Hospitality and hostility towards migrants: global perspectives – An introduction

By Mette Louise Berg and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

Migration touches, and has always touched, the lives of people across the globe. This includes those migrating, their families, kin groups, descendants, friends, and communities; those aspiring to migrate, but who are unable to do so whether for familial, financial, legal, security, or other reasons; those fostering, facilitating or constraining the migration of others (including those embedded within the 'migration industries' [Cranston, Schapendonk, and Spaan 2018]); and those living in sites of departure, transit and (non-)arrival. Migration is, in all its heterogeneity, a multidirectional process that is intrinsically related to diverse forms of encounters: with and between different people and objects, places and spaces, temporalities and materialities, beliefs and desires, and socio-cultural and political systems.

In this inaugural issue of *Migration and Society*, we reflect on the complex and often contradictory nature of such encounters by focusing on diverse dynamics of hospitality and hostility towards migrants around the world and in different historical contexts. Our contributors examine questions that are at the core of diverse encounters, including how and why different actors have responded to the actual, prospective, and imagined arrival of migrants across time and space; how migrants and refugees have experienced and responded to different, and at times overlapping, processes of hospitality and hostility in sites of transit and settlement, including those joining established diasporas and transnational communities; the politics and the poetics of hospitality and hostility towards migrants in different spaces; and questions of how, why, and with what effects diverse media have represented processes of migration, such that some groups have been rendered (hyper)visible and audible, while others have become invisible, inaudible, and silenced. Finally, by including contributions that examine past dynamics of hospitality and hostility alongside or in relation to contemporary ones, we aim – in line with the journal's aim more broadly – to highlight the significance of

historic resonances, continuities, and discontinuities with the current moment. This is particularly important in the context of our inaugural theme, given the extent to which the 'European refugee crisis' has predominantly been framed through a lens of historical and geographical exceptionalism, but also in our vision for *Migration and Society* moving forward.

Discourses, practices, and policies of hospitality and hostility towards migrants and refugees raise urgent moral, ethical, political, and social questions; processes and questions, as Elena Isayev reminds us in her opening article, which themselves have such long histories that they are simultaneously imperative and pressing for the 'here-and-now' and yet are equally 'timeless' in many ways. In seeking to answer such questions, we can benefit from empirically and theoretically grounded scholarship showing the social embeddedness, nuances, and ambiguities of situated practices of hospitality and hostility. Resisting the largely myopic, ahistorical, and isolationist responses that governments and media have developed to migrant arrivals in the global North, our inaugural volume includes critical reflections that aim to situate current practices in a deeper and wider historical and geographical context. This helps open up the possibility of imagining and embodying 'the otherwise', i.e. 'forms of life that are at odds with dominant, and dominating, modes of being' (Povinelli 2011: 1), most clearly manifested in the special roundtable section debating the utopian/dystopian vision of 'Refugia' (Nick Van Hear; Veronique Barbelet and Christina Bennett; and Helma Lutz).

As examined throughout the contributions in this volume, and indeed in our own work elsewhere (Berg, Gidley, and Krausova Forthcoming; Berg and Nowicka Forthcoming; Berg Forthcoming; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015, 2016; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2018), hospitality and hostility are closely interlinked, yet seemingly contradictory concepts and processes. Hospitality, it has been argued, is always conditional, and includes within it the potential for hostility and vice versa; both imply 'the possibility of the other' (Selwyn 2000: 20). Indeed, Jacques Derrida famously argued that hospitality is a word of 'a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it' (Derrida 2000: 3), by which he refers to hostility. To capture this constitutive duality, he coined the term *hostipitality* (Derrida 2000).

The lens of hostipitality has been applied to diverse contexts of displacement, including in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's ongoing research into local community responses to displacement from Syria in the contexts of Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2015, 2016; Fiddian-

Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2018).[1] In her research, she has drawn on the concept of hostipitality to examine the nature of encounters not solely between refugees and citizens, but also between different groups of refugees in Lebanon, including Palestinian refugees who have lived in Baddawi refugee camp in Lebanon since the 1950s and who have been 'hosting' people displaced from Syria since 2012. In effect, as Yousif M. Qasmiyeh (2016) posits with reference to this case,

> Refugees ask other refugees, who are we to come to you and who are you to come to us? Nobody answers. Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Kurds share the camp, the same-different camp, the camp of a camp. They have all come to re-originate the beginning with their own hands and feet.

