Reflections

Welcoming the masses, entitling the stranger – commentary to Gill

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Identity politics create distinctions, narratives and shared conceptions, and where distinctions can be made, differences arise. Contemporary states, organisations, companies and communities have procedures to level out these social boundaries, but the process of hospitality and welcome is at times more problematic than exclusion. The key question concerns the universality of welcome. If our welcome is extended to the masses, is the mass itself defined and delimited and, second, how does a general welcome condition everyday encounters with the (entitled) stranger. In this reflection, we concentrate on the concept of welcome on two different levels. The mass and interpersonal encounters and argue that whether refugees, migrants or tourists the spatiality of the welcome needs to be considered from both individual and collective viewpoints.

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Introduction

In a world where the possibility to connect is omnipresent, the concept of welcome has become both topical and political. The masses of tourists, migrants and refugees constitute a continual flow of movement or a gust of displacement. Much too often mobility scholars concentrate on the mobile agent and the ways mobility transforms and gives meaning to space, without considering how welcome is addressed, organised and felt (see Molz & Gibson 2007). This overlook partly relates to the Christian ethos on which much of European norms and values have been founded (Valéry 1962 [1926]), where welcoming the stranger is a virtue since one never knows the true benefits of welcoming. Such welcome is directed to the individual and not the masses of people. Whether people have been forced to leave their home or they are seeking safer and more stable living conditions, welcoming the masses hits a different register than the individual welcome.

Nick Gill (2018) essays to connect hospitality and refugees with welcome at the state and interpersonal level. This approach is more than welcomed. Beyond the welcome of the stranger, the question of who is the community behind the welcome is very critical. In public spaces, after the moment of arrival, the newcomers meet a mass of people they might profile as nationals of the country to which they arrived. Gill paints a picture of a visibly positive receiving community ready to associate itself with the label #RefugeesWelcome. Yet, understanding the fears, concerns,

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misconceptions and ideologies of those not welcoming or not issuing their welcome is just as important to understand and conceptualize. Sometimes the welcome is not only directed to the displaced, hopeful and often traumatised refugees but also as a statement against non-welcome. There are merits in analysing the state policies that concern refugees, but seeing the receiving community as a singular mass sharing the same charity unnecessarily writes of sectarianism in civil society. A useful conceptualisation in understanding how the welcome becomes normalised in everyday life could be to think how the stranger entitles oneself to the new space, how the welcome, in its emotional or superficial guises, influences on how the stranger is capable of forging attachment and connections the new social space. In this, we think through the stranger as part of a mass in tourism and migration.

The shades of welcoming in tourism

Welcome is a self-conscious term. It can be a compliment, a gesture and an invitation at the same time. A term that can be more uplifting than up-anchoring, since it organises space as an emotional discourse more definitely than as an impetus for movement. The tourism industry mediates a generic welcome, one that is normalised within the confines of the resort or hotel, where the local life does not have a lasting interpersonal connection with a tourist. Yet, for the receptionist or worker, encounters with the client and the other way around usually have a personal element (see Vainikka V 2015; Lynch 2017). Such meetings with the stranger, although fleeting and superfluous, can be essential for the traveller's sense of certainty and security. The magnitude of the tourism phenomenon engenders tourism spaces that are filled with strangers making only fleeting appearances, who nevertheless are touched by emotions from awe to anxiety, but who in general are unable to settle among the locals. The tourist is, like Patrick Modiano (1982) writes, a person from the beach, whose footsteps are washed away with the next tide. The tourist leaves no permanent mark to the location but is a rather changeable element within the place.

Welcoming the masses can be associated with success and as an indicator of the "cosmopolitan" character of the city. It can also convey struggles in tourism and recreation. In many European locations – from Barcelona to Helsinki or from St. Ives to Lapland – masses of travellers in the peak seasons transform the place. To describe this sporadic crowdedness that surpasses previous ideas of mass, journalists, practitioners and scholars have used the term "over-tourism" that underlines tourism that has grown so large that it induces feelings and expressions of "tourismophobia" among the local community (Milani *et al.* 2017). Torres (2016), columnist of Politico, even notices that Barcelona seems to have declared a 'war on tourists'. Mass demonstrations against tourism have taken place, and even attacks on tourist buses have been reported in Barcelona. The welcome in tourism is often selective. Planners, businesses and other local stakeholders wish to define what kinds of tourists they want to attract: luxury tourists, special interest tourists or the undifferentiated 'mass'. The mass has often been used as a term of magnitude characterising problems and challenges in tourism, while it could be discussed in a more analytically and diverse way (Vainikka V 2015; Butcher 2017).

