Hospitality and hostility: The dilemmas of intimate life and refugee hosting

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Abstract
Until recently, studies of hospitality have been less prominent within the broader context of studies of global mobilities. Yet, both are entangled. In this special section of the Journal of Sociology, we explore the effects of narratives of ‘migration crisis’ or ‘refugee crisis’ in contemporary, intersected global and local politics and studies of hospitality. In doing so, contributors bring hospitality and mobility studies into closer dialogue by turning their attention to the dilemmas of intimate life and refugee hosting.

Keywords
borders, migration, hospitality, hostility, hosting, refugee

Until recently, studies of hospitality have been less prominent within the broader context of studies of global mobilities. Yet, both are entangled. There can be no discussion of hospitality without recognition of the movement of subjects across borders, and a discussion of mobility without attention to practices of reception, hospitality and hostility cannot capture the socio-political impacts of human migration in host countries. At the end of 2014 and early 2015, record numbers of forcibly displaced people died as they attempted to cross the borders of Europe. These attempted crossings intensified the hostility of European border regimes (De Genova, 2016), resulting in further attempts to block already illegalised migratory routes. The discursive construction of a ‘migrant crisis’ through which this event was politicised signified the extent of European unpreparedness to adequately respond to the large number of people who were seeking refuge in the imagined safety of Western Europe. The frequently repeated discourses of ‘migration crisis’ and ‘refugee crisis’ represented crises of border regimes (De Genova,
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2016) and led to increased policing of already tightly securitised European borders. In this special section of the Journal of Sociology, we explore the effects of narratives of ‘migration crisis’ or ‘refugee crisis’ in contemporary, intersected global and local politics and studies of hospitality. In doing so, contributors bring hospitality and mobility studies into closer dialogue by turning their attention to the dilemmas of intimate life and refugee hosting.

Hospitality, with regard to migration and exile, is attracting increasing attention in contemporary social policy debates across a range of social, cultural and scholarly fields, including anthropology, cultural studies, geography, history, philosophy and sociology. Emerging scholarship on mobility studies has included a sustained focus on the political, philosophical and ethical aspects of hospitality which contributions to this themed section clearly demonstrate. The meanings of hospitality have been crucial in analyses of how immigration policies and discourses have been framed by politicians in both the nation and beyond. Drawing upon philosophical ideas (Derrida, 2000), hospitality has been seen as the giving of time and space to others (Dikeç et al., 2009). While highlighting cultural and religious particularity, historians have pointed to the shifting boundaries of the meaning and practices of hospitality over time (Browner, 2003; Pohl, 1999; Walton, 2000). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, anthropologists and ethnologists have emphasised how hospitality is caught up in systems of exchange, ongoing relationships of bonds and delicate trade-offs between hospitality and hostility that together secure social cohesion (Selwyn, 2000). In contrast, postcolonial scholars have examined hospitality within the context of colonial power relations and systemic hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers (Ahmed, 2000; Rosello, 2001). Furthermore, scholars researching Islamophobia and hostility towards Muslim immigrants have demonstrated how perceptions of cultural and religious incompatibility can operate to shore up ideas about an exclusive sovereign Europe (Yeğenoğlu, 2012). A growing enthusiasm for the investigation of (in)hospitality and (un)conditionality within academic spheres (Amin, 2012; Moiz and Gibson, 2007) reflects the influences of studies of diaspora and transnationalism, home, borders, securitisation, moral bonds and citizenship.

