



Centre for Ethnicity & Racism Studies

Reviewing the concept of hospitality in a contemporary world

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Introduction

Doubtless, hospitality has been widely studied over the last decades from diverse perspectives. As Lynch et al (2011) put it, the specialized literature has developed two clear waves of investigation. While some scholars see in hospitality a type of mechanism of control, others focus on its gift-exchange basis. Far from being resolved, this discussion leads to question the roots of hospitality in our contemporary society. Although, Jacques Derrida played a crucial role expanding the philosophical understanding of the issue, even in the Anglo-World, he paid little attention to politics in the configuration of “Otherness”. This essay review focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of Derrida from the lens of a promising Latin American philosopher, Ana Paula Penchaszadeh.

The success of nation-state was historically confined to its ability to monopolize the violence (Guidotti-Hernandez 2011). Modern philosophy attempted to decipher the code of “nation-hood” as inherently intertwined with a much elaborated ethnicity, homogenized and controlled according to the interests of elite (Skoll & Korstanje 2013). In this context, there is no much difference between Derrida and Nietzsche (in the reception of Latin Americans).

As the previous argument given, the legacy of Derrida as well as his critique to Western thought may be summarized in the three following relevant points

- Any process of ethno-genesis which is aimed to the sentiment of “us”, needs a counter-process of differentiation, an “outside” where the border determines who are in and out.
- Democracies, whatever the case may be, have their own limits and closures to “Others”.
- By means of “strangers”, nation-states develop the in-group rules.

One of the contributions of Derrida to this theme reminds us that at the time, we are in presence of Others, we are constituted as us. The “other” not only is disciplined, marked or regulated by host’s rules it reminds that tolerance is given by the law of masters. In this respect, Penchaszadeh distinguishes the guest from alien (stranger). Whereas the former signals to the gaze of state, the latter one defies the status-quo. As a result of this, the societal order demonizes aliens whenever they cannot be disciplined. Aliens represent a serious threat for politics, simply because they are beyond the hegemony of language. This begs a more than interesting question, is hospitality a subtle form of ethnocentrism or racial discrimination?, why hospitality and why now?.

The Urgency of Aliens

20 July of 2008 in Rome Italy, as picture on the introductory section showed, two corpses likely from two drowned Roma children lie down at the beach jointly a couple of tourists who were indifferently about what happened. What does this picture suggest?, are first-class citizens insensible to the Other`s suffering?.

Well, in the hyper mobile world of communication, instant experiences, hedonism and consuming life, two types of mobilities coexist. The global financial elite encourage travels to take distance from reality, embracing the belief that good citizens are legally allowed to be mobile. While thousand of vagabonds, migrants, refugees are condemned to starvation

and an imminent death. As a project, capitalism has consolidated generating serious asymmetries in the means of production, where few monopolizes the slavery of the whole (Virilio, 2012; Bauman, 2000; Tzanelli & Yar, 2009, Eagleton, 2011; Bianchi & Stephenson, 2014; Maccannell, 2011; Urry, 2007; Korstanje & Clayton, 2012). Paradoxically, though TV news are fraught of events characterized by “humanitarian disasters” of new-comers who do not find suitable welcome in the centre, nothing is done to change this radical situation. Undoubtedly, the problem of violence and hospitality seems to be inextricably intertwined.

This is the main reason why Ana Paula Penchaszadeh presents her book: *Politics and Hospitality*. In this project, she discusses not only the distance between guest and stranger but also the conceptual limitations of Derrida respecting to the influence of politics in the way the “Other” is imagined and subordinated to main Western matrix. Written in a polished way, this philosophical research is formed in six chapters, which range from the maussian theory of gifts towards the meaning of democracy. Since the act of giving hospitality is based on tolerance of the “Other”, which is marked as an alien, we must accept that there is something ethnocentric in the way the identity is forged. The first chapter (Hospitality and gift) explores the legacy of Mauss and his theory of gift to place hospitality into the fields of social bondage. She takes a public debate in the Argentinean Senate from 1894-1896, to show her thesis. In view of this document, it is clear how the same “Constitution”, which was originally issued to invite migrants to dwell the argentine soil, is gradually changed to a more restrictive forms of discipline. The needs of creation a nation-hood is associated to the governmental attempts to homogenize diverse ethnicities, groups, and new-comers arriving to Americas from 80s on. In this context, government appealed to language to accept (disciplining) aliens into the same nation. Those who resisted in speaking “our language” should be treated as “anarchists”, as “undesired guests”. The project of Enlightenment adopted by founding parents (in Argentina and other Latin American state as well) envisaged the aborigine as a threat which may place the civilized country in jeopardy. Rather, the second section discusses the limits imposed by sovereignty to understand the “otherness”. Within a certain territory, the legal jurisprudence