In addition to the formal tourism sector, mass tourism has diversified from the conventional tour operators and package tourists to include internet booking websites, low-cost carriers and Airbnb accommodation. Mass tourism ranges from visiting friends and relatives to business tourism to several special interest tourists. These developments have expanded the tourism pressure to residential areas (Gutiérrez *et al.* 2017). With Airbnb and other developments, travel and tourism have penetrated and disturbed the spaces of everyday even more than the "on the beaten track" tourism.

Sights and tourist attractions have become more mundane. The act of gathering generic photos from top sights has given way to the quest for authentic, more personalised experiences, memories and souvenirs. Tourists today are more and more *entitling* (Vainikka J 2012, 2015a) themselves to the local lifestyle and adopting and virtually claiming the locality as part of their identity. Travelling in the time of social media has generated a need to be like a local and the requirement to empathise with the place to know the local lifestyle. The neighbours in apartment buildings and local neighbourhoods have become part of the welcome, whether they like it or not. The scale of the change in tourism has

resulted in distortions in the real estate market as the local residents may have a hard time renting affordable housing. Within this scheme, the more or less continuous, unpredictable crowds, that are seen and felt as congestion all translate the problem of non-fixed, shifting communities where trust has to be reforged ceaselessly.

These changes have spawned discussions of new collaborative ways of developing tourism, where peer-to-peer practices reframe the tourist welcome (Dredge 2017). In this discussion, interest is directed to an alternative, that is creative, embodied and ethical, with arrangements of social life and hospitality that address and overcome "disruptive tourism and its untidy guests" (Veijola *et al.* 2014).

Welcome sometimes means that one needs to step out of one's comfort zone and challenge the sense of Self for the sake of the other. Höckert (2015) studied ethics of hospitality in the context of development studies and community-based tourism and discovered that often the helper enters assuming the welcome of the participating locals: because I am the helper I am welcome (see also Griffiths 2017). Voluntary tourism in this sense seems like a sort of heroism, not necessarily because of helping others but because it romanticises keeping a stringent budget while bootstrapping in a new environment. This, in turn, restricts the benefits from the community and underlines asymmetrical relationships. Voluntary tourism is part of the movement that regards cheap travel as a status symbol where the individualistic traveller identity is separated from mass tourism. The epistemological question of how do we separate ourselves from the masses does not itself merit to forget mass behaviour since everyone is more or less part of it.

It is easy to think the masses of tourists or masses of refugees as a categorical horde by their numbers or as a group of strangers that form their own community that is disturbingly separate from the welcoming hosts (Veijola *et al.* 2014; Vainikka V 2015). Large numbers of people mean the impossibility of knowing all of them well. As much as a nation can be imagined or categorised as a community, the mass as well can be a grouping defined by the status of the movement. Such status can be very superficial or serious, but the impetus for movement draws from the splendour, excitement, secureness or safety that the origin does not provide. The mass in itself is not a bad thing or concept rather it is very complex indeed (Vainikka V 2015) but to see one's position in the larger picture, requires self-critical analysis and stepping outside ones "comfort zone".

The antipodes of welcome when confronting masses

The point we would like to make is that welcome has a mass quality. Welcoming the stranger aims to change the status of the stranger into someone known (see Koefoed & Simonssen 2012) in a situation where the hosts are more powerful than the stranger. Even though this power asymmetry is not a conscious choice, the hosts hold pedagogical and symbolic power of what in the local is perceived natural. The extent to which this asymmetry can be bend tests territorial power structures. Welcoming the masses entails a change in the social structure of the hosts especially when the welcome becomes integration. It is always easier to recognise one stranger than a mass.