Within the particularities of contemporary asylum in Europe, as Picozza clearly states:

the prism of coloniality conveys an analytical sensibility capable of drawing connections between colonial history and the supposedly ‘post-colonial’ present, particularly relating to the racialised production, government and socialisation of refugees. (2021: 7)

In doing so, she continues: ‘refugees are not the product of crises external to Europe; they are a product of “Europe” itself – as both a project of global domination and a fragmented geopolitical assemblage’ (Picozza, 2021: 7). In this context, while the support and care for displaced people and grief for the suffering and death of unknown others offers a challenge to the xenophobia that underpins the current European border regime (Danewid, 2017; Liebsch and Goodwin, 2016), a decolonising approach offers insight into how refugees’ (im)mobilities on the one hand, and the hospitality practices of the hosts on the other, are intimately intertwined with genealogies of global colonial relations (Picozza, 2021; Wolfe, 2016).
A decolonising approach to relations between migrants and hosts also needs to pay attention to gendered relations of care. While hospitality to migrants and refugees plays a valuable role in contesting social exclusion (Squire, 2011), women have historically been seen as having a greater responsibility for hospitality. Moreover, the construction of women (and children) as more deserving refugees compared with men, who are imagined as ‘false refugees’ or ‘economic migrants’ (Freedman, 2015: 2), tends to signify the gendered characteristic of deservingness of displaced subjects. Thus, the social values attached to hospitality are also highly gendered (Hamington, 2010) – as well as associated with race, age and class (as the contributors to this section demonstrate). As such, feminists have been cautious about approaching hospitality as theory, discourse and practice. The work of feminist postcolonial theorists such as Ahmed (2000, 2012), Benhabib (2004), Young (2000), Brah (1996), Anthias (2012, 2021), Gunaratnam (2003, 2009), Farahani (2015, 2018), and Farahani and Thapar-Björkert, 2018, 2020), among others, on intersecting relations of inclusion/ exclusion, home/ homelessness, and borders and space within globalised conditions, have contributed to nuancing the existing theorisation of hospitality. In addition to gender, the focus on translocationality (Anthias, 2012, 2021) has underlined inter-racial hierarchies among those who are identified as guests or hosts. Hospitality as a shifting set of spatial and temporal relationships (Lynch et al., 2011) further exposes ongoing and simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion. In an era of increased transnational migration and postcolonial hospitality (Rosello, 2001), welcoming someone into one’s home can establish rather than destabilise one’s privilege. In working to fully understand the privileges embodied in governmental (in) hospitable policies and private hosting practices, we should not only connect past and current histories but also work backwards and then forwards (Bhambra, 2014).

As Bhambra argues, disregarding the colonial genealogy of migration and isolating connected histories has resulted in an ongoing loss of historical memory that ignores the causes of the forced displacement of people. It also overlooks the fact that ‘Europe’s relatively high standard of living and social infrastructure have not been established or maintained separate from either the labour and wealth of others, or the creation of misery elsewhere’ (Bhambra, 2014: 5). Further, Bhambra asserts that the concept of a ‘refugee crisis’ not only constitutes migration as a foreign and external problem arriving in Europe from the outside, but also displaces the responsibility of the Global North as causing the contemporary situation of ‘crisis’. In locating current forced migration in continuing colonial genealogies, a decolonising approach challenges the wilful amnesia that blocks comprehensive understanding of the enduring, intersecting global dilemmas of inequalities and (im)mobilities. In migration studies, a decolonising approach has led to a questioning of the predominant understanding of global migration as primarily a South–North phenomenon and a ‘problem to be solved’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020: 5). From such perspectives, while the Global North has been assumed to be the most desirable destination for migrants and exiles, there has been a lack of critical investigation of the role of colonial histories in contemporary migration and displacement.