issued by state establishes a guiding-rule for classifying selfhood from otherness. For that reason, it is almost impossible to discuss modern hospitality ignoring the principle of sovereignty. Tracing the cue of Schmitt, Hobbes and Rousseau, the sacrificial meaning is sublimated to construct a much broader negotiated sense of security. From education (Rousseau), to fear (Hobbes), the radical Other is established to forge the own identity. The third chapter, to our end the best developed, refers to the deepness of death. Alluding to the metaphor of pregnancy, where the young mother who brings life, is uncertain respecting to the evolution of her embryo, hospitality regulates the tension between what is controllable and uncontrollable. The current conditions of democracy that today traces and jails thousand of migrants, simply because they are demonized as a threat for social order, is one of the topics widely developed in fourth and fifth chapters. Last but not least, the efficacy of international right to protect “refugees” or the role of international institutions to protect the future victims of genocides represents the epilogue of this trailblazing philosophical project.

In sharp contrast to current literature, Penchaszadeh argues convincingly that hospitality is determined by the combination of five items: language, gift-exchange, sovereignty, representation of death and democracy. Whether Derrida over-emphasized on the tolerance as the borderlands of hospitality, she understands that hospitality goes in the opposite direction than tolerance. Starting from the premise that the self is enrooted into a certain territory, citizens are constituted according to the figure of “Others”, who are not citizens but are tolerated. By exercising their power, nation-states allude to tolerance to encourage the gift-exchange system. In fact, Derrida made a radical critique to post-modern society and its principle of property, which undermines the possibilities for peoples to embrace the “unconditional hospitality”. This leads us to a second question, may hospitality be conceived beyond the politics?.

Likely, as Derrida, Penchaszadeh had an idealized image of democracy, and of course they will respond, yes. However, this seems to be a deep-seated issue which may be continued in next approaches.

Discussing the limits of democracy

The limitations of Derrida come from his idealized view of democracy. Since its grounds are inclusion and acceptance, Derrida adds, democracy (at some extent) may be equaled to hospitality. However, its effects on politics are paradoxical. On one hand, the nation-hood confers the belief of an exemplary centre to be naturalized in the course of time. This space of exception not only gives “identity” but introduces “uncertainty” to close the unconditional hospitality. The late-capitalism is tended to “create an oligarchy” within democracy, to monopolize the disciplinary mechanism of control over workforce. Although Derrida’s concern on capitalism are correct, why we say adamantly he developed a Romanized view of democracy?.

As C. Castoriadis noted, democracy has not been a Greek legacy, but from Athens. Over centuries democracy was practiced by Athenians in a way the rest of Greece resisted. After the Peloponnesus war, the real nature of democracy has gone for-ever. Unlike modern democracy (or as we have dubbed in earlier works), ancient Greeks understood if everyone has right to all, anyone has nothing. Although the authority of the King was never questioned, Ancient Greece developed a political resort (demos) for lay-citizens to convoke an assembly if a law was unjust. With the advent of modern industrial revolution not only the social ties are undermined, but a new way of interpreting democracy arises. This is the concept created by British Empire, which has dubbed by Korstanje as “Anglo-democracy”. In perspective, it paves the ways for a new configuration of power, where “self-determination” sets the pace to “republicanism”, or “voting”. As a result of this, Anglo-democracy instilled “the concept of freedom” as a platform to stimulate the consumption. The paradox lies in the fact this temporal freedom was not associated to the politic fields, since the lay-citizen is not legally empowered by derogating the law passed by Anglo-

democracy. The liberties given to peoples were inextricably intertwined to “desire” and “consumption”.

