

# Pera Peras Poros Longings for Spaces of Hospitality

Mustafa Dikeç

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# Pera Peras Poros

## Longings for Spaces of Hospitality

*Mustafa Dikeç*

### Welcoming the Stranger

Though you have shelters and institutions,  
Precarious lodgings while the rent is paid,  
Subsiding basements where the rat breeds  
Or sanitary dwellings with numbered doors  
Or a house a little better than your neighbour's;  
When the Stranger says: 'What is the meaning of this city?  
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?'  
What will you answer? 'We all dwell together  
To make money from each other?' Or 'This is a community?'  
And the Stranger will depart and return to the desert.  
O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,  
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.  
(from T.S. Eliot's *Choruses From 'The Rock'*)

**W**ELL, PREPARING for the coming of the stranger should not be such a big hassle in the contemporary American city. With movement-sensitive lighting at the doorway and the 'armed response' sign in the garden, most families would feel themselves quite 'prepared' for the coming of the stranger. But is this a welcoming preparation?

The 'stranger' has made it again – be it Plato's *xenos*, the daring Ruth, or Eliot's Stranger – the stranger, the concept of the stranger has always been the one arriving with questions, posing questions, making one pose questions and thus challenging the order. This time, however, it is not *the* stranger but strangers, without a single figure, who ask questions and cause us to question ourselves: the displaced people, refugees without citizenship, 'the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics', as Hannah Arendt,

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writing after the Second World War, put it, the increasing number of immigrants in search of entryways to Western states, the so-called guest workers and also fellow strangers who share the same state, region, city, or even the same neighborhood. In short, ‘strangers’ of all sorts who constantly engage with one another. These engagements are conditioned by certain border politics and ethics, desirable or not, in a variety of scales, from the national to the personal. And talking about borders, in a sense, is talking about openings and reception, a welcoming reception. It is about hospitality.

Why, then, engage with this notion of hospitality? Three concerns prompted this project. Two exemplary quotes would suffice to illustrate one of these, which then links to the other two. The first is from Ulrich Beck’s *Democracy without Enemies* (1998), from the chapter where he discusses ‘The Open City’. The second is from the opening paragraph of Benjamin Barber’s *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong*:

Behind the initiatives for reviving the deserted central cities is the struggle for the city of And. This is directed against the extinction of functionally separated spaces in the rhythm of the times, but also against interventions of control by the community from above and below and against the regimen of exclusive difference. The search is for a culture and architecture of *hospitable spaces*. (Beck, 1998: 117)

Our world, on the threshold of the millennium, grows crowded: too many people, too much anarchy, too many wars, too much dependency. Plagued by the effects of this crowding – conflict, alienation, the colonization of our everyday lives by bureaucracy and markets, the erosion of traditional work, a scarcity of meaningful jobs – we look, often in vain, for *hospitable spaces* to live in . . . (Barber, 1998: 3, emphasis added)

What is meant by the term ‘hospitable spaces’ is left unexplained in both books. These quotes – and the examples could easily be multiplied – are representative of what may be seen as the uncritical use of the notion of hospitality, referring to physical, social, cultural or political spaces. And it is used as a good thing; it always poses itself as a remedy to a burden, as a liberating and emancipatory notion. Apparently it is almost always taken for granted. It is, in this sense, perhaps often overlooked as well. Is the oppressed guest worker, for example, content simply because s/he has found a ‘hospitable space’ to welcome her/him as a guest? The attempt, of course, is not to instigate a conspiracy about a notion that is so dear to many. The point here is that the notion of hospitality, simply because it is almost always taken for granted as implying a desirable quality, invites critical reflection. It is, perhaps, not always liberating and emancipatory, but, on the contrary, may conceal an oppressive aspect beneath its welcoming surface. If so, a critical investigation is necessary to reveal what it conceals, and to perhaps reconceptualize the notion.

The two other concerns that prompted this article have to do with the recent interest in cosmopolitanism, a term which, I believe, is sometimes

used over-enthusiastically, neglecting the negative implications it might carry. Besides, it is possible to observe the same uncritical stance towards the reception of Kant's (1970 [1795]) notion of 'universal hospitality', developed in his famous piece on 'Perpetual Peace', a text that has been at the core of the recent debates on cosmopolitanism.

The first part of the article is devoted to Derrida's reflections on the notion of hospitality. After an overview of Derrida's project, an attempt is made to build on it, to draw implications and to try to go beyond it. In doing so, I revisit Kant's text to discuss the implications of his project, distinguish between 'the other' and 'the stranger', and try to develop a politics and ethics of hospitality due to the stranger. Some implications of 'not being home' conclude the article.

### **Derrida and Hospitality**

Thinking about hospitality is not only to think about a generous and cordial welcome. Thinking about hospitality, more importantly, is to think about *openings* and *recognition*. Although boundaries form an inherent part of the notion of hospitality, without which such a notion would perhaps be unnecessary, hospitality, I want to argue, is about opening, without abolishing, these boundaries and *giving spaces* to the stranger where recognition on both sides would be possible. In this sense, it implies the *mutuality of recognition*. Based on alterity, hospitality is 'founded on the relation to/with the different' (Gotman, 1997: 15), the different being not simply different *from* us, but the different that 'troubles identity' and the order within (Honig, 1996: 257–8).

Hospitality is a problematic notion, full of internal contradictions. As a word, it is derived from Latin, a word that also carries the notion of hostility as a self-contradicting part of it. '[T]he stranger (*hostis*) welcomed/received [*accueilli*] as guest or as enemy. Hospitality [*Hospitalité*], hostility [*hostilité*], *hostipitality* [*hostipitalité*]' (Derrida, 1997a: 45).<sup>1</sup> It is no less problematic as a concept. To start with, hospitality is 'an asymmetrical social relation' since 'we want to honor the guest and keep him/her at a distance at the same time' (Gotman, 1997: 7). Besides, it requires that the host be the sovereign authority of his/her house, defining the conditions of hospitality, to be able to offer hospitality to the guest, to the other as stranger. This, Derrida argues, 'is the beginning, at the same time, of the constitution and implosion of the concept of hospitality'. 'Hospitality is a contradictory concept and experience in itself' that is 'possible only on the condition of its impossibility, producing itself as impossible', which is the condition of its possibility (Derrida, 1999a: 20).

