

Article

A Dialogic Theology of Migration: Martin Buber and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy

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Abstract: Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973) were influential theologians and intellectuals known for their heterodox theologies and for their visions of a society based on dialogue. Both experienced migration. Buber emigrated during his teens from Vienna to Galicia, then, after his marriage, from Vienna to Germany, and finally from Germany to Palestine in 1938. Rosenstock-Huessy, a Christian theologian of Jewish origin, fled Germany in the wake of the Nazi rise to power in 1933. Independently and in different contexts, these thinkers employed their theologies in the 1930s and 1940s, advocating for immigration against the prevailing ideas of nativism and developing an (embryonic) theory and praxis of dialogic integration. Both sought to replace the popular totalistic and intolerant melting-pot ideology. This essay explores Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s approaches to immigration and its reception, the influence of their immigration experiences, and the relation to their approaches to other aspects of their thought. It explores the nativist theological approaches they opposed and the anti-nativism that might have inspired them. Finally, this essay examines the novelty of their approaches; while their theological advocacy of immigration was unique only in their times, their dialogical approach to integration stands out, even with regard to the contemporary multicultural approach, due to its theological edge.

Keywords: Buber; Rosenstock-Huessy; immigration; dialogue; Zionism



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1. Introduction

Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973) were influential theologians and intellectuals known for their heterodox theologies and for their ideals of a society based on dialogue (Mendes-Flohr 2015, 2019b; Stahmer 1968). This essay aims to demonstrate how they harnessed their theologies during the late 1930s and the 1940s to champion openness to immigration against the prevailing ideas of nativism. In the United States and the land of Israel, nativists were often immigrants or were their descendants; nevertheless, they opposed immigration, conceiving it as damaging the desired social character. Furthermore, it will be explored how they based a pluralistic and attentive concept of immigrants’ integration on their dialogical approaches. By “integration,” I refer to the process by which immigrants enter a society and find their place. Although this process has important economic and practical aspects, such as finding a good source of income, the smooth entry of children into the education system, and, ultimately, economic and social mobility, my concern here lies with cultural integration. This includes language acquisition, a sense of belongingness, acquaintance with and gradual contribution to local culture, and the adoption of prevailing norms and habitus. Although Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s theologies and dialogical approaches were not identical, their ideas and practices regarding immigration and its reception bear much in common. These ideas and practices are my focus.

It is now a well-established fact that religion, as an institution and a system of creating meaning, plays a key role in the reception and integration of immigration, both for immigrants and natives (Foner and Alba 2008; Alba et al. 2009; Connor 2010; McDaniel et al. 2011;

Frederiks and Nagy 2016). In this respect, contemporary theologians and scholars of theology have suggested theologies that encourage integration and champion openness to immigration on religious grounds. These theologies invoke key religious themes like hospitality, exile, and wandering to promote the openhearted reception of immigrants (Sutherland 2006; Groody 2009; Kerwin and Gerschutz 2009; Padilla and Phan 2013, 2014). Nevertheless, scholarship on immigration has insufficiently explored theologians' approaches to the challenges of immigration. This essay aims to address this gap with regard to Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy.

2. Structure and Methodology

Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy addressed two aspects of immigration and its reception: First, they ventured to establish immigration's religious and existential merit; second, they advocated a more respectful and pluralistic attitude to immigrants and their culture.

The first issue involves mainly locating and re-interpreting notions from the Christian (in the case of Rosenstock-Huessy) and the Jewish (in the case of both thinkers) traditions to spotlight the virtues of immigration. I will analyze this rather under-discussed "theology of migration" in the context of other aspects of Rosenstock-Huessy's and Buber's thought and explore the nativist theological approaches they opposed and the anti-nativism that might have influenced them.

Regarding the second issue, Buber and Rosenstock-Hussey harnessed their dialogical approach to frame an attitude to integration intended to prevent the shortcomings of the concept of the melting pot: that the difficulties of immigrants to adapt themselves to the hegemonic culture often results in their voluntary segregation on the one hand and the loss of their unique cultural assets on the other. Their pioneering attitudes had three interrelated facets: first, their personal experience as immigrants, which influenced their advocacy, to be explored in the next section. Their experiences arguably made them aware of the flaws of the prevalent monolithic view of integration. Second, their critical approaches drew on their dialogic conceptions of human relationships. Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy conceived dialogism differently, and I will demonstrate how these differences shaped divergent emphases with regard to the integration of immigrants. Furthermore, I will emphasize the theological substrata of their basic dialogical attitudes, often cloaked in sociological and philosophical formulations. Third, I will explore how Buber and Rosenstock-Hussey parlayed their approach into concrete educational activity intended to meet acute challenges of integration in Israel and the United States, respectively. My conclusion highlights the novelty of their approaches, especially when examined today.

3. Buber's and Rosenstock-Huessy's Personal Immigration Experience

Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy were immigrants themselves. Buber emigrated from Vienna to Galicia in his teens in the wake of his parents' divorce. He left behind the vibrant life of metropolitan Vienna, with its flourishing German culture, and spent his adolescence at his grandfather's estate, located in the more rural Galicia, then dominated by a budding Polish culture. Then, in the wake of his marriage, he emigrated a second time, leaving Austria-Hungary altogether to settle in Germany where he became an eminent post-liberal intellectual, Zionist ideologue, and a mentor for young Jews and non-Jews seeking non-traditional religiosity and cultural renewal. His third and final emigration took place in 1938, when he fled from Germany to Eretz Israel/Palestine (Friedman 1981–1983; Maor 2016; Mendes-Flohr 2019a). Although Buber had declared on several earlier occasions his desire and commitment to immigrate to the land of Israel (see for instance his letter to the publisher Salman Schocken, from 19 May 1934), only the Nazi rise to power and the escalation of the ensuing persecutions of German Jews, which restricted his intellectual activity, led him to flee Germany (Buber 1991, pp. 418–19; Maor 2016, pp. 108–10, 138–40; Mendes-Flohr 2019a, pp. 192–201). Buber's immigration to Palestine was anything but smooth. His wife Paula failed to master Hebrew, and he found the hardships of adjusting

himself to Palestine's lower standards of living and to the prevailing unrefined, anti-bourgeois manners agonizing. (Maor 2016, pp. 161–64; Mendes-Flohr 2019a, pp. 220–23).

