

## Reflections

# From welcome to well ... come: the mobilities, temporalities and geopolitics of contemporary hospitality – commentary to Gill

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In this reflection, I take Nick Gill's contribution to this issue on the politics of hospitality and welcome as a point of departure to address three specific concerns, framed by the context of contemporary global mobility. First, I argue that various aspects of the recent so-called European migration crisis enable us to further question some of the long-fixed categories through which mobile actors are often classified. Second, I speak to the critical nature of temporality as a governing factor not just in how states manage mobile peoples, but in how people imagine, understand and experience individual and group processes of welcome. Finally, I suggest that just as geopolitical discourse plays a clear role in how migration is understood and experienced, so too are geopolitics deeply embedded in the encounters, practices and regimes of hospitality across tourism.

Keywords: mobility, tourism, migration, borders, time, hospitality

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## Introduction

"How long should, can and may a guest stay?" (Simon 2016, 167)

Over a few weeks in 1995, one particularly snarky billboard ad began cropping up all over downtown New York City. "Welcome to New York. Now Get Out," the advertisement proclaimed proudly. Coined by the weekly entertainment listings magazine *Time Out New York*, the publication had co-opted a phrasal verb's double entendre, leveraging that famously obnoxious New York attitude to sell copies. The sense of the ad was that if you'd managed to make it all the way to the Big Apple, congratulations and well done and all that, but it's really time to leave your hotel room and start seeing the city. However, the brusque tagline long stuck in my mind for another reason.

The demographic of *Time Out's* readership comprises both locals and tourists – people settled somewhere and people passing through. Indeed, New York has been one of the world's great destinations, today largely for tourists and a hundred years ago for impoverished migrants from Europe. Between 1892 until 1954, the city's Ellis Island was the United States' busiest immigrant inspection station and a gateway for more than 12 million immigrants. Then a nascent, burgeoning cosmopolis, New York readily took in Europe's tired, poor, huddled masses, processed and documented them, and then sent them off to settle their new American lives, often somewhere else. Albeit

unintentionally, the *Time Out New York* ad campaign served as a subtle reminder that this school-of-hard-knocks city had long opened its arms to welcome anyone and everyone – so long as they didn't all think to stick around.

I raise the example of Ellis Island here because it has become a core symbol in the mythologised, multicoloured narrative of US immigration history, having served both as a space of governance for refugee arrivals and, latterly, as a tourist attraction to celebrate them. The island now holds a hi-tech, interactive museum that teaches (tourists, primarily) about the role played by immigrants in the development of the US as a global power – and as a one-time beacon for the once-vaunted tenets of freedom, tolerance and truth.

Nick Gill's (2018) considered examination of the challenges of European welcoming is a much-needed and timely contribution to research on contemporary social exchange, human mobility and their constitutive tensions, and his work raises a number of compelling questions facing contemporary global society. In this reflection, I address three related issues which Gill speaks to in his writing. First, I argue that several aspects of global mobility (and the 2015–2016 European migration 'crisis' in particular) call into question some of the long-fixed categories through which mobile actors have long been classified. Second, I point out the critical nature of temporality as a governing factor not just in how states manage mobile peoples, but in how people imagine, understand and experience structures of welcome and hospitality. Finally, I demonstrate how, just as geopolitical discourse plays a clear role in how migration is understood, experienced and regulated, so too are geopolitics deeply embedded in the encounters, practices and regimes of hospitality across tourism.

### **Mobility's mobile and immobile categories**

For many, the defining images of 2015 were those indelible, interminable landscapes of human railways: thousands of people aboard rafts, trains, buses or just barefoot, one alongside the other, braving the elements and the odds in search of freedom and safety. The media spectacle presented them camped out in Budapest's central train station, squeezed into train carriages bound for Vienna, hoofing it alongside the autobahn outside Munich, hopping the Eurostar tracks in Calais, or clinging to overfilled boats forging across the ferocious, hungry Mediterranean. These migrants, many of them young people with families who had escaped war and death at home, endured thousands of kilometres of uncertainty in the hopes of landing somewhere that would welcome them.

