HOSPITALITY BETWEEN COMMAS AND BORDERS

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Abstract: Starting from the analysis of the concept "hospes" there are identified the key characters that make the purpose of this present study: the "host" and the "guest" as they find themselves in a both conditioned and conditional relationship in an attempt to provide and /or receive the gift of giving, of hospitality. In an unavoidable manner, a string of questions appear, such as: Is it possible to have an unconditional hospitality? Do we really know what hospitality means? The foreigner has only rights or duties? Is it possible that the role played by the host and the guest be interchangeable? Has the guest the need to abuse the host's hospitality; thus, as in the case of passing the threshold of intimacy, has the guest the right to read the electronic correspondence, use the credit cards or invade the privacy of the host's phone calls?The article also presents the importance of the "logos" as a form of recognition of the familiar, of a hospitable place/space. For Derrida, the language is the threshold from which the hospitality begins. The French philosopher underlines in "Of Hospitality" the hypotheses that if the foreigner speaks the language of the host, can the guest be considered an outsider? In order to obtain an overview image upon the concept of hospitality, of the passing over the different cultural, geographic, social or psychological barriers the study additionally contains a comparative exploration of Salman Rushdie's "Step Across This Line. Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002".

Keywords: hospitality, borders, foreigner, host, logos.

The word "hospitality" derives from the Latin *hospes* meaning "host", "guest", or "stranger", "foreigner". Jacques Derrida in "Of Hospitality" presses on the concept of the "foreigner question" pointing out the essential interrogation:

> Isn't the question of the foreigner *[l'etrangerl* a foreigner's question?
> Coming from the foreigner, from abroad *[l'etranger]* [1]*?*

Thus, from the moment one places the question of "the foreigner" he/she distances from the other person, and implicitly, posses him/herself on a different position of superiority, as he/she is not *the foreigner*, but the one who has the right to forward the question of *l'etranger*. The emphasis is now upon the "of" and the "to", meaning that

> the question of the foreigner is a question *of* the foreigner, addressed *to* the foreigner.
> As though the foreigner were first of all *the one who* puts the first question or *the one to whom* you address the first question[2].

The foreigner and the host, the person and the other one, the guest and the new arrival, these two elements facing each other, interacting or existing in continuity and discontinuity, two terms that influence one another, in resulting the existence of "hospitality" and "inhospitality". The former notion of "hospitality" defines clearly the presence of a guest and the positive attitude towards the new arrival. The latter concept of "inhospitality" seems to invalidate itself its meaning as "*in*" – "hospitality" reflects upon the

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond, trans. by Rachel Bowlby, (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.
[2] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 3.*

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implication of inclusion within space, a place, or limits, or behavior, or actions. In this case, "inhospitality" means within the "hospitality", inside the limits of "hospitality". Yet, one can become both guest and foreigner in his/her own territory, own limits or space. It is the case of Socrates who in "The Apology of Socrates" and in his defense addressed his fellow citizens and Athenian judges against the accusation of being a kind of sophist or skillful speaker[3]. He declared himself "foreigner" as he did not know how to use in his best interest the language of the courts, to the tribune of the tribunals: he did not know how to speak that courtroom language, that legal rhetoric of accusation, defense, and pleading; he did not possess the skill[4]. Not being able to pass the boundary of "logos", understanding the juridical "logos" he became, inside his space "a foreigner" caught in the labyrinth of the courtroom language and law.

In such a situation, the new "foreigner" obtained his "quality" due to the fact that he was inept at speaking the language, always being without defense before the law of the

country that welcomed or expelled him[5]. The philosophical logos cannot be applied in a Court of Law, only in its spirit. Socrates cannot benefit of the legal language in which he could have found comfort, or understanding as inside the Law the duty of hospitality is formulated, as a whole set of norms are displayed as the right to asylum or its limits. From his position, he is obliged to ask for "hospitality" in a language that is unfamiliar to him, unrelated, imposed on him by the "master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc.[6]" Such a situation requires an external action that imposes on him a translation into "their" own language and that "is the first act of violence[7]". Instantly, the existence of such borders raises questions about the knowledge held by others of the "foreigner". Who knows this person? Who can understand him? What representations inform that knowledge? What channels of communication can be used? What procedures are to be followed? What are the limits to these procedures? What alternative knowledge do they exclude? What discourses do they shape and have been shaped by? Who benefits from these discourses? What gives the "right" to defend himself to the "foreigner"? Who offers hospitality to the visitor? Why is hospitality withheld?