What, then, do we know about this seemingly impossible and paradoxical notion of hospitality? Do we, to start with, know what hospitality is? We do not, interestingly enough, if you ask Derrida. 'We do not know what hospitality is', he would repeatedly say. This bold statement, however, comes with some reservations. His first elaboration is on the dimension of 'not-knowing' as an essential part of the notion of hospitality.

This not-knowing [*non-savoir*] is not necessarily a deficiency, a disability, a shortcoming. Its apparent negativity, this grammatical negativity (the not-knowing) would not signify ignorance but would remind the mind only that hospitality is not a concept that readily lends itself to an objective knowledge. (Derrida, 1999a: 26)

This, of course, does not mean that such a notion does not exist, and therefore, is not known. What Derrida wants to emphasize here is that hospitality is an *experience* beyond objective knowing, directed to the other as the absolute stranger of whom nothing is known. Moreover, it is not only the concept of hospitality that is beyond a thing or object of knowing, but also the concept of the stranger. The way the stranger is conceptualized, conceiving the other as the stranger to whom hospitality is due, already presumes some form of determination, introducing 'circles of conditionality such as the family, the nation, the State, citizenship'. Maybe there is, Derrida argues, 'an other who is yet stranger than that, whose strangeness [*étrangeté*] does not limit itself to strangeness with reference to language, family or citizenship' (Derrida, 1999a: 27). This is the promise, though apparently negative, of the dimension of not-knowing in the notion of hospitality; thinking beyond knowing in order not to be confined to the limits posed by hitherto assumed conditionalities and conceptualizations. This is where hospitality poses itself, at the very beginning, at the point where one starts to think about it, placing one at the threshold of knowing, pointing beyond the boundaries.

The second implication Derrida derives from his initial proposition has to do with 'the temporal contradiction of hospitality'. Hospitality, for sure, carries a temporal value, 'before – after', as well as a spatial one, 'here/on this side – beyond' (Raffestin, 1997: 166). We do not know what hospitality is simply because it is not a 'present being'. This does not point to its 'not-being' for hospitality is indeed experienced, and, moreover, it could take the form of a law or a right (as Kant tried to advance). What this temporal contradiction refers to is that the experience of offering or receiving hospitality cannot last; it is performed only 'in the imminence of that which is "on the point of arriving" and can only last an instant' (Derrida, 1999a: 28).<sup>2</sup>

Not yet. 'We do not know yet what hospitality is.' This third reflection on the dimension of the 'not yet' is not, however, about temporality. It, on the one hand, is about our limited ability to conceptualize hospitality, limited because hospitality has hitherto been conceptualized merely as a cosmopolitical system of limits and obligations, as a regulative idea, with Kant as one of the initiators. This 'not yet' therefore refers to the fact that we have not yet been able to conceive 'hospitality beyond this universally European law' (Derrida, 1999a: 32). On the other hand, this 'not yet' refers to the opening as an intrinsic part of the notion of hospitality for 'we do not know yet who and what will come' (1999a: 33).

The final reflection Derrida makes on his initial statement relates to

the self-contradictory, self-limiting nature of hospitality, for the host, in order to be able to offer hospitality to the other as stranger, 'has to be the master at his/her house' and 'has to be assured of the sovereignty of the space and goods s/he offers'.

As the reaffirmation of the mastership and of being oneself at home [*l'être soi chez soi*], hospitality limits itself from the threshold on its own threshold, it always remains at its own threshold, it governs the threshold – and in this measure it prohibits in some way crossing the threshold that it seems to allow crossing. It becomes the threshold. This is why we do not and cannot know what it is. As soon as we know what it is, we no longer know it, [we no longer know] what it is properly, what its identity is at its threshold. (Derrida, 1999a: 39)

This apparent aporia, however, is the opening, pointing, once again, beyond the boundaries. It is this seeming impossibility that makes it possible to think and know more about hospitality – beyond knowing and beyond the threshold.

[T]his apparent aporetic paralysis on the threshold 'is' what needs to be overcome, it is the impossibility there that has to be overcome. . . . It is necessary to do the impossible. If there is hospitality, it needs to do the impossible. . . . Hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality, only by deciding to make it come from beyond, by surmounting hospitality which paralyzes itself on the threshold where it is. (Derrida, 1999a: 40)

These are Derrida's observations on the aporetic nature of the notion of hospitality. As he constantly argues, the challenge is to find the means, between *the* law of hospitality, which is unconditional, and laws of hospitality, which limit, condition and are inscribed in laws between states, to welcome the stranger. Before moving on to a conceptualization of hospitality, I would like to revisit a famous text by Kant, which seems to have inspired the recent debates on hospitality and cosmopolitanism. What I intend to do is to clarify my points of divergence from Kant's notion of hospitality, and to suggest that the way he conceives cosmopolitanism and hospitality might not be the best premise to argue about these notions, and that the framework he provides, far from satisfying cosmopolitan desires, might very well be abusive and restrictive.

### **Kant and the Discovery of the Finitude of the Earth's Surface**

Kant's geographical encounters, it seems to me, have always been problematic in themselves or in their consequences. In a recent article, David Harvey, in a harsh, though sometimes playful way, points to the sharp 'contrast between the universality of Kant's cosmopolitanism and ethics, and the awkward and intractable particularities of his geography' (Harvey, 2000: 535). Kant's geography is remarkably full of 'geographical racisms and

ethnic prejudices' (2000: 544), and makes one think that his cosmopolitanism and universal ethics were indeed limited, in a serious way, by his geographical imaginations. Harvey's critique is animated by his reading of Kant's *Geography*. My critique, on the other hand, is animated by a text seemingly irrelevant to geography, 'Perpetual Peace', where Kant's discovery of the finitude of the earth's surface becomes the foundation of a 'natural' right of hospitality.