As the previous argument given, in the Anglo democracy, any subject governs through its representatives and through the constituent assembly. This creates a gap between citizenry and social institutions, which is filled by economic financial corporations. At the time, the global sense of mobility is posed to favor the market citizens are really restricted in the politics. The disciplinary mechanism of surveillance prevents the social change. The ideology of capitalism has successfully expanded and accepted by populations thanks to two major assumptions, which are embraced by Jacques Derrida.

First and foremost, many scholars believe that State is a counter-force that balances the interests of Market. Citizens may find a shelter in the policies of nation-state. Historians of capitalism not only have widely criticized this belief, presenting evidence that nation-state surfaced to facilitate the expansion of capitalism, but also focused on social inequality was a constant on human history. Neither hospitality is a reified form of democracy, nor is inequality effaced from earth by democracy. In other times, there were serious political asymmetries enrooted in the authority of King, his territory and the duty of citizens. In order to weaken the social bondage, post-modernity has posed a new axiom, which suggests that “The massive” (this means what comes to all) is based on the spirit of democracy. Far from being real, this belief ignores the doctrine of sum-zero society. Within a frame-time, citizens will choose their governments as consumers get a product. Nonetheless, the workforce and its unions (in the struggle against international capital) lacks “from the demos” as a resource to protect the weaker agents (Korstanje 2013a; Korstanje, 2013b; Korstanje 2013c; Korstanje, 2014). In this conjuncture, Derrida precludes not only the roots of democracy but hospitality.

Ethnology and Anthropology have collected an interesting conceptual framework to understand hospitality as a rite of passage, or a pact, where “strangers” are well-treated to ask for the protection to Gods, once death. The same treatment strangers receive Gods will

harm or protect the human beings. Natural disasters, famine, plagues and other calamities were considered “a just punishment” when the community vulnerated the right of aliens. For whole part of cultures, the concept of evilness and tragedy stems from the violation of hospitality-guiding rule (Korstanje & Olsen, 2011; Korstanje & Tarlow, 2012; Korstanje, 2010). The conception of Derrida on hospitality not only is far from being historic, but also is imagined according to what his own stereotypes. Anyway, some interesting questions arise. What type of hospitality may secular societies offer?, is hospitality linked to the figuration of death?.

To our end, the paradox formulated by Derrida (in view of unconditioned and restricted hospitality) can be resolved as follows. Unconditional hospitality, which is based on religion and the belief in here-after, may be only granted in traditional societies, while its restricted form seems to be proper of modern secular ones. There is a last point in Derridean thesis which merits to be revisited.

Hospitality and Religion

As it has been earlier noted, hospitality keeps a strong political hallmark. In the age of Biopolitics, the exemplary centre exhibits not only the power of master, but also the vulnerability of guest. Any displacement within hospitality is a like a travel to death, towards here-after where Gods or spirits will guide our path (Korstanje & Skoll, 2014a). In this respect, Paloma Balbín Chamorro (2006) has deciphered the complex world of hospitality, using etymology as a valid instrument. The term comes from Latin *Hospitium* which derived in two legal terms, *ius hospitii* and *ius civitatis*. A close reading suggests that Humbert was not correct, when said that strangers received *hospitium* to be protected during their sojourn, Chamorro adds. In fact, the word *hospes* was applied to inter-tribal reciprocities that facilitated the economic good exchange. In this vein, Korstanje (2010) highlights that the roots of hospitality should be found in the “indo-Arian” formula, *hostis+pet*. Although, there was a direct connection between *hostis* and the figure of enemy, the *hospitium* was practiced in friendly contexts. The meaning of *hostis* was applied to connote “equilibrium” and balance among human beings. Furthermore, starting from the