Moreover, in the wake of his immigration, Buber had to cope with three significant changes in his intellectual activity. First, he left behind his fame as a German writer and thinker and immigrated to a country in which German was the language of the harshest enemy that the Jewish people had ever known. In a September 1934 letter to his disciple Hermann Gerson, Buber contradicts his anarchist image, revealing his post-immigration anxiety about losing the ground under his feet without stable income, cultural rootedness, and citizenship:

it would seem unnatural to me to go over there as a German writer (and I am a German writer. . .) without a profession tied to the people living there, the country's normal life, its requirements, and its economy. . . I am. . . in an eternal sense a "solid citizen," a son and father of the law. . . As an immigrant, without the connectedness of a properly domiciled "citizen", I would deny my true nature. (Buber 1991, p. 424)

Second, in order to secure his living in Palestine, he had to assume an academic position, whereas, in Germany, he had developed his thought mostly in non-academic frameworks. Third, although Buber gained his reputation as a Bible scholar and translator and as a pioneering dialogical thinker in Germany, the Hebrew University's conservative professors vetoed his nomination for a professorship in Bible studies, and he was required to reinvent himself as a sociologist (Buber 1991, p. 436; Maor 2016, p. 165; Mendes-Flohr 2019a, pp. 204–9; Eisenstadt 1992; Friedman 1999).

Furthermore, although Buber was part of a significant wave of Central European Jews immigrating to Palestine in the 1930s (called, in Zionist historiography, "the Fifth Aliya"), he still had to confront the hegemony of the "Second" and "Third" waves of immigration, dominated by Eastern European Zionist concepts and culture. The cultural elite of the Yishuv (the autonomous Jewish polity in Palestine) disregarded, or even renounced, the potential cultural contribution of Central European immigrants (Beling 1967; Zimmermann and Hotam 2005). This unwelcoming reception and these personal hardships likely sparked Buber's interest in ways to bridge the conflict between absorbing and absorbed groups.

Like Buber, Rosenstock-Huessy was forced to leave Germany by the Nazi rise to power. Although a renowned Christian pastor and theologian, his Jewish origins, despite having converted in his youth, made him an outcast in his own country. Moreover, he was wholeheartedly opposed to the Nazi regime and ideology. Therefore, he rushed to leave Germany in 1933, finding shelter in the United States, where he taught at Harvard University and later at Dartmouth College (Bryant and Huessy 1986, pp. 7–8). His strong opposition to Nazism and dismay at what he saw as the collapse of German culture led him to renounce his German identity after emigrating. As he wrote in the winter of 1935 to his fellow *émigré* theologian Paul Tillich, "I come here as a European". Consequently, he argued that intellectual refugees bring European, not German, culture with them to America, in hopes of auspicious interactions (Tillich 1983, pp. 268–74). Like Buber, he had to alter his intellectual orientation. While at Breslau University, where he taught from 1923 to 1933, he was a professor of German legal history; at Dartmouth, he taught social philosophy. In a 1958 patronizing radio interview, Rosenstock-Huessy described American culture as too young to stand on its own feet. "Each generation in America has been kept spiritually and intellectually alive either through visiting Europe or through importing Europeans." (Rosenstock-Huessy 1970, p. 176). Furthermore, he expressed a hope that "the translated life of the mind and spirit of Europe can water and make fruitful these broad expanses of America" (181). Yet Rosenstock-Huessy did not act according to this Eurocentric attitude as an immigrant. Rather, he undertook the task to accommodate his teaching to the needs of his students and to highlight and foster original American original culture, as he recounted in this interview:

I have learned in America [that] much of the German or European fund of knowledge is not suited for Americans. It is a great pity that the Americans in their humility, modesty, and intellectual unpretentiousness have had European cultural wares transmitted to them by specialists who continued to think in European categories. I was the first professor in my college who spelled out the American contributions to philosophy in a special course. In my other teaching specialties as well, I took care not to simply continue speaking as I had in Germany, but rather to base my teaching on the entirely different conceptions of my students over there in the new world. (Rosenstock-Huessy 1970, p. 167; See also Rosenstock-Huessy 1968, pp. 127–28)

Moreover, Rosenstock-Huessy presented his immigration as a “resignation” from European culture, way of life, and as desire for a reorientation: “I made [a radical] separation from my previous world. . . The greater the success of the emigrant, the more he has to attempt to cease being a European” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1970, pp. 169, 177). According to Rosenstock-Huessy, immigrants to America should follow “the faith attributed to Abraham in the Bible. He too had known nothing more than that he should go out from the land of his fathers. . . I can assure you, it’s the same when one lands in New York. . . One doesn’t hope, but does have faith” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1970, p. 169). He invoked Abraham’s “leap of faith” in emigrating to the Holy Land to highlight the theological aspect of his venture to adjust himself to a new culture. In the same breath, he constructed an analogy with a biblical parable to express the demand that the immigrant would leave behind his native culture. Yet Rosenstock-Huessy did not present his own concept of integration here. Rather, he was merely reacting against the prevailing melting-pot policy. As I discuss below, he was still toiling to develop an alternative.

4. Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy: The Theological Aspect of Migration

Although immigration (in Hebrew: *Aliya*, verbally “ascent”) was conceived as a cornerstone of Zionism, there was controversy among various Zionist streams regarding its desired model. While Theodor Herzl and other proponents of Political Zionism conceived of mass immigration to save millions of persecuted Jews in Eastern Europe, some socialist Labor Zionists, and Ahad Ha’am (pseudonym of Asher Ginsberg, 1856–1927), the leading figure of Cultural Zionism, advocated limiting immigration to a pioneering elite. They believed that the gradual immigration of socialist pioneers and cultural and intellectual figures who could found institutions would build a model society in the Land of Israel to heal the exilic degeneration and distorted economic structure of Jewish life. This way, the Jewish commonwealth would be built on socialism, the return to the land, and cultural regeneration (Mendelsohn 1981, pp. 110–18, 261–69; Laqueur 2003, pp. 279–88, 298–305). Moreover, Ahad Ha’am believed that Zionism should aspire to establish a “spiritual center” in the Land of Israel to rejuvenate the Jewish people, whose majority would continue to live for the foreseeable future in the diaspora. They were concerned that a mass immigration that did not accord with the economic capacities of the land might fuel and intensify conflict with the native Arab population and drive it to violence out of the fear of being outnumbered (Buber [1928] 2019; Buber 1946; Mendes-Flohr 1983).

Buber fully subscribed to the gradualist approach. In addition to concerns regarding a possible Jewish–Arab conflict, he was wary of the Jewish masses overwhelming the pioneering element and undermining the dream of a model society in the land of the prophets. Yet, the Nazi rise to power, the Shoah, and later the expulsion of Jews from Arab countries led to major waves of immigration. Between 1933 and 1953, more than a million immigrants (*olim*) found refuge in the Land of Israel (Hacohen 2003; Nir 2021). In a 1939 article, Buber expresses antagonism toward these immigrants, but also affirms his commitment to their reception:

But the breaking and ongoing wave of the Jewish agony, which came even before the rise of the Nazi regime, is flooding all our plans. . . There are countless people knocking on the gates of the land, for whom Zion has never been a symbol

and purpose. They are forced to immigrate because they do not find haven elsewhere. Beside youth who have devoted themselves to the pioneering ideal and received training in farms and workshops in Europe are surging masses of young people for whom the special roles of the existence of the Yishuv were foreign to their hearts and lives until now. . . they are foreigners, but Jews; They are foreigners, yet they suffer anguish. . . how can one separate. . . the desirable from the undesirable! The robust strongholds of Jewish regeneration are now surrounded by feeble human material without original shape, yet also hard to shape. Within our cities, beside the constructive elements, surges a population disengaged from the real Jewish people, covetous and opposed to public life. The pioneering “nucleus” is now surrounded by a shell, part of which is no longer its shell. The problem of internal stratification is growing. In some places it may even lead to new pathology. (Buber [1939] 1961, p. 179, my translation)

Nevertheless, Buber’s opposition to mass immigration was not grounded in a nativist attitude but rather reflected Zionist elitism. As we shall see below, despite his paternalistic perspective, Buber did his best to integrate immigrants and even abandoned his pretension to “shape” them according to a defined Zionist ideal. In fact, his approach was quite anti-nativist. From a theological perspective that has a theo-political aspect, nomadism was a Jewish ideal. Buber explicated in his book *Kingship of God* (1932) that God’s constitutive revelation transpired in the wilderness and not in the Holy Land, so as to demonstrate that God is not linked to a certain place: “[God] wanders with His creature, He remains near it, He stands by it wherever it stands” (Buber [1932] 1967, p. 100). Accordingly, Buber emphasized that in the Bible, God’s original home was not the Jerusalem Temple, but the Tabernacle, the mobile tent in the wilderness:

[t]he tent is the corporeal sign against that Baalization of the God Who does not allow Himself to be attached to any natural spot, not even to Zion, the original spot of His habitation. The leading of the One-who-goes-on-before remained so much the central idea of Israelitish faith that the wilderness-wandering reported by the narrator as the punishment of an entire generation of people and also remembered as such in song (Psalm 95), appeared to many singers and story-tellers as an abundant mercy. (Buber [1932] 1967, p. 100, compare Groody 2009, pp. 651–53)

Baalization, a concept coined to evoke the Canaanite god Ba’al, is the Zionist aspiration to hold the land and uproot the Arab population. Buber, conversely, argued that the ideal of wandering mitigates aspirations for Jewish sovereignty and paves the way for bi-nationalism (Maor 2016, pp. 186–93; Brody 2018, pp. 95–97). Regarding immigration, Buber opposes nativism. Even when the Jew dwells in his land, he should always see himself as a newcomer. In his book *On Zion* (1944), Buber refers to the liturgy of the ceremonial donation of the first fruits (*bikurim*) to the Temple on Shavuot (Pentecost). Surprisingly, the prayer, a prima facie expression of rootedness, opens with the biblical quotation “an Aramean gone astray was my father”, highlighting immigration as proper to Jewish identity. Our forefather, Abraham, followed God’s command and emigrated from Aram in today’s Syria to the Holy Land and is therefore known as the first *Ivri* (Hebrew), a term that connotes crossing from one place to another, a member of a “community of the travelers or immigrants” (Buber [1944] 1973, p. 8). Thus, only those who feel like immigrants in their own land can experience it as belonging to God, as the repository of a divine secret.