[The stranger] may only claim a *right of resort* for all men are entitled to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to communal possession of the earth's surface. Since the earth is a globe, they cannot disperse over an infinite area, but must necessarily tolerate one another's company. And no-one originally has any greater right than anyone else to occupy any particular portion of the earth. The community of man is divided by uninhabitable parts of the earth's surface such as oceans and deserts, but even then, the *ship* or the *camel* (the ship of the desert) make it possible for them to approach their fellows over these ownerless tracts, and to utilise as a means of social intercourse that *right to the earth's surface* which the human race shares in common. The inhospitable behaviour of coastal dwellers . . . is contrary to natural right. But this natural right of hospitality, i.e. the right of strangers, does not extend beyond those conditions which make it possible for them to *attempt* to enter into relations with the native inhabitants. (Kant, 1970 [1795]: 106)

Notice how quickly Kant moves from a natural, or a priori, 'right to the earth's [finite] surface' to a '*natural* right of hospitality'. Such a quick move makes the right of hospitality look like a natural right, while, actually, is an inter-states agreement, and very far indeed from being a natural right. It is founded on a natural right (i.e. right to the earth's surface) but it is not a natural right. It is naturally given, but politically modified, even abused. Even a not-so-patient reading of the text reveals that Kant's endeavor was motivated, partly at least, by commercial necessities and the need of the nation-state to define itself exclusively. I will, however, focus on one particular section, 'Third Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace', rather than analyzing the whole text. The title itself raises important issues:

Third Definitive Article of a Perpetual Peace: **Cosmopolitan (Cosmopolitical) Right** shall be limited to Condition of Universal **Hospitality**. (Kant, 1970 [1795]: 105)<sup>3</sup>

The question of conditionality, as Derrida states, is introduced in the very title of the article. This *cosmopolitical* right is determined with respect to citizenship and the state; 'it is therefore about an international law' (Derrida, 1999a: 17). Kant, in the first sentence, emphasizes this condition by stating that this right to universal hospitality has to do 'not with philanthropy, but with *right*' (1970 [1795]: 105). It is, therefore, engendered by a definition of a right that would be regulated at the juridical level through an agreement

between states. Kant's stranger, if granted this right, would have the right 'not to be treated with hostility' upon arrival on 'someone else's territory' (1970 [1795]: 105). The formulation of this right negatively (i.e. the right not to be treated with hostility) makes sense in the Kantian scheme since human nature, for Kant, is agitated by hostilities, and the state of nature is 'a state of war' (1970 [1795]: 98). This is the premise that lies at the core of his effort to put an end to natural hostilities by defining the conditions that would lead to perpetual peace.

On the other side of this right lies the exclusionary right of the host (presumably the state). The stranger 'can indeed be turned away, if this can be done without causing his death' (Kant, 1970 [1795]: 105–6). Only death, it seems, compromises the conditions of this cosmopolitical right to universal hospitality. The stranger, if received, 'cannot claim the *right of a guest (residence)*' but only 'a *right of resort (visit)*' (1970 [1795]: 106).

'The right of residence', as Laacher (1998: 148) states, 'is, *par excellence*, a sovereign act of the State.' The visit consists of 'the idea of passage, of the transitory, of the short period'. What is at stake is the respect that conditions the relationship between the host and his/her guest. 'In the visit, we are not *a stranger* in general, because the relation that is created on this occasion is a relation between *this stranger*, a concrete stranger (accessible and predictable) and the citizen of the country' (1998: 149). With residence, however, what is at stake is the establishment of a home: 'residing, constructing, developing habits; it is the inscription of one's presence in continuance, and this *obliges* sooner or later a redefinition of the sharing of goods, of values, and of space between the indigenous and the newcomer'. Residence, as perpetuation (*pérennisation*), 'poses the question of *rights* and *protection* of the new resident' (1998: 149). 'If residence is often associated with a particular territory, the *national territory*, it is because both of them, residence and territory, are synonyms with *home* and *security*' (1998: 150). This is why the question of residence, the question of granting the right to reside, is challenging for it challenges 'safe homes', an issue that will be addressed in the concluding section.

Kant's hospitality, therefore, administers the limitation of the rules of conduct. Even in the title, he uses hospitality to delimit the conditions of his cosmopolitical right. Hospitality, in Kant's scheme, executes closures, executing, at the same time, the very openings it should be evoking. In sum, Kant's 'Third Definitive Article of Perpetual Peace', this seemingly:

... generous article is in fact limited by a great number of conditions: universal hospitality is here only juridical and political;<sup>4</sup> it grants only the right of temporary sojourn and not the right of residence; it concerns only the citizens of States; and, in spite of its institutional character, it is founded on a natural right, the common possession of the round and finite surface of the earth, across which humans cannot *spread ad infinitum*. (Derrida, 1999b: 87)

Hospitality, as Kant conceives it, is 'a set of rules and contracts, an inter-state conditionality that limits ... the very hospitality it guarantees'



(Derrida, 1999b: 101), a set of regulations, only juridico-political, strictly delimiting the right to refuge or asylum.<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly so for ‘the first – indeed the only – concern of Kant is to define limitations and conditions’ (Derrida, 1999b: 89–90).

Before moving on to the next section for a conceptualization of hospitality as ethics and politics, it might be useful to clarify some points of divergence with Kant’s notion of hospitality and its recent reception in the literature. The article chosen as an exemplar is by Shapiro (1998) on the ethics of global hospitality.