premise that pet means “master”, hospes+pet should be understood as “master of host”. Whatever the case may be, this discussion reveals two relevant things for our review. The first and foremost, hospitality was enrooted in politics. Secondly, there was an asymmetrical relation of reciprocity between hosts and guests, which merits to be investigated. An asymmetry of this nature creates a gap which is filled by religion. Ramos y Loscertales (1948) agrees in the religious aspect of hospitality. Strangers or those who were pilgrims should be protected because they are absolute godsend. They represent an opportunity to be in communion with Gods, and the whole. The ontological security of community is given by its ability to be reconciled with Gods. This was the legal epicenter where any principle jurisprudence is structured. As Korstanje, in earlier works, puts it, hospitality with “strangers” equals the treatment humans received from Gods in the hereafter. The modern ethnology collated evidence enough to demonstrate many ancient tribes thought natural disasters were a product of stranger mistreatments. Here one question surfaces, to what an extent secular societies may offer generalized hospitality?. Korstanje explains that while secular societies, where religion is neglected, embrace “restricted hospitality”, unconditional hospitality only was possible in ancient or traditional communities (Korstanje, 2008; Korstanje & Tarlow, 2012).

Derrida and the problem of Imperialism

Jacques Derrida alludes to the figures of “foreigner” to draw the limits between inside and outside. Following Plato’s legacy, he questions to what an extent foreigners may be defined as those who asks about others. Guests are often accompanied with their own language, which is derived from their constitutional culture. Hospitality is offered or denied depending on the foreigner’s personal properties. New-comers interpellate the hosting community in the same way, the question may be or not hosted by the speaker. The language of the host interrogates violently and suddenly since it imposes the home owner’s interpretation. Therefore, the foreigner is forced to adopt another tongue which is not the one he usually speaks or writes. The host’s translation is part of his very own abode and it is precisely the point where the possibility of hospitality takes place. According to Derrida, two types of hospitality emerged in the “absolute” (unconditional) and “restricted”

(conditional) forms. In this sense, the absolute hospitality demands the host to open the proper home not only before foreigners but also before anonymous Travellers who are unknown for me. This way, I am obliged to let them to enter but to ask reciprocity. Rather, restricted hospitality signals to those foreigners who meet the criteria of laws, considering that hospitality is applied to a certain person, not an unknown alien.

The host's laws are certainly granted if the newcomers are subject to the right, which is always conditional. Without identity, or property, the guest becomes in "a parasite". No need to say, Derrida was adamantly criticized because he leaves little evidence how "absolute hospitality" may take room. Kevin O'Gorman explains that deconstructionism was rejected by professional philosophy during long time. The concept of "unconditional hospitality" as an impossibility since always strangers are conceived with a lower degree of violence. In the lack of accuracy to observe the ideal version of hospitality, a more restricted form arises. That way, he involuntarily links hospitality to ethics or in his own terms, friendship.

Whenever the hospitality is lived as an act of generosity, guests and hosts are unified into a friendly meeting.

"When a country's borders, or the domestic domain, are open to guests or immigrants, conditional hospitality places us in relation to impossibility; failure to provide a greater generosity and that impossible greater generosity inhabits our act of conditional hospitality. When, with the best intentions, people nonetheless inevitably fail in their attempt to be open to the difference of the 'other' that impossibility resides in their attempt, and places them in a different kind of relationship with the other in question". (O Gorman, 2006: 54)

Others voices criticized Derrida's development as pseudo-philosophy, (see discussion with John Searle). He is accused to misunderstand the real historic hospitality as "an intertribal pact" of non-aggression whose effects are determined by the political act. There is no possibility to offer hospitality beyond the politics.

It is important to clarify that this is not an essay review on Jacques Derrida in the strict sense of the word but on the reception in Latin American philosophy; to be more exact, from the reading of Maria Paula Penchaszadeh. It does represent only the reception Derrida had in the ethos of Latin American philosophers. As post-Marxian academicians as Alberto Fillipi observed, Latin America has developed a strange version of Marxism where politics not only were the motor of history, but also state was preferable designed as the protector of citizens before the advance of market. In this region, Marxism has changed to a new form that emphasized the role of politics in the social world.