Buber’s theology therefore championed immigration as a vital spiritual resource and was at odds with both the prevailing Religious Zionist thought and secular Zionist ideology, which valorize establishing roots in the land. Of special importance to this point is A.D. Gordon’s (1856–1922) philosophy, which Buber deeply admired, highlighting the organic link between the Hebrew terms *adam* (man) and *adama* (soil) and calling to replace Jewish exilic nomadism and “detachment” with rootedness. This rootedness preconditions the

renovation of the lost human embeddedness in nature (Neumann 2011; Turner 2020). Arguably, in opposing this stance, Buber was inspired by the exilic theology of his friend and collaborator Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), who saw the true attachment of the Jew to the Holy Land as based on longing for it, not rootedness in it. The Jew is thus obliged to be a foreigner in his own land, which shapes his nomadic character:

Only the father of humanity, and even he only as regards the body, is sprouted from the earth; Israel's ancestor, however, immigrated; his story begins, as the Holy Books recount it, with the divine command to go out of the land of his birth and to go into a land that God will show him. . . [For] the eternal people the homeland never becomes its own. . . it always remembers the lack of constraints on a traveler and is a knight truer to his land when he lingers in his travels and adventures and longs for the homeland it has left than in the times when he is at home. The land is in the deepest sense its own only as land of longing, as—holy land. [The Jewish people] is itself only a stranger and tenant in its land. "The land is mine," says God to the people; the holiness of the land removes the land from its natural hold as long as it could take hold of it; the holiness infinitely increases its longing for the lost land and henceforward no longer lets it feel entirely at home in any other land. (Rosenzweig [1929] 2005, p. 319)

Buber's Zionism thus strives to fulfill Rosenzweig's ideal of the Jew as an eternal immigrant in the Land of Israel.

Unlike Buber, who was active in a society that largely championed immigration on Zionist grounds, Rosenstock-Hussey published his immigration theology after the United States closed its borders. In 1924, the United States Congress passed the Johnson–Reed Act, establishing immigration quotas. This new policy, the culmination of a long period of aversion to immigration, was partly inspired by American proponents of eugenics, and was intended to privilege "desirable" immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, while impeding immigration from all other regions. In the wake of the Nazi rise to power and the ensuing eruption of World War II, waves of desperate immigrants yearned for a haven, only for their hopes to be dashed by the United States' restrictive immigration policy. Public opinion in the United States prioritized economic concerns and national security over taking part in the burden of the global refugee crisis (Cameron 2021, pp. 59–70; Daniels 2004; Keely 2019, pp. 43–56; Ngai 1999). Nonetheless, American nativism, prevalent until the end of the Second World War, not only has racial and eugenic sources but also religious ones. It consisted of anti-Catholicism, based on the idea of an "original" Protestant American identity; an assault on immigrants as importers of European secularization; the religious adaption of racism; and Christian antisemitism (Higham 1955, pp. 5–7, 26–30, 77–87, 277–86).

Rosenstock-Hussey fought to change public opinion by presenting immigration as an essential component of American and Christian identity. His advocacy of immigration was not only grounded in his own experience as an immigrant to the US but also in a pre-immigration universalist creed, founded on the idea of Christian *oikoumenē* (that is, a world united by Christianity) as embodied in the golden age of the Roman Empire before its schism into Western and Eastern Churches (Rosenstock-Hussey 1919; 1924, pp. 62–68). In *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man* (1938), he longed for (the imagined?) days when the global traffic of men and goods was undisputed, and he disapproved of America's restrictive policy (compare Groody 2009, p. 655).

Our own remembrance of the world of free trade of our pre-War days, now relapsing into a welter of tariffs, passport regulations, immigration quotas and all kinds of barriers, sub-divisions and sectionalism, can easily find its own likeness in the situation of a Roman empire which had lost its hold over the earth, but still conveyed to everybody who thought and fought politically, the two motives of unity and universality. (Rosenstock-Hussey 1938, p. 495; see Van der Pijl 1996)

In this book, as well in later works from the World War II period, Rosenstock-Huessy outlined what he termed the “Atlantic revolution” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1939a, 1940b, 1946), that is, the shift of the World’s axis from Europe to America. This shift obligated the United States to open its gates for Europe’s refugees and culture, as it was founded on European (or, more accurately, English) immigration and culture. He clarified in *Out of Revolution* that his immigration and that of other intellectual luminaries should be seen as part of a historical revolution, in which America stands in for the “old continent”:

The whole depth and height of European institutions is summoned to emigrate to America today! The collapse of Europe makes America [its] heir. . . The creations of the last two thousand years, down to the least and poorest, are asking shelter and protection in America. And the Americanization of the foreign-born is no longer a problem of education for the individual immigrant. America, with its wealth of European “goods” and institutions, still has to integrate these individual legacies to make them her living property. Museums of art and science are all very well; but the task at hand lies outside and beyond the museums. . . America. . . has never tried to make a world revolution; but her very existence has changed, and is changing, the World War into a World Revolution. (Rosenstock-Huessy 1938, p. 678)