Kant, as Shapiro rightly points out, ‘lacked a sensitivity to peoples and nations that were not organized in the form of states’. In this sense, his project was ‘strictly geopolitical, recognizing no nations that are not also states’ (Shapiro, 1998: 701). This is not very surprising since the period during which Kant conceived his project for perpetual peace and universal hospitality was a period when the territorial state was on the rise, and he ‘was very much taken with the replacement of monarchies by republican forms of governance’ (1998: 702). These are my points of convergence with Shapiro. I also appreciate his larger project, as well as his recognition of the historical circumstances that affected Kant’s thought. However, he still seems to be uncritically appropriating the Kantian version of hospitality. In the article that I have just cited, Shapiro defines Kant’s project as ‘the paradigm of hospitality to global difference’ (1998: 698), and his philosophy as encouraging ‘an ethics of interpretation aimed at a universal tolerance of difference’ (1998: 699). Such a definition may be criticized on three fronts. First, deliberately or not, he uses the notions ‘hospitality’ and ‘tolerance’ as if they imply the same thing. Kant’s project, at its best, would imply some tolerance on the side of his ‘civilized’ European nation-states – those who ‘know how to make better use of those they have defeated than merely by making a meal of them’ (Kant, 1970 [1795]: 103) – towards other ‘savage’ nations, provided, of course, that they avoid becoming part of the dinner. It has very little to do with what Shapiro seems to attempt in his project, except for their common use of the notion of hospitality. The second charge follows from the first. Shapiro’s use of the notion of hospitality as conceived by Kant is misleading, in that their concerns seem quite different; Kant’s project was a major affirmation of the exclusive use of the sovereign powers of the nation-state. And, finally, it is not clear what Shapiro means by ‘difference’. To take an example, what was really different at Kant’s time were the nations, cannibal or not, that were not also states, as Shapiro himself would admit. Given that these ‘different’ political communities, different from the European nation-states, were totally outside Kant’s project for universal hospitality – (their nutrition practices, of course, were not overlooked) – can one still interpret and appropriate Kant’s hospitality as ‘the paradigm of hospitality to global difference’? That would require a major effort indeed.

Does Kant’s philosophy, as Shapiro maintains, really encourage an *ethics*? Kant was very careful to define his notion of hospitality as a *right*. It should be emphasized that the notion of hospitality, as conceived in this

article, is at once ethical and political. In other words, rather than assumed as some kind of an abstract right to be distributed individually from above or from outside, it is cultivated both ethically and politically. Granting rights individually from above or outside does not guarantee that they will be practiced equally by everyone. Besides, there exist an ethics and a politics of rights formulation, and of their distribution and enjoyment. Bearers of the same rights may still be subject to domination, oppression and various forms of prejudice. A concern for such problems, of course, might also be approached through an appeal to human rights discourse. However, the ethics and politics of hospitality are more ambitious, so to speak, in their concerns, and are not motivated by the liberal discourse of rights.

Although it could be argued that hospitality, as conceived by Kant and his followers, provides at least a few actual rights, it is still conditioned by many issues. First, in order to be able to claim these rights, one has to be a recipient. In order to be a recipient, to be welcomed in the Kantian tradition, one must confront various conditions – from passport requirements to bank statements, from invitation letters to hardly enjoyable treatment by visa officers – all of which are conditioned abstractly by inter-states agreements, and concretely by the prejudices sustained by inter-states conditionalities. Obtaining an abstract right of hospitality is not a guarantor of treatment compatible with human dignity, just as bearing abstract rights (e.g. human rights) does not guarantee tolerable treatments. As long as human dignity is concerned, the notion of hospitality goes along with human rights. It does not refer, however, to an abstract right of which equal distribution would be considered as an adequate condition. This is why the notion of hospitality advanced here is conceived at once ethically and politically.

### **Ethics and Politics of Hospitality**

[W]e do not even have to cultivate an ethics of hospitality. Hospitality is culture itself and not an ethic among others. As it relates to the *ethos*, that is to say to home . . . to the manner of relating oneself to him/herself and to others, to others as one's own or as strangers, *ethics is hospitality*. (Derrida, 1997b: 42)

Democracies should be judged not only by how they treat their members but by how they treat their strangers. (Benhabib, 1998: 108)

[D]emocracy's *raison d'être* is the recognition of the other. (Touraine, 1998: 190)

In this section, I will try to reflect on the possibility and desirability of defining hospitality not simply as a right, but as a *sensibility* that would encourage the formation of a critical consciousness as to the politico-juridical, as well as ethical and social implications of the notion and the ways in which it is put to use. The suggestion that 'we do not yet know what hospitality is' and the possibility that we may never know notwithstanding, I want to argue that hospitality could be developed as a sensibility in social

relationships and interactions, as well as in institutional practices. This sensibility is similar to Connolly's 'critical responsiveness'. According to Connolly, an ethos of critical responsiveness endorses boundary crossings, and that is why it is critical to the 'maintenance of the constitutive tension between pluralism and pluralization' (Connolly, 1995: 183). It 'arises in settings where the end in question is often not yet clearly in view, either to the initiators or to the respondents' (Connolly, 1995: 184).

The way hospitality is conceived in this article emphasizes recognition on both sides, and not simply tolerance, since tolerance does not necessarily imply acceptance or approval. In some cases, simple ignorance would do it. In others, for example in the case of an 'undesirable' immigrant community, tolerance would hardly cross over the boundaries of the neighborhood where that community is located. Neither case implies recognition. Tolerance may simply mean 'one perspective exercising hegemony over the culture allow[ing] others to exist as enclaves within it' (Connolly, 1995: 92). Its connotation with indifference is evident:

Recognition is more affirmative than tolerance as a stance toward people and groups one finds different from oneself in their values, ways of living or social situation. Tolerance is a stance of mutual non-interference – you leave us alone and we will leave you alone. Its respect for liberty and pursuit of happiness is compatible with indifference. To recognize the other groups, on the other hand, is to affirm a relationship with them at the same time as one keeps a respectful distance, not claiming that underneath we are all the same. (Young, 1999: 246)