An Amnesty International global survey from 2016, Gill (2018) observes, produced an at once heartening and concerning statistic: two thirds of respondents stated they believed their governments should be doing more to help the plight of refugees. Indeed, even despite the marked rise of European populist and conservative discourse over the past several years, open displays of hospitality were readily visible throughout the crisis. Thousands of citizens across numerous European cities came out to welcome these huddled masses with red carpets, bright bunting, fresh flowers, bear-hug embraces, children's toys and homemade meals. Some even travelled elsewhere to bring their hospitality right up to where the refugees were landing on the continent's shores. Gill (2018) notes the solidarity of tourists to the Mediterranean's many isles, who took detours on planned holidays of sea, sun, sand and sex to welcome the new arrivals with whom they shared the warm beaches. There, they offered charity and assistance in the form of money, gifts and their own labour, distributing food, shuttling people around in their cars and brandishing a welcoming smile at the bow end of a tattered life raft. Not everyone celebrated the arrivals with open arms, however, and the ensuing debate raised very real questions about where all these newcomers were going to live, and how Europe was going to house them (Reig & Norum in press).

The contradictions of contemporary mobility were exemplified by these juxtaposed scenes of leisure and despair across a number of such shared public spaces (Orsini 2015). One stony, 30 km<sup>2</sup> outcrop that lies roughly 100 km east of Tunisia and 300 km north of Libya, the island of Lampedusa is home to 5,000 year-round residents who live largely off tourism and a withering fishing industry. Like the Turkish beach on which drowned toddler Alan Sardi was found, Lampedusa is one of many revitalised tourist spaces, which have used the dollars of Western visitors to prop up economies ravaged by changes in European fishing policy and the advent of new trends in tourism (Mostafanezhad

& Norum in press). The enduring hospitality of Lampedusa's community has been challenged over the past several decades by the island's need to reinvent itself economically and politically: first as fishing harbour, then as tourist heaven, and more recently as refugee haven for migrants trying to reach Europe by sea. When in 2015 and 2016 the island's tourists, residents and humanitarian workers came together to welcome and assist its refugees, the tweeted and instagrammed images of tanned tourists alongside olive migrants become a new type of souvenir bearing a new type of cultural capital. Such images contest the banality of the beach vacation trip, infusing the ordering of tourism (Franklin 2004) with new modes of authenticity (Melotti 2017). The point here is not to conflate the harsh realities of many refugee experiences with the privileged positionalities of leisure tourists, but to recognise that the spaces and spatialities of such groups can today often overlap in new forms of encounter.

The links between tourism and migration here are pertinent, and not uncoincidental. Scholars in recent years have written about the continuum of mobility that encompasses, and can often complicate, multiple forms of movement (Nagy & Korpela 2013), from the most hedonistic of tourist desires (Norum 2006) to human trafficking and so-called irregular movement (De Genova 2013). In their struggle to strike a balance between local identity and external and global pressures, the diverse communities such as those on Lampedusa become "laboratories" for encounters between new selves and new others just as the thresholds of possible hospitable interaction become spaces for realising the moral dramas of welcome (Barnett 2005; Melotti *et al.* 2017). If there is a liquid nature to contemporary society, as Bauman (2000) suggests, it is helping to redraw lines between and spaces around these figures and their movements, enabling encounter, encouraging exchange and challenging categorisations. Thinking critically about hospitality encourages a reassessment of the "proximities" that engender and surround moments of welcome and of the estrangements that occur when selves are shifted from one place and positionality to another (Dikeç *et al.* 2009).

### Timely guests

Scholarship on notions of hospitality and welcome has emerged in recent years largely alongside identity politics debates that seek to understand belonging, inequality and cosmopolitanism in postcolonial, multicultural societies (Candea & Da Col 2012). Though social scientists have long been interested in the social processes of exchange that constitute relationships of hospitality (see e.g. Smith 1977; Mauss & Beauchat 1979 [1904–1905]; Morgan 2003 [1881]; Shryock 2004), it is new questions around contemporary encounter and neighbourliness between people from different social and cultural (e.g. ethnic or religious) affiliations that have highlighted the renewed importance of hospitality as an analytical concept (Laachir 2007; Saxer & Zhang 2017). But much work done on the welcoming and the welcomed reinforces facile, monoaural relationships among these groups to space and time. Traditional understandings of the trajectories and temporalities of migration have typically held a linear model: arrival to integration, visitor to resident, alien to citizen. Similarly, literature that foists a hospitality framework onto the mobile figure can frequently presume and reproduce firm, intransigent social categories in which, for example, migrants or tourists are seen to be mobile/dynamic while locals or hosts are framed as immobile/static (Molz & Gibson 2012).