In a lecture delivered ca. 1940 or 1941 dedicated to the concept of the Atlantic revolution, Rosenstock-Huessy ventured to reclaim emigration’s prestige by highlighting its existential and religious aspects, which were also relevant for natives. His approach, at odds with the prevailing disapproval of immigration by many theologians, was probably inspired by a 1937 essay by German-born theologian, Paul Tillich, that linked migration to a certain mode of thought. “Therefore the poets are right in saying that man as man is always in a state of ‘farewell,’ of migration, and the prophets are right in saying that human life is pilgrimage. Only by separating himself from himself does man find himself: namely, his creative power” (Tillich 1937, p. 296). Individual creativity depends on the adventurousness and flexibility of the migrating mind, and collective creativity depends on the fertilization generated by migrating cultures that are open to give and receive. Tillich argued that migration allows for the ability to think outside the box and transcend bounded identities on both personal and social levels. The spiritual migrant is open to encountering new concepts and perspectives. Yet, without neglecting the past and the known, he seeks to bring the two into dialogue. He concludes his essay by advocating that “[h]umanity, existing beyond the cleavage between our own and the foreign, gives meaning to migration, justifies separation from soil and tribe, condemns seclusion, gives hope to the creative mind, which is the permanent émigré in the world” (305).

In a very similar manner, Rosenstock-Huessy interprets immigration as transcending the ego’s limits and habits of thought.

Our faith says that man can accomplish the impossible, that he can shed his skin, burn his idols, die to his preferences and acquire new ones when he overcomes his worship of his own cleverness. . . Rejuvenation of thought, immigration into a new realm of thinking may take the place of the former frontier. Let everybody ask himself every evening into what unknown part of human life have I immigrated today? (Rosenstock-Huessy 1940c, p. 9)

Like Tillich (and Buber, as we shall see below), Rosenstock-Huessy believed that a common and renewed culture can only stem from a religious regeneration beyond the prevailing ideologies and identities. Dismantling boundaries and inflexibility, he argued, should be the contemporary American ideal in diametrical opposition to Nazi racism, which sacralized and consolidated them:

We must go back to 1776. Immigration as a spiritual power, as the power to rediscover the real world. . . must become our battle cry. By this slogan, we express our faith in the power of man to change, to overcome difficulties, to create a new environment. Immigration is the common denominator that may

make America immune against Hitler's plan of a revolution. . . [to] set up section against section, race against race, class against class. (10)

In a 1949 lecture at Dartmouth, in a course on "Universal History", Rosenstock-Huessy discussed the theological virtues of immigration, stating that nativism was wrong as man is not "of this world". Modern mobility uprooted millions from their hometowns or homelands, and there was no point in resisting the sense of uprootedness it generated. Rootedness was a pagan ideal, he argued, and Christianity posits man as a citizen only in the spiritual dimension:

[m]an should have no roots in space, that he should come into the world, but never be of the world. . . The attempts to make man at home in one world are naive, pagan, well-meaning attempts, but I would say they are pre-Christian. They are antihistorical. It cannot work, because the empires have been uprooted by science for the very purpose. . . to prevent this rooting in space. All science is against it, you see. Space is something abstract. You can't put down roots in space. Modern man is a new type of nomad. (Rosenstock-Huessy 1949)

"Spiritual" Immigration, Rosenstock-Huessy argued, transcends boundaries and limitations and thus may well shape a society open for "social" immigration.

These ideas anticipated contemporary theologies of immigration, as mentioned above, championing immigration as a key characteristic of holiness.

5. Buber's Concept of Dialogic Educational and the Resulting Dialogic Approach to Immigrant Reception

In Buber's and Rosenstock-Huessy's time, absorbing societies believed that immigrants should shed their cultural distinctiveness, deemed as dispensable or even detrimental in their new homeland, and adjust themselves to the prevailing culture, norms, and habitus. The once prevalent (and now notorious) melting-pot policy was an institutionalized implementation of that approach, both in United States and Israel, and it often resulted in the loss of valuable cultural assets (Gleason 1964; Hirschman 1983; Gorny 2001; Ya'ar 2005). However, this was only one of the losses caused by disregarding the newcomers' culture. In addition, the common difficulties of immigrants to espouse native culture regularly resulted in their voluntary disengagement from the absorbing society and even in their voluntary ghettoization.

Buber's critique of the homogenizing integration policy and development of his pluralistic and dialogic alternative was gradual and not always consistent. In the 1939 essay discussed above, Buber did not suggest dialogue between "the pioneering nucleus" and the "immigrating shell", but rather employed the paternalistic ideal and mission of "shaping" the immigrants. In his 1950 essay on adult education, Buber still believed in the "modernist" ideal of a unified society into which immigrants should be absorbed. But he felt that the implementation of this ideal had become impossible. It is important to note that massive immigration from Arab countries followed immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel, generating radical cultural gaps, tensions, and hostility between immigrants and natives. During the 1950s, Buber was active in adult education and was thus deeply aware of the friction between newcomers and more established residents of the nascent state. Indeed, he pointed out the problem that "[t]he various diasporas, [are] markedly different from each other in their nature, language and way of life" (Buber [1950] 2005, p. 353). The classic Zionist solution, which Buber termed "the organic plan", envisioned a gradual immigration led by the pioneer elite: "the pioneers will form a unity of a creative center, which would overcome the existential and spiritual distance between the diasporas, and thus ensure uniform development for the future". Lamentably, mass immigration, generated by the Holocaust and expulsions of Jews from Arab states invalidated this solution. A new solution was needed:

After all, our situation is different from that of the United States, which could have waited until it became a "melting pot"; we will not be able to wait until the

necessity of shared life has straightened out and settled for several generations the undesired differences. Now that things have gone the way they have, we have been forced in a very short time to become a real national unity, with a uniform economy and culture. This unity will not arise by external means. Where is the spiritual factor, which has the power to establish it? This factor is adult education. (Buber [1950] 2005, p. 353)

Notwithstanding the elitist and monolithic concept of national culture voiced here, Buber did acknowledge Israeli cultural diversity and accordingly adopted a more pluralistic and dialogic concept of immigrant integration. He also worked to establish the needed framework for its implementation: the *Bet Midrash* (seminar) for teachers of “the People”. The fundamental principle of this institution, according to Buber, was that teachers of immigrants should be immigrants themselves. After a short and condensed period of training, they would be sent to absorption centers (Anonym 1951; Buber n.d.; Buber [1952] 2005, pp. 360–63; Zelikovski 2008).