Far from evoking the idea of a subjection to the host, hospitality means, on the side of the guest, that the host has a space of his/her own, and although a passage is granted, that should not translate into an extirpation of boundaries, which necessarily are present as providers of the 'preconditions of identity, individual agency, and collective action' (Connolly, 1995: 163). It consists of 'crossing a border without abolishing it' (Godbout, 1997: 46), keeping in mind that '[c]rossing the threshold is entering and not only approaching or coming' (Derrida, 1997a: 109). On the side of the host, it is a call to keep spaces open. Keeping spaces open does not simply refer to opening the doors to a stranger. It goes beyond that, as hospitality would suggest going beyond, and refers to the act of engaging with the stranger. A 'gesture of hospitality', after all, 'is an engagement' (Joseph, 1997: 137). Hospitality as engagement: not simply a duality of the guest and the host; the guest is as hospitable as the host in that he/she is in engagement with the host while the host recognizes the specificities of the guest. Based on the notion of alterity, hospitality is the 'first step towards alterity, first step of engagement' (Gotman, 1997: 8). Thus, the host also is a guest in this act of engagement and recognition, '[a]s if the place in question in hospitality were a place that would originally belong neither to the host nor to the guest, but to the gesture by which one gives welcome [*accueil*] to the other'

(Dufourmantelle, 1997: 60–2). Hospitality implies, therefore, the cultivation of an ethics and politics of engagement. It is a sensibility, at once political and ethical, which implies *reverence for the stranger*.

The concept of hospitality is full of internal contradictions: the guest as friend or enemy, the creation of borders as a condition for the possibility of a concept and experience aimed at crossing borders, 'being possible only on the condition of its impossibility'. Hospitality, as Derrida suggests, always implies a 'not yet', a 'being at the threshold'. It is never completed, the guest is never settled and not because he/she is not given the right to. There is a constant process of engagement, negotiation and perhaps contestation. There is a constant process of shifting roles as hosts and guests. The guest and the host are held in tension. This seems to be an important feature of the notion of hospitality that could be extended to many fields in order to avoid oppressive settlements and closures, evoking, at the same time, the dimension of the political beyond the purely administrative. Hospitality, as far as the relationship between the guest and the host is considered, is neither absolute nor ultimate.

Given such contradiction and tension, one could, and maybe one should, speak about the ethical, as well as the political dimensions of hospitality. It is possible to reflect on an ethics of hospitality, and a law or politics of hospitality as Kant once did, though with quite different motivations. Here, I would like to borrow two terms from Pogge (1992), although the argument here is not confined to the moral domain, as it was for him. It is possible, therefore, to conceive an *institutional* conception of hospitality and an *interactional* conception of hospitality. The former has to do with the juridical, with principles and institutional arrangements, and the latter with ethics, with our actions and engagements as individuals and groups, as well as with 'the political' that goes beyond institutional practices and is to be found in various dimensions of social relations. The institutional conception, however, is not enough to capture all the implications of the politics of hospitality, which are present in all acts of hospitality. A politics of hospitality is 'a politics of capacity, of power' with regard to both the host and the guest, concerning the power of the host over the guest and vice versa, 'like two sovereign powers' (Derrida, 1999b: 18).

The sovereignty of the two powers, that of the host and that of the guest, may not, however, be equal. And when inequality of power comes into play, it could easily translate into discrimination and domination. Worse still, this translation may co-opt the language of hospitality.

To dare to say welcome is perhaps to insinuate that one is at home here, that one knows what it means to be at home, and that at home one receives, invites, or offers hospitality, thus appropriating for oneself a place to *welcome* [*accueillir*] the other, or, worse, *welcoming* the other to appropriate for oneself a place and then speak the language of hospitality. (Derrida, 1999b: 15–16)

Recognition, as an essential feature of hospitality, does not then necessarily

follow welcoming or receiving, although discrimination and domination could. I have two examples in mind; one based on a personal experience, if I may be allowed to cite it, and the other on the experiences of millions who have had the ‘privilege’ of being received by their hosts – the *guest* workers.

*Britain welcomes you.*

Does it, really? A very charming phrase, with the warmth of the word ‘welcome’ in it, printed under an equally charming picture of a quaint British town. This, yes, is a poster, of the kind that you would find posted on the walls of travel agencies, or, as I did, on the walls of the waiting rooms of consulates. I had remarked the poster while I was trying to get a visa that would allow me to change planes in London. Unlike more privileged citizens of the world, I had to obtain a visa simply to ‘be’ at the airport in London, where I would get off one plane and run to catch another. No, Britain does not *welcome* you. Rather, Britain welcomes you *if*. . . . And this ‘if’ is further conditioned depending, *inter alia*, on your nationality. This is a conception of hospitality on the very same lines as that of Kant, and a perfect example of a deceiving usurpation of the language of hospitality, displayed also in the example of guest workers below.

*Guest* workers are those workers coming from other countries to their *host* countries where there is a need for labor in the local economy. As Walzer outlines, the stay of these guests is conditioned by many regulations: they are admitted as guests and not as immigrants looking for a new home and new citizenship; the ‘civil liberties of speech, assembly, association – otherwise strongly defended – are commonly denied to them, sometimes explicitly by state officials, sometimes implicitly by the threat of dismissal and deportation’; and their right to stay is strictly bound to employment, which forces most of them to leave in time of recession (Walzer, 1983: 56–7). The state, in the lives of guest workers, appears as ‘a pervasive and frightening power’ and ‘never asks for their opinion’ (1983: 59). Although these guests come to their host countries, where they are ruled as subjects, knowing what to expect, and in a sense agree to be ruled, ‘this kind of consent’, Walzer argues, ‘while it is sufficient to legitimize market transactions, is not sufficient for democratic politics’ (1983: 58). Besides, the presence of consent is no guarantee that guest workers (or anyone, for that matter) are not oppressed by consent ‘[f]or the absence of consent suggests that overt injuries need to be addressed *while its presence suggests that there may be subterranean injuries in need of attention*’ (Connolly, 1995: 102, emphasis added). As participants in economy and law, guest workers should also have the opportunity to participate in politics, going beyond simply being exploited workers under a deceptive language of hospitality since ‘[n]o democratic state can tolerate the establishment of a fixed status between citizen and foreigner’ (Connolly, 1995: 61). The oppression of guest workers, however, is sustained by very elaborate and rigid boundaries establishing

two broad categories of identity, those of the host and the guest. Although the two identities mutually depend on each other to construct themselves, one-sided domination casts a dark shadow on the relationship between them, caused by the rigidity of boundaries. One would, perhaps, recall the epigraph that opens this section: ‘Democracies should be judged not only by how they treat their members but by how they treat their *strangers*’ (Benhabib, 1998: 108).<sup>6</sup> It is timely, perhaps, to engage with the difficult but important questions of the host and guest, and of the stranger and the other.