Responses to contemporary migration and displacement in Europe are shaped by publicly circulating images of displaced people making the difficult and dangerous trek across and through Europe in the hope of finding shelter. Many individuals and organisations have offered a welcome to refugees, whom governmental policies portrayed as
needy, unwanted and unwelcome. This tension between government border regimes (De Genova, 2016; Tazzioli, 2016) and public solidarity (Picozza, 2021) illuminates not only the very interplay between governmental hostility and private hospitality, but also the ‘hostipitality’ (Derrida, 2000) that reflects the power asymmetries between the host and the guest. This power disparity has different and intersecting aspects. In coining the concept of ‘white hospitality’, Kelly (2006: 467) argues that both governmental and private hospitality can be overlaid by a rhetoric of inclusion and generosity in a way that ‘effectively results in the displacement of responsibility for the government’s hostility, or, more precisely, declares this hostility as responsible and necessary’ (2006: 467). The articles in this special section interweave theory and empirical research to engage debates on the socially situated and politically motivated process of hosting with regard to immigration, at times paying specific attention to the intersections of race, gender and age. Key concerns of all the articles are both the operational and vernacular facets of hospitality and hostility.

The contribution of this special section to studies of migration and hospitality

The contributors to this special section recognise that contemporary hosting contexts and practices are socially complex and in a state of constant change as a result of global turbulence, the renewed fortification of national and regional borders, and a resurgence in nationalism and far-right extremism. The articles engage with the effects of contemporary immigration regimes and border politics through the dynamic interrelationship between hospitality and hostility and the negotiation of intimate citizenship (Plummer, 2003). The authors interweave theory and empirical research to engage debates on the socially located and politically motivated process of hosting with regard to immigration, including highlighting the imbrications of race, gender, faith and temporality. A key concern of the special section is with both the structural and the vernacular facets of hospitality and hostility. We have aimed to recognise how these dynamics not only create binaries between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’, deterring people from seeking refuge (Gibson, 2007), but also promote policies of social abandonment. Ideas about deservingness, as contributors suggest, influence even private hospitable practices and condition the direction, quality and form of hosting. In so doing, the (un) deservingness of refugees, as constituted by gender, race, class and generation, is maintained as a tension between proving both their vulnerability and their potential to become economically independent and productive citizens. Significantly, the section draws out hospitality discourses and the local affective, global and governmental hostile policies and practices that extend border politics across social, political and cultural boundaries.

In acknowledging the centrality of hospitality and hostility to contemporary social life, contributors make three key interventions. First, by building on discussions in feminist and critical race and whiteness studies, we show how hospitality is gendered and racialised; here we are especially interested in the entanglements between whiteness, colonial legacies and new ‘welcome cultures’ that often displace global responsibility. Second, the articles uncover how hospitality discourses and practices have the potential
to encompass a range of multiple and different intimate and social relationships rather than simply being ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Third, a central and implicit thematic across the articles is that of ‘intimate citizenship’.

Citizenship is a contested concept that has been subjected to a variety of scholarly and political examinations and is intimately entangled with the public sphere of social, legal, and political rights. By criticising the exclusive focus on citizenship as solely a public matter, feminist scholarship (Weeks, 1998) has emphasised not only how ‘private’ matters such as family, marriage, sexuality, and parenting have been disregarded within citizenship theories, but also how the impact of gender and family in shaping social relations has been ignored. Building on the focus of feminist scholarships on private spheres, Plummer (2003) introduces the concept of ‘intimate citizenship’ to examine the rights of people in relation to their own bodies, of how they (un)relate to one another, how they do gender, how they are sexual beings and how they (dis)claim identity and representations. The fragility of intimate citizenship exposes not only how people’s private decisions, choices and practices are intertwined with public institutions and state policies, but also how those decisions and practices carry contradictory emotions, ambiguities and tensions (Oleksy, 2009; Plummer, 2003). While most studies on intimate citizenship have focused on the exclusionary consequences of the personal choices in the lives of sexually marginalised groups, much less attention has been paid to the ways in which marginalisation and stigmatisation are articulated through other existing hierarchies (such as race, class, age, ability and nationality cittizenship). Belonging entirely neither to the private or the personal sphere, intimate citizenship is wrapped up in intersecting power relations and is, accordingly, infused with the local and global public spheres. Here, the pairing of global mobility and the intimate (Pratt and Rosner, 2012), challenges not only the grand narratives of social institutions but also exposes how global forces explicitly and implicitly undergird personal exchanges. Furthermore, Pratt and Rosner (2012) ponder the very connections between the global and the intimate, such as the framing of the personal as political as a deeply rooted concern of feminist analysis, thus stressing the importance of adapting an analytical feminist methodology for exploring the universalist assumptions of social policies and producing a more nuanced account of the world we live in. What is most at stake in contemporary contestations of intimate citizenship is how matters of belonging are activated through different scales of exposure and vulnerability to migrant others. In different ways, authors suggest that what is most at stake in contemporary contestations of intimate citizenship is how the settled and the mobile relate to one another in the making of political communities. In this regard, we are concerned with the opportunities that the concept of intimate citizenship offers for thinking about hospitality and hostility as a part of contemporary citizenship politics, policies and practices. By examining the tensions within governmental, institutional and vernacular practices, the authors identify novel and shifting relationships of hospitality and hostility within changing national and global circumstances.