Buber’s approach was based on his dialogic educational creed. Generally, it consists of three major principles. First, following Buber’s famous distinction between I–it and I–thou relationships, the heart of education is not about transmitting knowledge and values to the educated as part of a collective. This corresponds to the I–it sphere. Rather, it is a living, open meeting of the souls of the educator and the educated, without defined ends, as an I–thou relationship. The reciprocal relationship between teacher and student means that both learn one from another, and this is what uplifts and cultivates them both. Second, learning is part of life and thus should transcend the confines of “class” and “schools”. Third, the initial step towards learning is the mutual feeling of a lack of knowledge on the part of teacher and student alike. This could only be gained through religious sentiment, that is, acknowledging the infinite, impenetrable dimension of the world (Buber [1926] 1947; Buber [1950] 2005, pp. 345–58; Weinstein 1975; Cohen 1983; Jacobi 2005).

Moreover, in his 1926 lecture on dialogic education, Buber vehemently argued that contemporary education could not aspire to shape the educated according to a certain ideal form:

The question which is always being brought forward—“To where, to what, must we educate?”—misunderstands the situation. Only times which know a figure of general validity—the Christian, the gentleman, the citizen—know an answer to that question. . . [as a] figure which rises clear in the air, out-topping all. The forming of this figure in all individuals, out of all materials, is the formation of a “culture”. But when all figures are shattered, when no figure is able any more to dominate and shape the present human material, what is there left to form? Nothing but the image of God. That is the indefinable, only factual, direction of the responsible modern educator. (Buber [1926] 1947, p. 102)

Accordingly, in a later essay, Buber defined the vocation of the educator as the development of the individual character of the educated, “and thus the bearer of a special task of existence which can be fulfilled through him and through him alone” (Buber [1954] 1988, p. 73). Dialogic education is thus about cultivating the individual, rather than a collective task. Furthermore, Buber saw education as founded on reciprocity and responsibility for and commitment to the other, on the one hand, and respecting his autonomy, on the other. This approach undermines any pretension of compulsion:

Man exists anthropologically not in his isolation but in the completeness of the relation between man and man; what humanity is, can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity. For the proper existence of the interhuman it is necessary. . . that each one means and makes present the other in his personal being. That neither should wish to impose himself on the other. . . (Buber [1954] 1988, p. 74)

The educational dialogue’s uniqueness is defined by the concept of “inclusion (*Umfassung*)”, which means that the educator dives into the being of the educated and makes

himself present, which builds the trust essential for education. The concept of inclusion and the dialogic educational ideal are detailed in another essay on adult education:

Group education is not possible unless the teacher. . . encounters [the class] as individuals. “encounter”—this is the foundation and root of education. encounter means that the teacher’s connection to his students is not a brain-connection, the effect of a developed brain on minds that have not yet matured, but a soul-to-soul connection, in which the teacher stands against his students with all his being. . . That means, that the teacher does not work from the top down, from the cathedra to the benches, but out of a real interaction, from an exchange of experience, for the experience of the students is also important. . . Teachers must also ask real questions. . . questions that are not yet answered, and the students’ answers will provide them, the teachers themselves, the knowledge that they are missing. . . And they must answer the students’ questions not only with factual information. . . but also with the depths of their personal experience. They must encourage the students to express themselves, and they must do so as well. (Buber [1950] 2005, pp. 356–57; see Buber [1926] 2005, p. 160; Buber 1949, 1951, n.d.)

As Tamar Kron noted of the desired educational meeting, “making myself present entails risking and sacrificing my I as ego, my seeming, my self- image, my persona, my theories and programs, and open myself to the spontaneous, the unpredicted” (Kron 2017, p. 127). This concept of dialogic education shaped Buber’s theory and praxis of immigrant education and its mature renouncement of the then prevailing concept of monolithic integration.

In the same vein, in a 1943 article, Buber highlighted how culture is a product of the dialogue between “the spirit” and “the people”, and not a dictation of the former to the latter.

There is no cultural life without a special form, and there is no special form unless it coats life under the influence of the spirit. The spirit penetrates the depths of society’s natural and historical life and renews its external and internal form. But it does not dwell into life and remain within them, but returns to his sphere and is renewed there himself by influence from below. . . It must not be forgotten that in the history of mankind not only the floating spirit affects the surface of the receiving water, but is also affected by them, and without their influence it secludes and shrinks. (Buber 1943, p. 59, my translation)

Furthermore, dialogic education upsets the arrogance of the receiving society and invites its members to listen to the immigrants and seek their cultural contribution in order to build together the renewing Israeli Jewish culture. In 1949, Buber argued at a meeting of intellectuals with Prime Minister David Ben Gurion: “A great deal depends on whether the contact [of the intellectuals] with the [immigrating] masses is a true contact, real contact” (Buber [1949] 2005, p. 242). Thus, the educational approach in the adult education system that Buber envisioned must be dialogical.