In Finland, welcoming the masses cannot be discussed without taking note of the displaced populations after the Second World War. The massive relocation operation that involved 420,000 people from mainly Karelia, but also Lapland and the outer islands in the Gulf of Finland meant that 11% of the population was integrated to the rest of the nation. While this relocation is often told as a national survival story, with suppressed emotional longing, it is also a story of welcomed and unwelcomed experiences (Hyytiäinen 2005; Kuusisto-Arponen 2009). In this case, welcome would not have been possible without strong government guidance, and one could argue that the relocation process paved the way for the Finnish welfare state (cf. Kettunen 2001) as the negotiation of old cultural boundaries at the local level administration spawned new ways of political practice.

If the war itself is one of the landmarks of the discourse of Finnish unity, the relocation of Karelians should be the point when the cultural cleavages within Finns were stitched up. Nevertheless, the relocated people did not always fit in the local social sphere. Cultural and at times religious differences catered suspicions for decades. The experience of welcoming and living with masses of people who represent the internal other (Johnson & Coleman 2012) or people who bring the antecedent otherness (Vainikka J 2015b) to their doorsteps was not easily reconciled.

For many, the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 provoked the difficulties of the late 1940s and their legacies. Some argued that Finns as a nation have dealt with masses of people without homes before, others claimed that the relocation concerned Finns and pleaded that Finland as a peripheral country should not extend their welcome. The public discussion quickly turned into a debate between the acknowledgement of human rights, humanitarian aid and international commitments and the imaginary of a small nation unable to house massive amounts of refugees, fear of being overwhelmed and sheer racism. Suddenly the media created a bipolar juxtaposition between the tolerant and nationalist bigots that are separated by what columnist Paretskoi (2016) termed *'tolkun ihmiset'* (people of reason). Paretskoi's column was unexpectedly picked up by President Niinistö (2016), who a week later from the column noted in his speech of the opening of Parliament that the uncontrolled immigration is talked about by people who in their heated discussion verbally abused and slurred their imagined antipodes. In his speech, Niinistö also noted that:

> "Migration is a serious problem. Europe, Finland, the western way of thinking and our values have all been challenged by it. This is a stark transformation; just a few years ago we were exporting our values and regarded them as unquestionable, now we are having to consider whether even we ourselves can preserve them."

This passage highlights the effect a mass can have to the welcoming host but also the fact that the society tends to swiftly move in the direction where the bigger threat is canvassed. What Niinistö's speech underscores is that Finnish politics has traditionally been more realistic than idealistic, where the capacity to cope gives way to values. When politics is swayed this way – be it by geopolitical, ecological, economic, social or nationalistic threats – it subsumes the threat in the political agenda before the threat turns into a movement beyond political control. Since autumn 2015, the legal instruments and management practices concerning immigration were accustomed to the increased number of refugees (Ministry of Interior 2017). For example, some countries like Iraq were perceived safer than they actually were. The legislation was changed to address the residence requirement. Family reunification criteria's were reviewed to consider the income levels. Humanitarian grounds were annulled as an argument for residence permits. The handling for asylum appeals was decentralised. Legal aid was restricted to public service providers. In addition, the share of negative asylum decisions increased considerably. These elements have been in stark contrast with humanitarian values and were underlined as exceptional measures in a time crisis, but have, with the clean-up of much social media commenting, prevented further and wider cleavages in the society.

At the same time, legislative changes were made to smooth the migration of talent from the rest of the European Union. These legislative changes were an attempt to manage the masses of refugees and control migration. The changes in migration policies challenged drastically from universal ideas of humanitarian aid and the welcome of the stranger. Migration policies have become more and more selective and driven by economic reasoning. One could argue in line with Mountz and Hiemstra (2014) that structures of crises and chaos were organised into exceptional moments for ideological and geopolitical reasoning, but the government action prevented the nationalist movement to gather too much force that could endanger the political process. At the same time, such policies lined in with fears and anxieties brought by economic recession and terrorism.