### **The Other and/as the Stranger**

We are strangers wherever we are. (Fernando Pessoa)

The notion of hospitality raises difficult questions concerning the status of the host and the guest. Rather than conceiving the relation between the host and the guest as absolute, hospitality implies a questioning of the authority of the host, of the ways by and through which this authority is constructed, and of the limits of this authority. Trying to extend the notion of hospitality, trying to make it more hospitable to itself, implies not the sovereign power of the host over the guest, but the recognition that we play shifting roles in our engagements, as both guests and hosts. Recognizing the host as a host does not, and should not, necessarily mean subjection on the guest’s side, but should rather invoke an appreciation of the limits of the guest’s actions towards the host, which is more of a sensibility than a subjection. A failure to recognize these limits as a guest leads to conquest, as once happened in the case of colonialism, which Kant also seems, but only seems, to condemn.<sup>7</sup> Hospitality, on the guest’s side, is a recognition of the host’s right *not* to be conquered, and this right extends well beyond the politico-juridical. Therefore, it is not only the stranger who is in danger of not being received as a guest, but also the host who is vulnerable to conquest.

Thinking about the host and the guest evokes a temporal limit built into the conventional notion of hospitality – that the guest will leave. The conceptualization here, however, is not aimed simply at defining the rules, written or unwritten, that form the conditions for the guest’s *stay*; it has to do with the reception of the stranger, recognizing him/her in its alterity, providing the spaces of recognition where it would also be able to claim its position as a host. Only if the notion is reduced to a duality of host and guest, the former having absolute authority over the latter, is one trapped by this temporal limit. The position assumed here, obviously, is far from that. Hospitality is not about the rules of stay being conditioned by a duality of host and guest with unequal power relations leading to domination; it is about a recognition that we are hosts and guests at the same time in multiple and shifting ways. Hospitality, in this sense, is a refusal to conceive the host and the guest as pre-constituted identities. It is about the recognition that they are mutually constitutive of each other, and thus, relational and shifting as all identities are.

The notion of hospitality also raises difficult questions concerning the distinction between the other and the stranger. The stranger is not necessarily an other although he/she could easily become one. The whole point of trying to advance a notion of hospitality is to welcome the stranger rather than rendering him/her as the other. It refers to a 'solidarity of strangers' in that every act of engagement is a form of solidarity.<sup>8</sup> It is aimed at pointing to the perils of closure, at the prevention of closing spaces to the stranger, othering him/her. It is a notion aimed at encouraging engagement with the stranger without losing the spaces for alterity on both sides. The notion of hospitality allows the guest to remain a stranger instead of becoming an other (on one extreme), or of being assimilated (on the other).

There is at least one more way to reflect on the other and the stranger, that is, considering 'the othernesses that are not reducible to the stranger' (Honig, 1993: 194). It seems to me that it is as legitimate to talk about rendering the stranger as the other, or even to argue that defining him/her as a stranger itself implies an othering, as talking about reducing the other simply to a stranger who is unknown, unlike an 'us', and/or who is not a citizen. '[T]he real challenge posed by the other', Honig states, 'is not whether or how to convert, tolerate, protect, or reject those who are not the same, but how to deal with difference, with those who resist categorization as same or other.' 'Perhaps', she goes on to argue, 'the real outrage of the other is not its unlikeness to "us" but its undecidability, the fact that it calls attention to the processes that produce and consolidate difference and otherness into comfortable binary categories' (1993: 194). 'Estrangement', as Dillon states, 'is consequently a condition of human existence as a *how*, a way of being, and *not a what*, an object whose essence may be captured in a concept' (1999: 95, emphases added). Therefore, it is also possible to talk about the ways in which the other is reduced to the stranger, concealing the very ways in which he/she actually is othered. The other, in this sense, is not a stranger that is simply unknown or unlike to an 'us' by its differing qualities, but is an other produced by the very actions of that 'us'.

The category of the stranger, which plays an essential role in the notion of hospitality, is not easy to grasp. The foreigner, for example, is a stranger. But so is the person that I see on the street in my neighborhood. People that we do not know are strangers, for sure, but so too are some of the people that we know. Could it be said, for example, that someone with whom I have been living in the same city is less 'stranger' than someone, say, who has just entered the country illegally and happened to find a job there?

The two of us belong to the same world. We're all together, but we're not in the *same* world. You, if you enter my world, are a *stranger*; I, if I enter your world, am a *stranger*. You wouldn't accept me if you knew that I'd been arrested by the police several times, and I wouldn't accept you knowing that you never stole. You have one world and I have another world. There's a war going on between our two worlds that are, nevertheless, one and the same. That's it! (cited in Arantes, 1996: 81, emphasis added on 'stranger')<sup>9</sup>

The statement, made during an interview in a video program, belongs to an unemployed man earning his living as a male prostitute in São Paulo. It indicates the multiplicity of boundaries, boundaries at once separating and relating us. It also indicates, once again, that it is not possible, nor desirable, to comfortably categorize the stranger since ‘the category of the stranger breaks open from the inside the established categories and stereotypes of the local world (the world of locals)’ (Beck, 1998: 125, emphasis removed).