In ‘Not in My Name: Empathy and Intimacy in Volunteer Refugee Hosting’, Yasmin Gunaratnam draws on narrative interviews with volunteers in an English charity who provide temporary accommodation to destitute migrants and refugees. The article investigates the ethical and emotional complexities and ambivalence of the tensions between hospitality and hostility through stories of empathy. Highlighting the hostile environment
of the pre- and post-Brexit UK, Gunaratnam shows how public discourse weighs down on the private/personal domain. One host saw hosting as a political palliative; ‘We’re like little bits of sticking plaster, but it makes a difference if you’re bleeding.’ The article works to show how hospitality articulates with empathy, such that they become mimetically entwined. In doing so, Gunaratnam argues that the contemporary hosting of refugees produces new and ethically fraught dilemmas of intimate citizenship for those committed to materialising hospitality at a time of intensified nationalism, xenophobia and racism.

In the article, “‘Wir schaffen das’: Hope and Hospitality Beyond the Humanitarian Border’, Billy Holzberg examines how hope for a different culture of hospitality was articulated during the long summer of migration of 2015 in Germany. By juxtaposing Angela Merkel’s ‘Wir schaffen das’ speeches with the cross-border migrant March of Hope, Holzberg’s article suggests that, while Merkel’s rhetoric opens the horizon to a more hospitable Europe, her policies of humanitarian securitisation ultimately redistribute hope away from migrants and towards a German nation imagined to need protection from them. Subsequently, the article shows that cross-border marches reveal affective infrastructures of care and hospitality that extend beyond the gesture of hospitality embedded in Merkel’s rhetoric. By displacing governmental and global accountability and disregarding colonial genealogy, Merkel’s humanitarian politics and rhetoric are presented as a sudden state of emergency to be solved through humanitarian securitisation, assisting migrants in need while decreasing future migration. Drawing on feminist, queer and postcolonial theories of affect, Holzberg approaches the intimate life of borders and crossings through an analysis of borders as affective.

In their article on refugee hosting networks, Pierre Monforte, Gaja Maestri and Estelle d’Haluin explore the motivations and experiences of those offering private hospitality. Through interviews conducted with volunteers active in the Refugees Welcome movement in Britain, France and Italy, this article explores the motivations and experiences of individuals who practise (private) hospitality by hosting refugees in their homes. Looking specifically at the ‘responsibility’ that emerges from the practice of hosting, the authors show that the experience of private hospitality is based on narratives foregrounding feelings of love and family-like relationships, thus creating the expectation of an affective connection between host and guest. The authors maintain that this process is highly ambivalent, as it risks creating and reproducing everyday intimate bordering processes. In the face of the governmental, political and socio-cultural boundaries between ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ migrants, private hospitality is ambivalent since, as the authors show, it does not necessarily disrupt the conditional character of hospitality. Therefore, volunteers risk reproducing some of the disciplinary role of charities and governments as they engage in processes of distinction between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ refugees.