Buber’s dialogic approach, when implemented in immigrant education, inevitably erases the gaps between the receiving society and the newcomers. He emphasized that, although the founding elite was equipped with Zionist ideology, it lacked the essential connection with Jewish religious tradition, to which the newcomers were more connected. Thus, both sides needed to change, learn from one another, and grow the renewed Jewish culture they desired together (Buber [1941] 2005, pp. 320–21). Furthermore, Buber argued that neither dying pioneer idealism nor nationalist fervor, tarnished by two world wars, could serve as a bridge between the founding, pioneer elite and the newer immigrants. Only Jewish religiosity, defined as “a renewed affinity to the eternal values” could supply this common ground, and its new expressions should be co-created by the intellectual elite and the newcomers together. Importantly, the bridging potential of Jewish tradition was not a given, fixed corpus but a dynamic and live process, open for interpretation, discussion, and renovation, as Buber wrote: “It is a matter of freeing young people from

the usual isolated contemplation of the present and teaching them to see themselves as heirs and creators at the same time, creators of a redesigned heritage" (Buber [1950] 2005, p. 351; see Buber 1992).

In a speech at an *ulpan* (an educational institute for teaching adults Hebrew), Buber explored the etymology of the Hebrew word *klitah* (absorption) in ancient sources and concluded that it stands for a plant extending roots into the soil. Thus, absorption is an active task for newcomers, rather than an action enforced on them by the founders (Buber 1952).

Buber's dialogic concept of immigrant integration is mainly educational, limited to the reciprocal relationship of teachers from the founding elite and immigrant students, then inviting immigrants to serve as teachers. Buber did not, however, invite immigrants to shape institutional curricula. Nonetheless, when compared to the prevailing concepts of integration in the first decade of the newborn state, which were wholly paternalistic and often homogenizing, Buber's approach stands out as anticipating today's pluralistic ideal of integration.

Unfortunately, financial difficulties and Buber's unwillingness to integrate his educational activity within the formal framework of the Ministry of Education, brought an end to the "*Bet Midrash* for teachers of the people" only three years after its establishment (Zelikovski 2008, pp. 89–90). Thus, the influence of Buber on actual governmental policy was quite meager. Nevertheless, from his educational approach presented here, we can glean principles for a pluralistic reception and integration of immigration, which I find relevant and applicable today, as I will argue in the conclusion.

6. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: The Dialogic Reception of Immigration

Like Buber, Rosenstock-Hussey suggested and worked for a non-monolithic reception of immigration intended to bridge cultural gaps between immigrants and natives. His approach was based on his dialogic thinking and was probably motivated by his experience of immigration.

Rosenstock-Huessy shared some basic tenets with Buber's dialogic approach, as the two intellectuals were in close contact during the interwar period, mainly via their mutual friend, Franz Rosenzweig (Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huessy 2022). Although his and Buber's dialogical thought have dissimilar emphases and were differently formulated, Rosenstock-Huessy also believed in the essentiality of a non-technical, non-objectified, and non-functional layer of communication (what Buber termed the I–thou relationship) with regard to the reciprocal relationship between educator and educated (see Rosenstock-Huessy 1939b). Yet unlike Buber, Rosenstock-Huessy highlighted the lingual character of the dialogue, which he termed "the grammatical method". He strove to revive reciprocal communication at large, which was not focused on "true" and existential communication like Buber (Stahmer 1968, pp. 133–39). In a 1935 lecture, he defined the character of true learning as follows:

The modern thinker conceals from himself the fact that no thought can come in the ken of the majority of man except in listening. Most people partake in the reasoning process by listening and answering. The electric induction of the dialogue makes us partners in truth. Once the social situation is over, we are empty again. (Rosenstock-Huessy 1935, p. 73)

When we speak, we articulate and reformulate earlier uses of words and stamp them with new meaning. Yet this process, which Rosenstock-Huessy compares to religious salvation, is dialogic and not individual. Speech is a human trait; hence, by speaking, we unite with mankind, or more accurately, recreate this unity.

It is strange that most analyses of language start with a lonely Ego. . . Language means the liberty between two people to modulate in complementary ways one and the same word or idea or topic or language. . . Both articulate: both are committed to a ballet which they execute together, and which makes sense only when danced together. No party speech, no theological innovation, no scientific discovery, no part of any dialogue in the world

makes sense if it is not understood as a variation of something the speaker and his public have and hold in common, yet as a variation by which the speaker leads into a new future. . . [Speech] is the rebirth of that element which binds together the whole race, speech. And which makes every one of us one verse in the universal song of creation, as Augustine called this participation (Rosenstock-Huessy 1937, pp. 50–51).

Language, for Rosenstock-Huessy, is not given but always evolves and grows. Although it is enacted in a certain social framework, like a family or nation, it has the potential to transcend borders and make a language-community more and more universal. “By speaking. . . man can evolve the boundaries of inner space in any given moment so that they become more and more inclusive” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1937, p. 55). Therefore, he firmly believed in the power of language to bridge and transport cultural assets between immigrants and natives. Language is not nation-bound but all-human; it thus may well form a rich and variegated culture: “By speech. . . we duplicate and triplicate the intensity of life on earth by bringing all separate processes, dispersed through centuries and over thousands of miles, into one stream of continuous conversation and recording” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1945, p. 120).