There are natives and foreigners, friends and enemies – and there are strangers who do not categorically fit into this model, who dodge, obstruct, and irritate oppositions. The relativity of the stranger exists . . . because the stranger is a *concept without a counterconcept*. . . . Put generally: the category of the stranger is *the counterconcept (or contrary concept) to all concepts of social order*. (Beck, 1998: 127–8)

And this, exactly, is the promise of the stranger. ‘The advent of the stranger’, as Dillon states, ‘is fundamentally deconstructive. It always brings to presence the strangeness, heterogeneity, and supplementarity of the human way of being as such, and thereby, also, *the political challenge* human being faces to address that strangeness in survivable and hospitable ways’ (1999: 95, emphasis added). Alterity, as Collin (1998) states, is not only interruptive but constitutive as well. The point, then, it seems to me, is to take *the* question of the stranger, and the question *of* the stranger not as nuisances to be avoided, but rather as potentially liberating challenges, liberating in their capacity to question and urge one to question the closures that are comfortably taken for granted as safe spaces – those ‘safe spaces called home’ (Honig, 1996: 267).

### **Openings: On Not Being Home**

*Greg:* The hotel is full. Time to put out the no vacancy sign. Too many here. Too many of the wrong people . . .

*Doug:* . . . The values we learned have turned to shit or are turning to shit because of the alien problem.

*Greg:* It’s really *us* against *them*..

(Conversation between LAPD officers, cited in Soja, 2000: 368, emphases added)

The rights of foreigners and aliens, whether they be refugees or guest workers, asylum seekers or adventurers, indicate that *threshold*, that *boundary*, at the site of which the identity of ‘we, the people’ is defined and renegotiated, bounded and unraveled, circumscribed or rendered fluid. (Benhabib, 1999: 736, emphases added)



Arguing for a 'politically engaged, democratic cosmopolitanism', Honig re-reads the biblical book of Ruth, engaging with Ozick's and Kristeva's readings where Ruth appears as a model immigrant (though for different reasons). Honig sees Ruth, like Ozick and Kristeva, 'as a generative, potentially very powerful source of new ethics and dispositions' (Honig, 1999: 186). She questions, however, the ways in which Ruth appears as a model immigrant in the interpretations of Ozick and Kristeva, where Ruth represents a 'reinvigoration by way of conversion or assimilation', in the former, and a stranger who 'unsettles the order she joins', in the latter. These two interpretations, Honig argues:

... combine two of the dominant and enduring responses we have to immigrants. Immigrants are either valued for what 'they' bring to 'us' – diversity, energy, talents, industry, and innovative cuisines, plus a renewed appreciation of our own regime, whose virtues draw immigrants to join us – or they are feared for what they will do to us – consume our welfare benefits, dilute our common heritage, fragment our politics, and undermine our democratic or cosmopolitan culture. Both responses judge the immigrant in terms of what she will do for or to us as a nation. (Honig, 1999: 188)<sup>10</sup>

It is perhaps timely to ask the question inversely: what will 'we' do for or to the immigrant/stranger? Faced with an increasing number of immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants and homeless people, isn't it timely to 'call out for another international law, another border politics, another humanitarian politics, indeed a humanitarian commitment that *effectively* operates beyond the interests of Nation-States' (Derrida, 1999b: 101)? Isn't it timely to engage and challenge, as Honig suggests, 'the seduction of home', the seduction of the 'construction of "homes" as spaces of safety, spaces safe from the disturbance of the stranger'? Isn't it timely to consider the usurpation of speaking the language of hospitality in order to construct safe homes? Isn't it timely, in short, to reconsider the notion of hospitality, to reconsider what it means to be host and guest, to be disturbed, as Levinas once hinted at, by 'being at home with oneself'?

What if being disturbed by 'being at home with oneself' turns into being disturbed by the stranger? The incident that once seduced many Californians with an image of home safe from the stranger presents an example. California's Proposition 187 was an initiative passed by 59 percent of California's voters in November 1994, declaring the state's undocumented immigrant population ineligible for basic social services such as health care and education. The argument for the ballot initiative was based on creating a safe home for 'we, the Californians':

**WE CAN STOP ILLEGAL ALIENS.** If the citizens and taxpayers of our state wait for the politicians in Washington and Sacramento to stop the incredible flow of ILLEGAL ALIENS, California will be in economic and social bankruptcy. We have to act and ACT NOW! On our ballot, Proposition 187 will be the first giant stride in ultimately ending the ILLEGAL ALIEN invasion. (cited in Hinojosa and Schey, 1995: 18)

The result was upsetting: abuses against not only undocumented persons, but against the Latino population in general, many of them United States citizens and legal residents. 'Hate [was] unleashed.'<sup>11</sup> Some responsible 'residents' of California even felt free to demand green cards from people that they suspected to be 'illegal aliens' (CHIRLA, 1995). Their home state, after all, was under attack. The effect of Proposition 187 has been:

... to recriminalize the alien population and to heighten the costs of alien visibility. . . . In short, the effect and likely goal of Proposition 187 are not to prevent illegal immigration but to render aliens politically invisible, to quash their potential power as democratic actors, labor organizers, and community activists. (Honig, 1998: 5)

California's Proposition 187 was an attempt to build 'safe homes' for Californians, not for all of them of course. The political abuse of the image of home as a sheltered and safe place drew upon an 'exclusionary, territorializing, xenophobic, premodern and patriarchal cult of home' (Antonopoulos, 1994: 57). It was an elaborate fixing of boundaries, making California a safe home for its 'legal' residents based on the exclusionary politics of home. Boundaries, evidently, not only evoke the idea of hospitality, but of hostility and racism as well.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to remember, however, that it is not only the situation of the guest but also the host that needs to be reconsidered since, in the case of immigration, for example, it is 'both receiving populations and immigrants [that] . . . risk mutual transformation, [that] . . . engage and attenuate their home-yearning for each other's sakes and for the sake of their political life together' (Honig, 1999: 203). The point, therefore, is about openings, about 'keeping open the question of who "the people" (the demos) is', since the question of democracy 'always arises at the limit of the demos . . . wherein native, subject, citizen, or people receives its designation as such from the way the human encounter with the stranger and the strange is assumed' (Dillon, 1999: 120 and 96). There is a need to reconsider the boundary, not only as a separator but as a connector as well, where hospitality comes into play pointing beyond the boundaries. There is a need, perhaps, to reflect on what the title words, in Greek, of this text suggest: *Pera – peras – poros*: the other side/beyond – limit – passage; 'beyond the limits that interdict passage' (Baptist, 1999: 102). There is a need, more importantly, if a cosmopolitan approach is to be assumed, to think about hospitality 'that would be more than cosmopolitical, that would go beyond strictly cosmopolitical conditions', that would go beyond the interests, authority, and legislation of the state (Derrida, 1999a: 43).