The suppressing political action underlined the role of third-sector organisations. The discrepancies between cold government policies and compassionate organisations as Nick Gill (2018) illustrates makes it seem that the welcome of the host is moving with two different carriages. The receiving communities responded to mass migration with help and welcome, volunteering, accommodating asylum seekers in their homes and donating clothes and other essentials. Most donated without ever meeting the refugees, some feared disapproval of the negative factions of society. The polarised public discussion prompted some to devote their time for the welcome. Indeed, as Gill (2018, 93) states "Welcoming refugees necessitates certain aptitudes and resources". For many, it is not only confronting traumatized migrants that become a mental obstacle, but the crossing of the everyday comfort zone to encounter the stranger. For many, civil organisations themselves are communities of their own, and not necessarily felt easily approachable, although

that is what they aim to be. Within this moment of exception, the pressure to help must have made many those not previously part of the activity, take their step forward. We feel that equally important discussion, in a longer run, would be how the welcome could be acted within the diverse contextual positions of individuals. Not only organized help but also everyday encounters in public space matter.

The faction that opposes irregular, or in many cases any kind of immigration felt threatened by the large numbers and were at times openly hostile towards reception centres, their workers, civic organisations and the concept of welcome in general. They quickly labelled civic organisations and those promoting liberal sentiments as '*suvakit*' (the tolerant in a derogatory form). In the faceless social media sphere, this label could be attached to anyone who held on to the humanist values unquestioned before 2015. For the antagonists of migration, these values had turned naïve, innocent and hampering solutions (Kaján 2017). At the same time, mainstream media got questioned for drawing even a neutral picture of refugees or migration, and conspiracy theories about hiding the real costs of migration flew wild. The freedom to connect and share opinions created a crisis of media and expertise.

This social turmoil is the kind of breeding ground that gives room for openly racist extremist movements to turn visible. The 'patrolling' groups only generated unrest among the public. For example, a recent study shows that extremist movements caused mainly feelings of worry, fear and distress among local communities of border towns Tornio and Lappeenranta (Prokkola *et al.* 2017). The threat the extremist movements underlined was of their own making, not the one they canvassed to the social fabric.

Escaping fear generated fear elsewhere. The refugees struggled for a voice, but this voice was transmuted and distorted into a fear of a mass of strangers that strengthened the need to address welcome for those holding on to their humanist values. We must recognise that within the society, everyone will not connect easily to strangers. Nevertheless, entitling the stranger with safety, a place to call home, new spatial identity and means for pursuing happiness does not remove these values and feelings from anyone else. We need to investigate what and what kind of circumstances contribute to people feeling threatening by immigration or to a feeling that people are not heard. In this, we should go beyond the saintsimonian structural explanation of an idle class or those socially marginalised since distrust does not turn into trust and welcome simply with a paycheck.

Polarized discussion causes fear as pro- and anti-immigration debate easily pushes the other further just to make room for their own argument (see Puustinen *et al.* 2017). This quarrel and throwing stigmatised labels only diverts the core issues from the debate. In the heat of it all, the root causes for social malaise and the universality of human rights were sidelined. Using terms like refugee crisis, chaos in Europe or communities on alert gives too much latitude to the economisation of our values (Crawley & Skleparis 2018) and seeing people as cost items instead of turning the discursive welcome into interpersonal co-being.

Short discussion

We have discussed welcoming in two contexts: tourism and irregular immigration. The welcome and hospitality are essential dimensions of human relations and include various asymmetrical positionalities, historical legacies, spaces and politics. Welcoming the masses is not a straightforward issue, and requires attention from researchers, politicians, journalists, civic organisations and ordinary citizens. Being one of the many and experiencing the shades of welcome of the hosting mass are critical to understanding how the interpersonal encounters are conditioned. Sometimes the stranger needs only one good connection to become part of the greater mass. All this expresses that the mass should be not used in a taken-for-granted manner. In addition, the ability to host, who is permitted to be a guest, how to host the Other and how the host's Self is defined (Molz & Gibson 2007, inspired by Kant 1996 [1795]) are central aspects to consider in contexts of hospitality and welcome (see also Rapport 2012). At its best, welcoming makes visible the togetherness between strangers in a day-to-day basis and works to entitle the stranger as equal.

Acknowledgements

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