Meanwhile, recent academic debates have brought to the fore the contemporary anxieties of time, considering in particular the social effects of societal and technological acceleration and atomization (Fuchs & Detmers 2017; Ssorin-Chaikov 2017). While Gill (2018) does not speak directly to temporality, he does allude to its role in the relationship of the guest to place. Indeed, the core existential anxiety of the guest is the question of time: How long? For the primary demarcating boundary of the space of the guest is that of time; as Simon (2016, 168) puts it, "the guest is only a guest when he neither leaves nor stays". Take, for example, the Gastarbeiter who may come for three years but stay for thirty. She is both legally and societally compelled to integrate into her new home and shake her guest-ness; and yet at the same time in most European contexts, she (and her progeny) may never be able to fully shed their guest identities. The paradox of the guest is that, once integrated, she is no longer a guest, since she would then become one of "us". Once accepted into the position of guest, she cannot be turned away; yet she must also remain a stranger, never to be integrated (Simon 2016).

The processes involved in global migration vary in duration and complexity, as boundaries between permanent and temporary mobility become more and more porous and contingent (Robertson 2014). Moreover, migration today is far from a temporally linear process, and studying its trajectories according to a spatially simplistic structure fails to capture the multiple and varied movements which comprise migration. Its complex nature betrays multiple and variegated times, rhythms and tempos, involving diversion, repetition, simultaneity and open-endedness (Griffiths *et al.* 2013). Investigating experiences and regimes of time and these attendant components reveals the uneven mobilities present in the hospitality encounter, since mobile practice, discourse and imagination are mediated by multiple, diverse temporalities, shaping the social experience of place (Norum & Mostafanezhad 2016). Through a consideration of the temporal, one better appreciates the boundary-blurring between categories of mobility such as temporary/permanent, legal/illegal, skilled/unskilled and sojourner/settler. Moreover, framed against the spatial dis- and relocation implicit in various forms of human movement, reflecting on hospitality's multiple temporalities compels us to attend to "the possibility of encounters with others that do not simply only occur in time or space, but are themselves generative of new times and spaces" (Dikeç *et al.* 2009, 1). Through the circulations of diverse temporal regimes, we can destabilise binary categories, enabling us to think anew about "the way such unevenness is reproduced through discourses of hospitality that determine which strangers are (or are not) invited and welcome" (Molz & Gibson 2012, 8). A temporalities of hospitality thus allows us to consider the profound tensions created by time, the multi-faceted assemblage of spatialities and relations articulated in and through mobility, and the complexities of the guest's desire for becoming *through* the moment of welcome (cf. Collins 2018).

### **Geopolitical hospitality, hospitable geopolitics**

Human mobility, encompassing the meanings embedded in various forms of movement, has long been a barometer of geopolitical action and imagination. But this goes far beyond commonly placed conceptualisations of a geopolitics of mobility that is bound primarily to migration politics and the trajectories of displaced migrants (or the state's attempts to track, control and contain them) (see Hyndman 2012). As the recent summer juxtapositions of migrants and tourists on hotspots such as Lesvos and Lampedusa show, tourism, too, becomes enrolled in geopolitical discourses, practices and imaginations. Tourism, in fact, has long been geopolitical, and mobilities of leisure have often had less than leisurely undertones. Some of the earliest forms of organized travel were articulations of imperial dominion, colonial sway, political interest and social positioning. The Romantic Age's Grand Tour, for example, was a bourgeois fashion that brought young members of the upper class from overcast, northern countries to soak up the sunny cultures of the south: first, Italy and Greece; later, Spain and Turkey. The practice was a mode of cultural exploitation and social class reaffirmation that has persisted well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century through economies such as the Gap Year or Volunteer Abroad programme, experiences of privilege that these days crop up on many an undergraduate student's CV.

Manifold tourism narratives and imaginaries can reveal disengagements from pressing, pertinent and increasingly omnipresent global geopolitical events and encounters, contributing to what Hannam (2017) has noted to be an "erasure of the geopolitical" across multiple tourism industry practices and relationships. Indeed, perhaps because political overtones are often swept under the surface of everyday tourist encounter, little work has been done to understand regimes of tourism as geopolitically fertile spaces, bringing the microgeographies of inter-state processes into plain view (see, however, Enloe 1989; Gonzalez 2013; Lisle 2016). Both historically and contemporarily, tourism has been predicated on multiple uneven power relationships, and as such, has propagated various politicized forms of social and cultural exploitation. But the complexity of both contemporary tourism and modern geopolitics often obscures the relationship between these two entities. As these links proliferate, globalization and the accelerated circulation of capital reflect various forms of control, from soft power to hard hegemony. The processes, practices and the pervasive imaginaries of tourism reflect and reproduce global, national and local forms of power and control. Through geopolitically

dictated regimes of practice, certain people and places are deemed desirable and profitable while others are kept far from the pass of the tourist's contactless debit card.