To conclude, there is no way, I would argue, to escape the advent of the stranger, to avoid questions and questionings that tremble, if not stir, the socio-political order that once appeared, perhaps, as a safe home. Nor is there a way to avoid the production of others. What is more important, instead of reflecting on the ways by which no other would be produced, is

to be able to resist processes that produce *and* reproduce others; processes that stabilize themselves, that close spaces, and that derive their sustainability from the very process of othering itself. Again, what is more important, rather than reflecting on the ways by which to avoid the ‘disturbance’ of the stranger, is to be able to provide for the social, cultural, institutional, ethical *and* political spaces where we could learn to engage with and learn from each other, while being able to constitute our subjectivities free from subordination, in democratic ways. The point, then, is to open spaces, spaces where recognition as well as contestation and conflict can take place. Furthermore, the point is not merely to open spaces; more importantly, it is to keep them open. Hospitality is aimed at such a concern.

### Notes

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1. *Hostis* in Latin means both guest and enemy.
2. Derrida here refers to Klossowski’s *Les lois de l’hospitalité* (1965).
3. The two words, ‘cosmopolitan/cosmopolitical right’ [*Weltbürgerrecht*] and ‘hospitality’ [*Hospitalität*] are highlighted by Kant himself. Derrida translates ‘*Weltbürgerrecht*’ as ‘cosmopolitical’ [*cosmopolitique*] whereas it is translated as ‘cosmopolitan’ in the English version. A literal translation of the word is ‘right of citizens of the world’, which, I believe, is captured more effectively in its connotations in the word ‘cosmopolitical’.
4. Derrida’s use of the term ‘political’ demands some elaboration. He uses the term to refer to, and eventually to criticize, the merely institutional character of Kant’s scheme rather than evoking the idea of antagonism and contestation. Kant’s cosmopolitical right to universal hospitality, he states, is ‘politico-juridical’, juridical and political only, determined always by citizenship as a *legal* status.
5. And this is in sharp contrast to Campbell and Shapiro’s take on Kant. For them, ‘[Kant] was an early advocate of a cosmopolitan ethics of international relations. In his “Perpetual Peace”, for example, he mapped a world of governmental states in a way that combined his commitment to a state model of global geography with *an ethic of hospitality* toward those, such as *immigrants or refugees*, who cross state boundaries’ (Campbell and Shapiro, 1999: xiii, emphases added). The only point I would concede is Kant’s commitment to state sovereignty, but the rest of the views they present are indeed very far from my own. By and large, however, we are on the same track committed in our projects to a ‘hospitable recognition of alterity’s worthiness of respect – irrespective of the national or global territorial practices through which it can be identified’ (Campbell and Shapiro, 1999: xviii).

6. This short piece by Benhabib is a reply to David Miller's article, 'The Left, the Nation-State, and European Citizenship', that appeared in the Summer 1998 of the same journal where Miller conceives the nation-state as 'the privileged site of democratic self-determination' and emphasizes the importance of nation in the quest for democracy. For Benhabib, however, the European experiment 'recalls some of the hopes expressed by Immanuel Kant in his essay Perpetual Peace'. I would rather cite Kant's essay as a word of caution, since some of his hopes have already been concretized in the image of the 'fortress Europe'.
7. As Nussbaum observes, 'what Kant objects to in colonialism is the oppressive and brutal treatment of the inhabitants, more than the fact of rule itself' (1997: 14). Although I wholeheartedly agree with her on this point, I should add in passing that I find her appreciation of the importance of hospitality for Kant misleading, at least in the example that she uses to illustrate it. Footnote 39 on page 13 reads: 'Kant's friend Wasianski tells a remarkable story about the importance for Kant of hospitality *to the stranger*. A week before his death, stricken in both body and mind, Kant received a visit from *his doctor*, a busy and eminent man.' I have added the italics to illustrate my point of divergence, to emphasize that the notion of hospitality should go beyond that, recognizing the various, and more problematic than the one in the story, ways of being a stranger, and being able to offer hospitality to them.
8. I borrow the phrase from the title of Jodi Dean's book *Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after Identity Politics* (1996). Although solidarity and hospitality seem to be conflicting notions, since strong forms of solidarity close spaces, an understanding of hospitality as an opening rather than a simple and absolute host/guest relationship makes them compatible. The engagement of the host with the guest, or vice versa, also refers to a form of solidarity, which is enabled by hospitality.
9. This statement opens Arantes' excellent article where he discusses the contradictory (symbolic) boundaries in urban space that separate as well as put into contact different, and most often contradictory, socio-spatial practices.
10. For Honig, the first is the 'welcoming' response and the second is the 'wary' one. The welcoming response, however, could have consequences very far from those the word 'welcome' suggests, as I have tried to illustrate above in the example of guest workers.
11. Title of the report published by the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) in 1995.
12. For more on Proposition 187, see Hinojosa and Schey (1995), Armbruster et al., (1995), Smith and Tarallo (1995), and CHIRLA (1995). The Proposition was voted in 1994, and finally deemed unconstitutional in 1999.

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**Mustafa Dikeç** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Urban Planning, University of California, Los Angeles, California.