In these encounters, including in situations such as Baddawi, characterised by intense precarity and overlapping displacement, it has been argued that the inherent conditionality of hospitality is underpinned by the paradox that to offer welcome is 'always already' to have the power to delimit the space or place that is being offered to the Other (Derrida 2000; Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). The resulting hierarchies and tensions towards 'new arrivals' have often been presented not only as common, but also potentially as *inescapable*.

And yet, as Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argues (2016), hostility and rejection are not inevitable. Rather, it is urgent to trace and examine alternative modes of thought and action that transcend and resist the fatalistic invocations of hostipitality. Exploring such approaches, including the framework for supporting the development of sustainable 'welcoming communities' for refugees and migrants (Bucklaschuk 2015), appears essential for further analysis both in theory and practice, as the articles in this volume also abundantly illustrate.

Writing in the late 1970s, an earlier theorist of hospitality, the anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, similarly argued that the 'law of hospitality', i.e. the 'problem of how to deal with strangers' (2012: 501), is 'founded upon ambivalence' and contains within it a conflict that cannot be eliminated (2012: 513). It can however be put in a state of suspension, as he illustrates through empirical examples from a range of sources, ancient and modern, and from different cultural contexts. Pitt-Rivers thus moves from the universal 'law' of hospitality to its

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[1] 'Local Community Experiences of and Responses to Displacement from Syria: Views from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey,' AHRC-ESRC Project Grant Ref: AH/P005438/1. See https://refugeehosts.org/.

differently expressed 'codes' that vary according to social and cultural context. Ann-Christin Wagner, in her article in this issue, takes her cue from Pitt-Rivers' approach and argues that 'successful hospitality renders the stranger's threat harmless through intricate choreographies and imposing spatial boundaries'. In other words, to understand the relationship between hospitality and hostility, we need to pay close attention to the spatiality, temporality, and texture of social relations.

As soon as we start thinking about hospitality and hostility as embodied, enacted, and resisted practices grounded in particular spatio-temporal contexts, a series of further questions arise: Who has or assumes the right to act as host, in what contexts, and on what social grounds? Who is recognised as guest, and who is turned away, by whom and on what grounds? To answer these, we need to consider issues of gender, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, citizenship, and legal status, amongst others. It equally becomes essential to explore the justifications or motivations that guide those showing hospitality and hostility; here questions of faith and/or universalist vs particularist orientations are likely to be important. In other words, when we consider hospitality and hostility as social practices, we need to think of relationships and social actors, of power and hierarchies, but also of agency and, as part of this, diverse modes of resistance.

Moving from the largely European roots – in disciplinary, theoretical and, to a large extent empirical senses – of Derrida's and Pitt Rivers' conceptualisations of hospitality, it is also worth reflecting on cognate concepts in other social and cultural contexts. Hence, as Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh (2018) note with reference to the hosting of refugees in 'neighbouring' countries in the Middle East, 'Qur'anically and according to the Sunnah, the term neighbour has a clear spatial and moral reading that is defined, reaffirmed and demarcated by proximity, neighbourhood and charity.' Simultaneously, however, they argue that when we view the term 'neighbour' through its various usages in Arabic throughout history, we find that the concept can invoke antagonism, antonyms, as well as organic clashes with the overarching religious canon. A clear example of this schism of interpretation is embodied in the very definition of the term 'neighbour' offered in *Lisan Al-Arab,* the authoritative and encyclopaedic Arabic dictionary:

> The one whose house is next to yours, the stranger, the partner, the beneficiary, the
> ally, the supporter, the spouse, the intimate parts, the house that is closer to the coast,

the good, the bad, the hypocrite, the changeable, the kind.

(Translation by Yousif M. Qasmiyeh)

It is both essential to bear this ambivalence and semantic (and functional) rupture in mind, in addition to re-viewing Derrida's conceptualization of hostipitality and Pitt Rivers' analysis of the law of hospitality, as we continue to carefully examine the nature of diverse encounters – past, present and future – in equally diverse contexts of both migration and (im)mobility.