Tourism, as an industry and an assemblage of socio-cultural practices, is capable of at once constituting and reflecting geopolitical discourse, while also spatializing international politics and mediating tourists' affective experience of and in place. These linkages are perhaps most evident in phenomena that juxtapose varying forms of mobile practice and varying types of political subjects. For example, as Sheller (2016) considers in her analysis of Chinese artist-activist Ai Weiwei's Refugee Project, the sights of migrant deaths such as tourist beaches become easily re-mediated as sites for reassembling the social through making a portable public sphere. As Mediterranean islands are turned into "places of detention, containment and deportation" (Gill 2018, 90), the authenticity of human mortality supersedes any bottled or packaged tourist authenticity. In such encounters, the leisurely spaces of the beach, produced by various intermingling desires, have become liminal spaces in extremis – landscapes where the sensuous hedonism of life co-exists alongside the darkness of senseless death. Though the geopolitical implications of such phenomena may be vast and far reaching, understanding their constituent social elements can in fact be quite simple to grasp. As the artist summed up in a recent Guardian opinion piece, "The refugee crisis isn't about refugees. It's about us" (Weiwei 2018).

### **Conclusion: the hospitality industry**

As a social process predicated on unequal relationships of value, the welcome embeds social transactions in both material and immaterial exchanges. It speaks to notions of identity, alterity, belonging; sovereignty, politics, and inequality. It is comprised both of negotiations of reciprocity and multiple inherent tensions: tolerance/xenophobia; generosity/parasitism; friendship/enmity; spontaneity/calculation (Candea & Da Col 2012). Importantly, for researchers, hospitality raises complex questions relating to economy, sociality and time. With respect to Derrida, Levinas and their acolytes, hospitality is all too often taken at face value and accepted critically. To many working in tourism, for instance, hospitality refers first to an industry, and then to a human sentiment. While hospitality seems a universal category, particular contexts will show its particularly problematic textures. In this reflection, I have outlined several ways in which considerations of hospitality can contribute to contemporary debates on mobility, time and the political. I have aimed to use Gill's (2018) work to show that different kinds of mobile people may be confronted with the different faces of the polyhedron of hospitality, from open arms and hot soup to conditional acceptance or a gesture showing one the door.

A few years ago, I visited a museum exhibition while travelling up North. Entitled "Come to Finland," it showcased a collection of evocative vintage marketing posters and brochures that sold Finland as an inviting travel destination during the golden age of European travel. The lithographs, rife with nostalgic tropes of tourist adventure and romance, depicted simple scenes of untrammelled landscapes of forests and lakes, inviting an adventurous Euro-American public to experience the wonder of North. Through simply designed imagery and alluring bygone slogans (e.g. "It's off to Finland for winter sport!"), the posters flaunted Finnish society as progressive, international and open. Open, that is, to the visiting guest.

One of the earliest of these travel posters was designed in 1893 by national romantic Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela: an impressionistic representation of the eastern Finnish town of Imatra, superimposed with a map of the surrounding area labelled in both French and Russian. At the time, Finland existed under the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, and tens of thousands of Russians – soldiers, merchants, civil servants and even tourists – lived in the country, some as permanent residents, some temporarily. Today, the country has comparatively little foreign immigration; as of 2016, there were 364,787 people with non-Finnish backgrounds residing in Finland, comprising under 7% of the population (Statistics Finland 2017) and a markedly lower percentage than in neighboring Norway and Sweden.<sup>1</sup>

As a temporary migrant myself to the Nordic countries on several occasions over the past two decades, I have found myself incredibly welcomed by nearly everyone – that is, until the odd person



learns that I am due to stay for more than a few days. Then come the quizzical looks, the questions, the hesitation and disquiet over how to process and frame me and my intentions. In today's hospitality, in many places, an initial warm welcome extended from host to guest can become mollified and mitigated as a lukewarm exhortation to, well ... come – so long as the guest remembers that, at some point, it might behoove him to get out.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The figure here refers to a person either born abroad or born in Finland to two parents who themselves had both been born abroad. For comparison, the figure for 2017 in Norway was 17.3% of the population (Statistics Norway 2018) and in Sweden 24.1% (Statistics Sweden 2018).

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