

Editorial

The Boundaries of Hypothesis

Ana S. Moura/AMP Rodriguez General Editor

Nelson Zagalo Guest Editor

The several 'Hypothesis' Histories, i.e., Alternate, Alternative and Counterfactual History, have intertwined on its DNA both analysis and creativity, as all matters born out of interesting questions usually have. The child-like question that starts the divergent chronology in motion, *What if?*, lays a hypothesis and underlines that the answer to this question, which challenges reality as the facts tells us to be, can bring gravitas and a deeper meaning to those facts, through an incursion in an alternative reality. Because context brings not only meaning but also allows for both a collective memory to sustain identity within itself and empathy to what is beyond its boundaries.

In addition, to challenge reality in its due course, even that the change happens only in the realms of imagination, also allows attempting an escape from our default lack of perspective. This is something that all individuals, all communities, face as a danger. The Ancient Romans, brilliant engineers, were likely unable to take their engineering capacity further because their knowledge of mathematics lacked the symbol, and concept, of zero. And as far as they were concerned, what could possibly be the need for nothingness?

*But nothingness can
be a tricky matter and
affects reality in more
measures than one.*

We lack the knowledge of our nothingness, the more so because differences between cultures are becoming themselves null, as internet connects us culturally in a *molto rapido* rhythm and abundance, as the speed and amount of exchanged information reaches never seen before levels. Ideally, and 'ideally' being used as hopefully, that has the positive aspect of fostering empathy and respect, as everyone from everywhere get acquainted with each other. The downside effect is that we all become less aware of what we are missing, as we all have the same common knowledge.

From this we have two interesting possibilities. One, the past, as the popular quote (that is also a book and film title) states, is a foreign country, more specifically, an alien culture, filled with possibilities to enhance our perspective of the present and of reality as we consider it. And Alternative and Counterfactual History allow and motivate exploring it as such, as they are imagination and analysis holding hands. The other is that dialogue is more imperative than ever, to avoid the trap of not identifying our zeros, and dialogue exists when you have differences, so that discovery is a possibility, and resemblances, so that you are comfortable enough to explore such possibilities.

Differences are, of course, at the root of the meaning of tolerance. If there are no differences, namely of thought and opinion, one cannot exert tolerance. And our tolerance is tested when facing the past. So much so, that the past keeps being brought up to conversations to justify present tolerances and intolerances. Resemblances are, as we

are all very aware of, the key to state how far we will tolerate the difference.

The role of analysis and knowledge has to be one where you can go beyond the common emotional and intellectual resource of these definitions of difference and resemblance. Differences can be what is missing, and resemblances can stand for what we discover to be valuable where once difference stood. And in the middle, hypotheses remain as a frontier.