From the first moments of our own lives, we become "foreigners", "travelers" into the "unknown", "new arrivals". We must learn the proper *logos*, the instruments of communication, the gestures and the laws that make us "hosts" not "foreigners".

Salman Rushdie, in "Step Across This Line" illustrates the "position" of humans as we "are frontier-crossing beings", "we emerge from the amniotic fluid, from the universal liquid of the womb", and in our transition "we recognize and celebrate the prototype of our own literal, moral and metaphorical frontier crossings, applauding the same drive that made Columbus's ships head for the edge of the world, or the pioneers take to their covered wagons. The image of Armstrong taking his first moonwalk echoes the first movements of life on earth. In our deepest natures, we are frontier-crossing beings.[8]"

As "frontier – crossing beings" we understand the need to learn the host's language in order to benefit of the "hospitality" that he/she can offer.

From Derrida's point of view, that is where the question of "hospitality" begins to form its shape: do we have the right to ask the "other" – the "foreigner" to understand us, to

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 15.*
[4] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 15.*
[5] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 15.*
[6] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 15.*
[7] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 15.*
[8] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line. Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002*, (New York: Random House, 2002), 408.

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skillfully practice our language "in all the senses of this term[9]" and with all the extensions that it requires? All these sets of requests are to be achieved before we are able and "so as to be able" to welcome the "foreigner" into our country?

But what if he/she already controls our language are the questions above still available? Would the "foreigner" still be a "foreigner" and could we apply, on equal terms the norms of the same Law that contains the asylum, or the hospitality?

Socrates turned the situation in his favor as he asked his fellow citizens, the Athenian judges to "treat him like a foreigner for whom marks of respect can be demanded". He describes himself as being a "simply, absolutely, completely" foreigner, meaning that he was "simply, without artifice, without *techne*, very close to *a technos*, with a short "*o*", which does mean, precisely, inexperienced, without technique, inept, without savoir-faire[10]". He based his argument on the fact that if he was taken into consideration as a "foreigner" people would naturally excuse him when he spoke in the accent or dialect that is external of the Law. Thus we understand that at Athens, the foreigner had some rights. "He saw he had a recognized right of access to the courts. There is thus a foreigners' right, a right of hospitality for foreigners at Athens"[11].

For Derrida, the conception of hospitality represents an additional instance of his attention to the human and the relationships that are created between them, with regards to the concepts of "giving" and "receiving":

"I must not even be prepared to receive the person, for there to be genuine hospitality: not only to have no prior notice of the arrival but no prior definition of the newcomer, and no way of asking, as is done at a border, "Name? Nationality? Place of origin? Purpose of visit? Will you be working here?" . . . Hospitality is not merely receiving that which we are able to receive[12]"

From this perspective, between the obligation to welcome an unknown and potentially hostile stranger, in a situation where the person offering hospitality can offer it because, as a host, owns the place to which the stranger is invited to enter, and the fact that the gift (of hospitality) is intrinsically conditional and limited as the person can be given limited access to use the space or to be obliged to leave this "foreign" environment as soon as the host rethinks his/her position. Thus, the "host" becomes the "guardian" of his/her space and he/she has the right to command upon it.

From this perspective, Rushdie accentuates in "Step Across this Line" that:

In all quests the voyager is confronted by terrifying guardians of territory, an ogre here, a dragon there. So far and no further, the guardian commands. But the voyager must refuse the other's definition of the boundary, must transgress against the limits of what fear prescribes. He steps across that line. The defeat of the ogre is an opening in the self, an increase in what it is possible for the voyager to be. […]The journey creates us. The frontier is an elusive line, visible and invisible, physical and metaphorical, amoral and moral[13].

Still, in the case of the "host" the space provided to the "guest" is clearly delimited; the "foreigner" must pass a threshold, a door, and a barrier that is both visible and physical.

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 15.*
[10] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 19.*
[11] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 19.*
[12] Jacques Derrida, *A Certain Impossibility of Possibly Saying the Event,* in Chicago Journals, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter 2007), The University Chicago Press, 451 http://www.scribd.com/doc/97952959/Derrida-a-Certain-ImpossiblePossibility-of-Saying-the-Event

[13] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line. Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002,* (New York: Random House, 2002), 411.