Hence, far from taking such identities and identifiers for granted, we must continue to ask: who comes to be seen as our neighbours and kin and therefore deserving others? Who is seen as the Stranger, and by whom? What does this entail, when, why, and where? When, why, how, and by whom do Strangers come to be seen as threats / undeserving others? What are the politics and the poetics of hospitality and hostility, and what can and should socially engaged scholars and practitioners do in times and spaces that are characterised by a lack of conviviality and, some might say, humanity, towards migrants and people on the move?

As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has argued elsewhere (2016), in light of the limitations and dangers of fatalistic readings of hostipitality, a more productive theoretical lens may ultimately be that of Jean-Luc Nancy's 'being together' and 'being with' (Nancy 2000). In essence, in light of the 'everyday geographies' and 'quiet politics of belonging' that characterise 'ordinary' encounters, and ordinary modes of being in the world (Askins 2015), the conceptual and practical challenges that emerge in encounters between hosts and strangers include recognising the realities of, and potential for, refugees, migrants, and hosts (whether citizens or refugees/migrants themselves) both 'being with' and 'being together'. This would require an unpacking of the very categories of host and guest, thus taking us from universalising claims and the taxonomy of host-guest relations to the messiness of everyday life and its potential for care, generosity, and recognition in encounters.

As feminist scholars have long argued, care is a universal human experience and a basic human need; equally, the ability to care for others is a fundamental human capacity (see e.g., Held 2006). Importantly, Nira Yuval-Davis asserts that 'the ethics of care' is 'a necessary element of social and political solidarity, *but cannot guarantee it*' (2011: 8; emphasis added). It is, of course, essential to remain attentive to the realities of structural inequalities and power imbalances (for instance, in the carer : cared for relationship) that can act as barriers

to different forms of solidarity (as also argued by Yuval-Davis 2011). Nonetheless, repositioning the focus of enquiry, and examining the nature and potentialities of encounters between hosts and strangers, the self and the other, through the optic of a feminist ethics of care, a focus on refugee-refugee relationality, and/or Nancy's 'being with' and 'being together,' may lead us into more hopeful, solidary, and productive ways of studying dynamics of hospitality and hostility, and ultimately of different ways of encountering, studying, and theorising migration itself.

It is against this backdrop, and with the 'bridging' aims outlined in our Editorial (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Berg, this issue), that we are pleased to introduce a collection of research articles that situate contemporary migration in historical and societal context from ancient Greece (Elena Isayev) to the imagined transnational space of Refugia 2030 (Nick Van Hear, with critical responses from Veronique Barbelet and Christina Bennett, and Helma Lutz); from the struggles for citizenship and belonging of former Burundian refugees in Tanzania (Patricia Daley, Ng'wanza Kamata and Leiyo Singo), to sanctuary city organising in Canada (David Moffette and Jennifer Ridgley) via a refugee host town in Jordan (Ann-Christin Wagner), and practices of hospitality and hostility in Portugal (Elizabeth Challinor), and the US (Denise Brennan); from the challenges facing the Athens city council (Lefteris Papagianniakis interviewed by Aris Komporozos-Athanasiou with Nina Papachristou), to campus organizing and teaching about refugees and migrants under the Trump presidency in the US (Diya Abdo and Krista Craven; Sara Vannini, Ricardo Gomez, Megan Carney, and Katharyne Mitchell); and from provision of education to unaccompanied refugee youths in Lesvos (Ivi Daskalaki and Nadina Leivaditi), to representations of separated child migrants in UK media (Rachel Rosen and Sarah Crafter), via faith-based solidarity with refugees around the world (Olivia Wilkinson), and the agency and legal consciousness of UK social workers in re/making immigration policy in practice (Kathryn Tomko Dennler). As well as this rich and varied body of articles, practitioner reflections and interventions, utopian/dystopian imaginings, and interview-based contributions, the issue also includes a Creative Encounters section curated by Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, including poetic and visual pieces by Theophilus Kwek; Tahmineh Hooshyar Emami; and Mohammad Assaf and Kate Clanchy. Finally, we have a suite of book reviews resonating with the hospitality and hostility theme, edited by Agnieszka Kubal and Gunvor Jónsson.

It is our hope that readers will enjoy these theoretically and empirically rich articles and reflections, and that you will join us on our journey as we collectively continue to critically explore these and other migration-related dynamics and encounters around the world in future issues of *Migration and Society*.

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