Drawing on the concepts of Derridean ‘hostipitality’ and Plummer’s ‘intimate citizenship’, Walker and Gunaratnam examine the political ambivalence of hospitality to young African unaccompanied minors as they transition to adulthood. They suggest that this biographical transition offers a unique empirical opportunity to examine the extent of hospitality, as the (uninvited) Black child guest crosses the threshold into being an unwanted, potentially deportable, ‘invader’. Drawing from the young men’s images (art and photographs) and narratives, they discuss experiences of differential anti-Blackness during migration journeys and consider how hegemonic notions of masculinity
circumscribe the quest for legal citizenship and the meaning of adulthood. The article offers an engaging example of how the category of ‘unaccompanied minor’ is established through colonial and racial genealogies. The authors address the reverberations between hospitality and hostility encountered by the young men via the Derridean (2000) neologism derived from ‘hospitality’, that is, ‘hostipitality’. The concept of hostipitality recognises situations and events of hostility as more than the antithesis or absence of hospitality – the latter understood ‘as a vital receptivity to the needs of an Other’ (Dikeç et al., 2009: 11).

Nazli Şenses and Fataneh Farahani’s article, ‘Civil Society and Pro-migrant Activism in Turkey’, examines the hospitality practices of pro-migrant civil society organisations in Istanbul. Through qualitative interviews, they examine the ways in which the politically and morally charged ambivalences of hospitable practices are articulated through intersecting gendered, professionalised and faith-based aspects of different civil society organisations. Interrogating the idea of a homogeneous ‘Global South’, the authors demonstrate how use of the concept is accompanied by the development of particular understandings and practices, while at the same time international recognition and funding are necessary. In doing so, they develop a nuanced criticism which emerges as an alternative to merely re-applying concepts from the Global North. By contextualising the religious and geopolitical particularity of Turkey and its constantly shifting position as gatekeeper of Europe, Şenses and Farahani show how the hospitable practices of civil societies are conditioned by global as well as localised politics of hosting. They show how civil society actors’ attempts to be good citizens and good Muslims, as well as good care-providers, expose the intimate aspects of hospitality segueing into discourses of the (gendered) deservingness of displaced subjects as new citizens.

Concluding thoughts

This special section aims to illuminate the emergence of hospitality and hostility in a contemporary era of globalised migration encounters and fraught border regimes (De Genova, 2016), illegality (Andersson, 2014; Khosravi, 2010), the securitisation of migration (Squire, 2015), moral arguments for migration rights (Maboloc, 2020), decolonisation of asylum (Picozza, 2021), and regimes of hospitality and governing citizenship (Foultier, 2015). These intersecting discourses and practices constitute those seeking better and safer lives as strangers, aliens, racialised immigrants, undocumented refugees, foreign beggars and other displaced subjects who are in transit and/or without a home as ‘guests’ – albeit unwanted ones. This concept of the other as guest generates another concept: namely the concept of ‘host’.

The contributors’ nuanced and informed analyses of the power relations embedded in hospitable practices speaks, as Ahmed (2000) argues, to a gap between the past and the present. It also shows how colonial amnesia and the erasure of connecting histories can lead to a fixation on the stranger as either a danger or a victim (Ahmed, 2000: 5). Alternatively, as Ahmed notes:

by allowing some aliens to co-exist ‘with us’, we might expand our community: we might prove our advancement into or beyond the human; we might demonstrate our willingness to
accept difference and to make it our own. Being hospitable to aliens might, in this way, allow us to become human. (2000: 2)

Enjoying, confronting, adjusting to, troubling, challenging and reflecting on her own privileges, the hospitable host undergoes a variety of conflicting feelings as s/he is confronted with the precarious lives of displaced people. Acknowledging these troubling and troublesome ethical and moral commitments in the spirit of an inclusive and ethical hospitality and connecting histories, we invite you into this special section ‘Hospitality and Hostility: The Dilemmas of Intimate Life and Refugee Hosting’.

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