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As Derrida accentuates, "from the outset, the right to hospitality commits a household, a line of descent, a family, a familial or ethnic group receiving a familial or ethnic group[14]".

Moreover, in the case of an absolute "hospitality" the "host" must open up his/her home, giving it not only to him/her but to the unknown, "anonymous other". A rule imposed by this situation is that the "host" does not ask of the "other" reciprocity, meaning that they enter into a pact. That is the "hospitality by right". Still, "hospitality breaks with hospitality by right", thus we understand that "the law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the "pact" of hospitality[15]"

Referring to Kant's "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch", Derrida continues his argumentation highlighting that if the "foreigner" is to be received by the "host" in his/her space, the latter has the right of at least ask the name of the "foreigner", in order to guarantee his/her identity as one would act as witness in a court of law.

This is someone to whom you put a question and address a demand, the first demand, the minimal demand being: "What is your name?" or then "In telling me what your name is, in responding to this request, you are responding on your own behalf, you are responsible before the law and before your hosts, you are a subject in law.[16]"

Once the "host" has a reasonable amount of information about his/her "guest" a relationship can be established between the two.

In "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality", Kant accentuates that "hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another". As long as the "guest" occupies peacefully the given space, one may not treat him with hostility. This right is available only for a limited amount of time, a "temporary sojourn" that may accompany an inhabitant another right to associate, which "all men have"[17].

The concept of "hospitality" presupposes a delimitation of thresholds or frontiers, between spaces, places, countries, familiar and non – familiar, foreign and non – foreign, private and public, private and public law, the public or political space and the individual or familial home. Derrida brings the attention on the limitations or delimitations of the State, as the public authority, the public power to control, monitor, "ban exchanges that those doing the exchanging deem private, but that the State can intercept since these private exchanges cross public space and become available there, then every element of hospitality gets disrupted"[18]. Along with the development of the technology, the communication technologies (e-mail, fax, telephone) these techno-scientific possibilities threaten the interiority of the home ("we are no longer at home!")[19].

In order to maintain the position of "power" or "control", the law rearranges itself, there are new legal texts along with new police ambitions attempting to adapt to the changes related to communication or information, thus, creating new spaces of "hospitality[20]"

For the law, the "guest" is a "foreigner", and he must remain a "foreigner". The concept of "hospitality" remains, in this case, like a law, conditional and conditioned "in its

[14] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 23.*
[15] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 25.*
[16] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 27.*
[17] Immanuel Kant, "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality" in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch, 1795.*
http://www.constitution.org/kant/perpeace.htm
[18] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 50.*
[19] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 52.*
[20] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 57.*

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dependence on the unconditionality that is the basis of the law[21]". Thus, people are kept in, inside the law, dependable on the law, having the right to act as "hosts" on limited grounds.

There is always a threshold that must be passed, a territory that has a "host", and a "foreigner" that needs to enjoy the right of "hospitality" or at least, only to transit the territory. In an age of mass migration, globalization, connectivity at all levels this concept shifts its parameters becoming a subjective, legal, protective or human term.

Time, perhaps, to propose a new thesis of the post-frontier: to assert that the emergence, in the age of mass migration, mass displacement, globalized finances and industries, of this new, permeable post-frontier is the distinguishing feature of our times […]. For all their permeability, the borders snaking across the world have never been of greater importance. This is the dance of history in our age: slow, slow, quick, quick, back and forth and from side to side, we step across these fixed and shifting lines[22].

The only realistic conclusion is that "hospitality" is dependable on time, power, and in between commas and borders. The "step" is made for passing over a threshold, a border that separates the exterior world from the familiar one. The moment when hospitality becomes conditioned, thus it develops into a conscious action limited by laws, restricted by customs, it alters itself into an impossibility.

We do not know what hospitality is [Nous ne savons pas ce que c'est que l'hospitalité] .

Not yet. Not yet, but will we ever know? Is it a question of knowledge and of time?[23]

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[21] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality, 73.*

[22] Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line. Collected Non-fiction 1992-2002*, (New York: Random House, 2002),427.

[23] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality", trad. de Barry Stocker, Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki - Journal of the Thoretical Humanities*, 5: 3 (December 2000), 6.

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