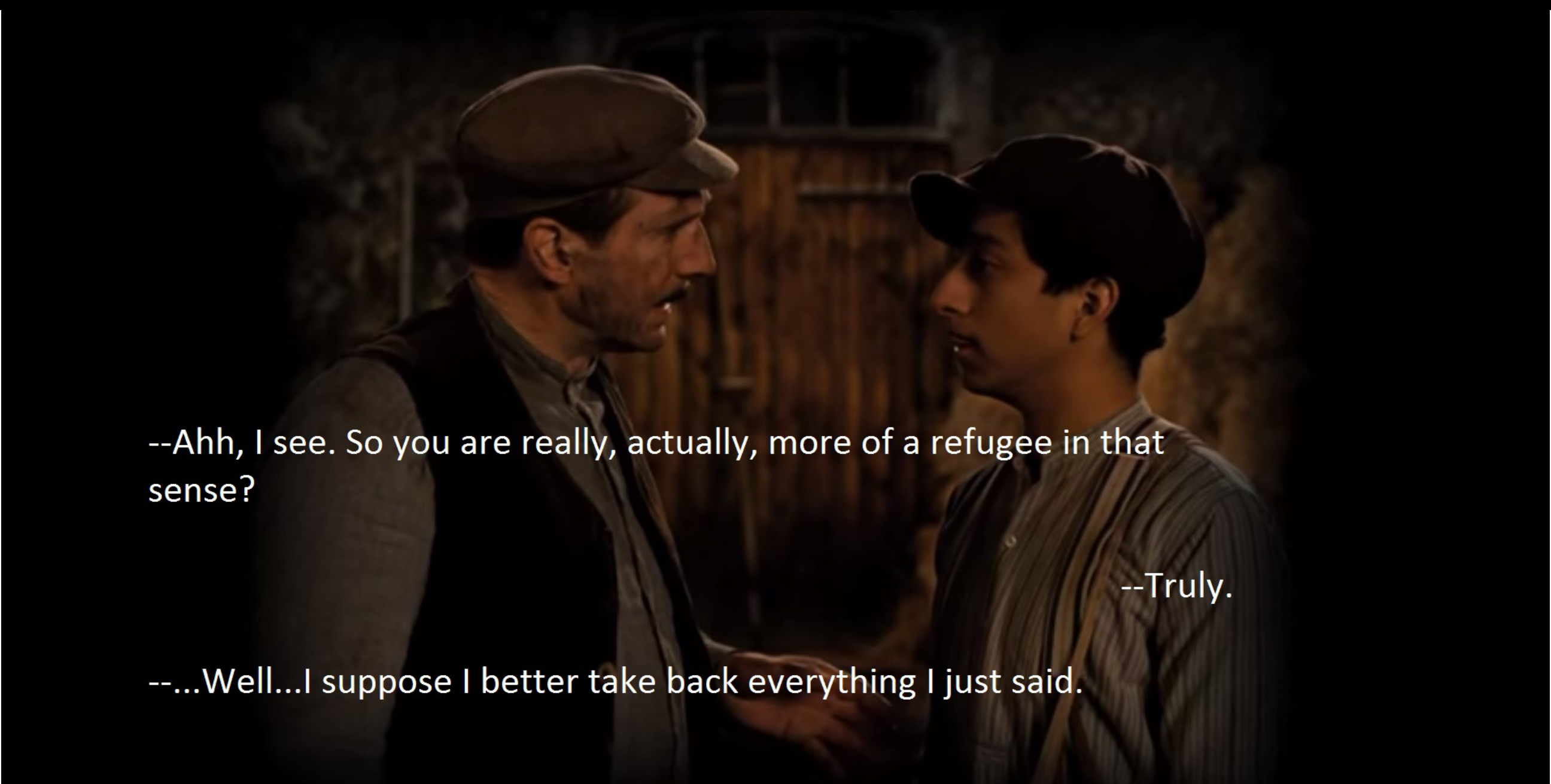


On The Concept of the Refugee: Dead Duck or Phoenix?



--Ahh, I see. So you are really, actually, more of a refugee in that sense?

--Truly.

--...Well...I suppose I better take back everything I just said.

■ The proposed project looks to moments within contemporary political theory, ethnography, literature, film, and poetry for the purpose of asking how our politics can be informed by an acute examination of the conceptually defined figure of the refugee as a political subject. To do this, the project suggests vitality within the concept of the refugee read as a distinctly produced subject that can be manipulated to serve an unlikely potentiality; a potentiality that necessarily contributes to an emergent politics at the level of the quotidian.

■ In other words, humanitarian discourses assert a stratified understanding of statelessness, differentiating between refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and internally displaced peoples (just to name a few) in a pseudo-juridical sense. This bifurcation of statelessness follows a logic that values certain pain and suffering as legible. There is something about the conceptual discernibility of the refugee as a category within the humanitarian rendering that presents certain forms of statelessness as appealing to codified state institutions.

■ This project tries to ironically invoke the hierarchized structure that exceptionalizes the refugee (from other forms of statelessness) for the purposes of trying to argue that there are more

political lessons that can be seen and learned from the politics of statelessness than merely a struggle for political voice. This work looks to vignettes by/about “refugees” as a moment to more agonistically articulate the “problem of the refugee” as one that must be fundamentally interrogated. These instances provide an opportunity to closely read (and reread) the work of theorists such as Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Ranciere, and Bonnie Honig.

■ By exploiting the false clarity of the figure of the refugee, it is my hope that it will be possible to become conceptually intimate with lives deemed indistinguishable. The question that remains beneath the surface of these interpellations remains related to a negotiation of: Who am I / Who are you / Who are we? These questions manifest themselves as haunting disputes throughout the survival of recognition and self-recognition. This can lead us to appreciate the important falsities between bare and political life (zoe and bios) that underwrites the alleged “problematic” lives of indistinguishability. These haunting disputes are to be taken up and learned from as opportunities for listening which has only ever been heard as silence.

■ For me, this project encapsulates intimate trepidations surrounding a resurgent popular-

Photo credit/citation:

The Grand Budapest Hotel. Dir. Wes Anderson. Perf. Ralph Fiennes (as M. Gustave) & Toni Revolori (as Zero). Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2014. DVD.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
ity in the way a biopolitical state of exception has been theorized in the 21st century. This thesis has itself been born out of a number of fascinations developed throughout the entirety of my career at Simon's Rock whilst studying with Professors Asma Abbas and Katie Boswell. Most particularly, however, this project was born out of the following courses: Anthropological Perspectives on Dispossession & Displacement, The Democratic Imagination, Politics by Other Means II: Citizens, Soldiers, and Revolutionaries, the 2013-2014 Proseminar, and a Readings in Social Theory Tutorial that I was able to take with Katie. As such, I see this material exploration as the next step within my study and articulation of the possible renderings of emergency politics. Thus, the thesis is in no way a series of apologies, but instead an invitation to articulate a more hospitable examination of political lives. I have come to realize how incredibly high the stakes of politics are, and I sincerely hope that you, my reader, are able to do the same.

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