In his magnum opus, *Out of Revolution*, Rosenstock-Huessy saw the post-World War I international order collapse in the 1930s as the end of insulated national identities. The future, he forecasted, belongs to multiculturalism, and “man will no longer be satisfied to remain shut up within the limits of one nation’s institutions and ways of life. . . more than one type has to be made accessible to the souls of men. The absolute power of each separate god is gone” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1938, p. 729). The bridging power of language was the tool for this revolution. Consequently, there would be no place for an integration policy intended to assimilate immigrants into a given national culture. Rather, immigrants would be welcomed to destabilize and enrich this culture.

When newcomers and natives alike do not sanctify their identity but constantly question and surpass it—that is, immigrate in the spiritual meaning discussed above (compare Groody 2009, p. 663; Senior 2008, p. 29)—then successful and prolific integration can happen:

From naive membership in one minority, from being natives of one state, we all must re-immigrate into the New World that lies beyond nationalism. This process must shape our whole thinking and doing: It is our way of believing in man’s soul, his power to grow and to change. When we let it go, the minorities cluster around their separate interests and the melting pot loses its magic. . . The early Christians emigrated from this world, as martyrs and monks. Racists and nationalists, natural men who rest on their first birth, hush up their migrations and get stuck in accidental environment and a particular nationality. We are not deserters of this world and are not part of this world. We immigrate into this world. The boundless hope that man is neither a class product nor a race product, that he is not the slave of his environment. (Rosenstock-Huessy 1940c, p. 12)

Rosenstock-Huessy thus sought to blur the borders between natives and newcomers by transforming immigration into an existential act. This transformation will open the hearts of the natives to welcome the foreigners and their cultures to broaden their own identity. Likewise, it will disincentivize the newcomers from voluntary segregation.

Like Buber, Rosenstock-Huessy did not limit himself to theories of immigration. Rather, he searched for practical ways to advance dialogic integration. He worked to promote this model of integration in his own adopted home in Vermont (Rosenstock-Huessy 1940a). His integrative educational tool was Camp William James, initiated in 1940 as a center for training youth for leadership in the Civilian Conservation Corps, one of the signal initiatives of the New Deal (Maher 2008; Preiss 2013). Among the aims of this camp was the integration of immigrants into the fabric of society. In his introduction to *The Christian Future* (1946), Rosenstock-Huessy wrote,

What these boys achieved has encouraged me to publish this book. They proved that spiritual immigration into this world is not a dream. The hope of Camp William James was that by throwing into a declining community a unit of unbound, free youth, regardless of background and profession, even the most stagnating vested interests and backgrounds could be ‘desquamated’’. (Rosenstock-Huessy 1946, p. 28)

As millions of Americans lost their homes in the Great Depression and wandered through the country, Rosenstock-Huessy found an opportunity to implement his theological-educational vision of immigration as tool for integration, social unity, cultural renovation, and individual growth (Rosenstock-Huessy 1940b).

7. Conclusions

Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy suggested a theological pro-immigration approach that anticipated contemporary immigration theologies. Both presented immigration as an individual merit, generating and generated by open-mindedness, spiritual flexibility, and the courage to transcend bounded identities. From a historical perspective, their approach was at odds with the prevailing ideas of nativism in The Yishuv/Israel and the United States of the 1930s and 1940. It was immigrant oriented (that is, subversive and exilic) as well, voiced by newcomers who were, in many respects, outsiders. From a contemporary perspective, Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s theologies of immigration stand out as interlacing existential and political aspects, a link that modern theologies often lack. For Buber, immigration dismantles national sovereignty; for Rosenstock-Huessy, it heralds universalism, comprising interacting national identities.

Furthermore, Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy opposed the then popular “melting pot” policies that demanded newcomers to forgo their distinctive traits and espouse a monolithic national culture, values, and ways of life as quickly as possible. They conversely invited immigrants to cultivate these national aspects together with the natives, who they also advocated should see themselves as immigrants. Although pluralistic, even dialogic, concepts of integration are now much more prevalent, inter alia, thanks to the social thought of Charles Talyor and Jurgen Habermas, Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s pluralism is unique and worth studying. The contemporary pluralistic approach to integration usually renounces altogether (or at least minimizes) a desired common cultural center, which is still crucial for social solidarity. Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s approaches invite immigrants instead to co-create the common center. Both figures yearned for a renewed melting pot, galvanizing a unified society, yet with ideals and destinations not predetermined by native elites but constantly questioned and renewed. Moreover, unlike contemporary pluralistic approaches, theirs were religious in nature. This may well render them more palatable for contemporary religious and conservative opponents of immigration in Europe and the United States, who are often repelled by the secular character of the multicultural and pluralistic justifications of the dialogic integration of immigration.

However, the suitability of Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s dialogic approach to immigration in Western societies should also be questioned. First, we must have reservations as to whether its religious dimensions are appropriate for European secular societies. Second, this approach is founded on a rigorous educational methodology (in Buber’s version) or a demanding existential attitude (in Rosenstock-Huessy’s version), both of which are hard to implement in large-scale organizations like public educational systems. Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s limited effect on Israeli and American integration policies, respectively, demonstrates this difficulty. The crucial question is whether their approach is translatable to a less idealistic and demanding dialogic integration model. Third, Buber and Rosenstock-Huessy were untraditional religious thinkers and leaders. Will contemporary religious audiences find their ideas compatible with their traditions? Again, it seems that Buber’s and Rosenstock-Huessy’s ideas must be translated into a more traditional idiom in order for them to have a significant impact on traditional societies. Notwithstanding these

doubts and considering the enormous challenges posed by immigration today, Buber's and Rosenstock-Huessy's unique approach to integration merits revisiting.

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