Secondly, there is a strange fascination, likely resulted from French philosophy, for the promises of democracy. Latin American thinks that the restrictions imposed over their economic prosperity not only are given by the continuation of coups de etat that interrupted the democratic life, but also by a dark compliance between armies and neo-liberal forces of the market. In this point, genuine democracy is the best antidote against the asymmetries created by capital-owners. Although it is right on some sense, this romantic gaze ignores “the concept of democracy” cemented the expansion of capitalism worldwide. However, there is a little uncovered point of discussion in this entry that likes Derrida’s work with ethnocentrism. In what way are we authorized to confirm this allegation?, is not Derrida the philosopher of deconstructionism?.

Empires consolidate their hegemony in two drastic different directions. On one hand, we have the classic discourse that proclaims the superiority of few over others. In these terms, hospitality is limited not only to the authority of masters but persists in the roots of law. This is exactly what Derrida called “restricted hospitality”. However, there is another type of hospitality that never asks anything in return. Is this a sign of supremacy or a simple attempt to connect with others in egalitarian conditions?.

Marshall Sahlins was one of the pioneers in continuing with Marcel Mauss' concerns. Centered on other factors as kinship, power, rank and geographical distance, Sahlins elaborated a new typology of reciprocities that may be explained as follows,

As a dyadic swap, reciprocity (like solidarity) is subject to a rite of redistribution of goods that marks the roots of social bondage. While produced objects are necessary for economic subsistence, the monopoly of surplus (wealth) confers status to holders. Following Sahlins' model three types of reciprocity should be noted,

- Generalized reciprocity is marked by no needs of return for one or both parties. These transactions not only are centered on vagueness in the obligation to reciprocate, but in a clear asymmetry of rank between sides.
- Balanced Reciprocity signals to an equivalent exchange of goods or values among parties. An example of this subtype whenever a tourist pays for a room at hotel.
- Negative reciprocity is characterized by the interest of parties to maximize their profits no matter than the Other. Clear examples of this are theft, or barter. The self receives or takes a good which never is returned with impunity.

Not surprisingly, Sahlins did the correct thing to announce the status and rank plays crucial role to create a "generalized reciprocity". Only the lords of city are allowed to offer an "unconditional hospitality" without reciprocity (Sahlins, 1963; 1965; 1972). Since the "Other" is a little thing, nothing is asked to be returned to the master. This generalized way of reciprocity covers not only an act of paternalism but of imperialism. A more subtle discourse that characterizes the upsurge and zenith of empires relates to the fact, that Otherness is under-valorized to be assisted without exception and at any situation. The expansion for trade needs to use the allegory of human rights to connect emotionally with other territories. History witnessed how empires literally appealed to humanitarian reasons to save the "condemned", the savage souls from their hell. Beyond the attempts to help others, lays the logic of exploitation and domination. This begs a more than interesting question, why we should help Others who have nothing to do with us?.

While Durkheim sought an innovative explanation to precise how society is possible in collective ways, the liberal alternative stays close to “individualism”. One of the exponents of this tradition John Rawls sets forward a theory of reasonable law to explain why some nations fails other are prosperous. Liberalism had serious problems to digest charity when it is framed beyond the individual right to property. The theory of reasonable law rests on the belief that people sacrifice their appetite for war and ambitions to achieve wider forms of political, economics, and social cooperation. Therefore, trade and negotiations are of paramount importance to balance the international relationships. Of course, Rawls is criticized simply because after Auschwitz this idea would seem a simplistic utopia, an allegory. His response to these allegations is not convincing. Rawls echoes Kant’s doctrine of international law that only a liberal society may lead human beings to a sustainable state of well-being. Any person may be pressed to help others without violating its autonomy. Therefore, peoples must assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just descent political regime. What happens when assistance should be done over dictatorship regimes?.

Korstanje and Skoll (2014b) have explained that the theory of peoples, like Derrida, should be revisited but not the reason Rawls notes. He is divining the world in democracies and dictatorship enlarging the gap that facilitates the surface of an “empire of charity”, or “the empire of human rights”.

“The neoliberal development in 1990s not only issued a lot of uncontrolled loans that indebted many poor countries, but also generated an iron chain of dependency between first and third world. Shown to be a resounding failure, the first social scientists who encouraged the theory of development—Milton Friedman possibly the most well known, especially in his design of the Pinochet-led Chilean economy—replied that cultural asymmetries were the reason for the third world not to gain the benefits of financial assistance. That is, it was not the economy; it was the value system of Third World peoples that kept them in poverty” (Korstanje & Skoll, 2014b: 13).

At least, this reminds Truman's doctrine of development which not only indebted the world but also created a strong dependency from periphery to its centre. Whenever the suffering in the world becomes in the platform for submission, it exhibits the lack of ethic of imperial ethos.

Conclusion (rethinking the imperial code)

Even if the tension between hospitality and ethics was formulated by a whole number of philosophers in ethic fields (From Kant to Rawls), much deeper insight is needed respecting how "ethnocentrism" evolved. The ebbs and flows of Derrida's insight on hospitality stems from this above discussed imperial logic, where the "Other" (incapable to make another thing than knocking the doors of our paradise) is portrayed in vulnerable conditions to reinforce our "absolute supremacy" over them. By offering an absolute hospitality to the peripheral others do not enhance their lives. Rather, it aggravates the conditions of exploitation. Ideologically, the success of empires to keep the control over periphery consists in expanding the good-person exchange into a finely-ingrained system. In so doing, it engenders some big economic imbalances given by the asymmetry of forces. The absolute or unconditional hospitality not only reinforce the sentiment of supremacy of "selected race" over the colonized one, but also elite claimed its right to be like-gods. In every newspaper, in every TV program or talk-show there is a concern for poverty and the vulnerabilities of pours, simply because it entralls Occident as an exemplary civilization. As Clifford Geertz puts it, sometimes, pacts are celebrated to be violated (justifying a preventive attack), while others are done to show the inferiority of others. This is the weaker blind-point not only in Derrida, but in Penchaszadeh which merits to be discussed. This is the reason why, absolute or restricted hospitalities are subject to politics.

Anthony Pagden describes how the concept of hospitality was politically manipulated by Scholastic philosophers to legitimate the conquest of Americas. Although the discovery and colonization was achieved in a shorter period of time, no less true is that other incipient imperial powers as England and France questioned seriously the role of Spaniards in

Americas. What type of law allows Catholic Church in giving rights to Spain in groups that do not accept Christendom?. Starting from the premise aborigines do not accept Catholic religion, why we think the treaty of Tordesillas (1494) was legal?, may a person expropriate the land without working in it?.

Over years, there was a hot debate among philosophical schools of Spain and Portugal. However, case reports from this new world suggested some conflicts with aboriginal tribes, which rejected the “European principle of hospitality” as it has been formulated by “natural right”. Although, the European natural right demanded that *Hommo viatores* (traveling humans) should receive protection, food and assistance while traveling, some aborigines was not cognizant of this customs and repelled the presence of strangers. This act of hostility not only reminded that aboriginals (for philosophers) were not familiar with the “natural right” (hospitality) but paved the ways in order for them to be seen as sub-humans. That way, there were not ethical problems in expropriating their lands or even enslaving them for hard work. Pagden’s research discusses to what an extent the conquest of Americas, which as remembered as one of the bloodiest event of history, was legitimized by the European principle of hospitality (Pagden 1995). To cut the long story short, “absolute hospitality” beyond its impossibility is conducive to the subtle discourse of Empires which expand their hegemonies by means of “generalized reciprocity”.

Whatever the case may be, we do thank Ana Paula Penchaszadeh who has a great sensibility and intellect in dealing with these slippery matters. The problem of hospitality is not news, and still persists in the matrix of Western civilization. To what extent, the Other is an invention of selfhood to legitimate the established order, or whether this Other is used to expand my own hegemony are two major concerns on the puzzle the philosophy should unravel in a near future.

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