Introduction: Mediterranean Migrant Hospitalities

Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman

Abstract This book takes some of the insights of the anthropology of hospitality to illuminate ethnographic accounts of migrant reception in various parts of the Mediterranean. Anthropology has revisited the concept of hospitality in recent years, drawing on the insights of ethnographers of the Mediterranean, who ground the idea and practice of hospitality in concrete ethnographic settings and challenge the ways in which the casual usage of Derridean or Kantian notions of hospitality can blur the boundaries between social scales and between metaphor and practice. Host-guest relations are multiplied through pregnancy and childbirth, and new forms emerge with the need to offer mortuary practices for dead strangers. The volume does not attempt to define a distinctive Mediterranean hospitality, but explores the potential of the concept of hospitality to illuminate the spatial and scalar dimensions of morality and politics in Mediterranean migrant reception.

V. Grotti • M. Brightman (✉)
Department of Cultural Heritage, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: vanessa.grotti@unibo.it; marcandrew.brightman@unibo.it

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The second decade of the twenty-first century will be remembered in the Mediterranean perhaps above all for the human consequences of the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in 2011 and the civil war in Syria, which began in the same year. Libya could no longer employ its numerous sub-Saharan African migrant workers and lacked the means and political motivation to prevent them from embarking on the voyage across the sea to Europe. Meanwhile large numbers of refugees fled the Syrian conflict and sought safety in Europe. These may be the principal reasons for the great increase in the numbers of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea from 2011 to 2020, though the causes are many and complex, and here is not the place to review them. Indeed, we are not concerned here with the 'push' and 'pull' factors of migration, with attempting to explain the 'problem' of migration or to offer 'solutions'. Migration is a part of the human condition, and more historically contingent and in need of explanation are the existence of hard borders, the problems of global inequality, and their relationship towards the spread of what Karl Polanyi (2001[1944]) called 'market society'—but this is not our aim. At the heart of the subject of this book is the recognition that the large number of migrant arrivals on the European shores of the Mediterranean, especially Italy, Greece, and Spain, amplified contrasting responses among the populations who found themselves hosts, willing or not. The more migrants arrived, the more some local people proclaimed that they were welcome, on the grounds of moral duty and common humanity, while others called just as loudly for their expulsion, denouncing them as a threat to social order. More recently the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has further exacerbated this latter reaction, as the sanitary crisis combines fear of contagion from strangers with justification for restrictions on movement—history shows that such fears conflating social order with hygiene have been associated with epidemics since the expansion of maritime commerce in the middle ages (Bashford 2007; Snowden 2019). On different scales, local people, local and regional institutions, and states have found themselves playing the role of hosts, willing or unwilling, while arriving migrants were placed in the equally ambivalent

role of suppliant guests—in most cases frustrating their search for digni-
fied and autonomous livelihoods.

As legislative and administrative knots tightened and European border
infrastructure grew, conditions continued to worsen in Libya, Syria, and
numerous sending countries; sea crossings became ever more perilous,
their organization being driven ever more deeply into the unscrupulous
hands of organized crime, and deaths at sea multiplied scandalously. Over
the same period, women began to make up a growing proportion of the
migrants attempting the crossing. Sexual exploitation, of more and less
violent varieties, afflicts the lives of female migrants without fail, especially
in Libya, and it is largely for this reason that many women arrive in south-
ern Italy from North Africa either pregnant or with a small baby (Grotti
et al. 2018). The women who arrive in Greece from Syria are more often
accompanied by their husband or family, but they also often arrive preg-
nant or become pregnant during the interminable waits in refugee camps
and detention centers.

Death and new life have thus dominated the circumstances of migrant
arrivals in recent years at the southern threshold of Europe, whose inhab-
itants have found themselves compelled to play the role of host. The image
of the threshold is doubly significant. Firstly the threshold is a key symbol
in rites of passage, and as Michael Herzfeld underlines in his closing con-
tribution to the book, the perilous crossings of the Mediterranean are rites
of passage, in which persons symbolically die and are reborn (a notion that
many of our own informants explicitly referred to). Secondly, hospitality
symbolically begins with the crossing of a threshold, as the outsider
becomes a guest by entering the host's home. But what happens when
these different kinds of threshold become intermingled and confused?
When dead strangers must become guests, and when shelter must be given
for the birth of strangers? The social and political sciences have invested a
great deal in the study of migration in the Mediterranean in this period,
including a significant amount to the problem of mass migrant death,
rather less to birth. However they have largely done so as a part of the
migration industry that flourishes in European borderlands, with short-
term and highly structured field research contributing to bureaucratically
organized large research programs. Without the slower, more intimate,
long-term field research that is the hallmark of social and cultural anthro-
pology, these approaches have shed little light upon the ways in which
migrant hospitality is lived by those involved and what it means to them.
The ethnography of migration and of migrant reception, of birth and

death, brings its own considerable challenges—to name just a few, there are those of multiple languages and cultural backgrounds of interlocutors, and the shifting nature of a mobile population in the spaces of hospitality. Despite these difficulties, we have attempted to bring some grounded insights to certain aspects of Mediterranean migration and hospitality.

Hospitality entered the anthropological lexicon in the Mediterranean, so when the problem of hospitality has been brought to the center of the world's attention so decisively as it was in the 2010s by the migrant arrivals and deaths that occurred in the region, it seems worthwhile to offer an ethnographic response. Anthropology has revisited the concept of hospitality in recent years, embracing it for its compatibility with long-standing disciplinary concerns such as exchange and reciprocity, kinship and alterity, ritual and social order (Ben-Yehoyada 2015; Candea and da Col 2012). The practices and policies of hospitality and hostility to migrants raise moral, ethical, and political questions that are 'both pressing for the here and now and timeless' (Berg and Fiddian-Quasmiyeh 2018: 2), a point worth underlining given the ongoing migrant reception crisis in the Mediterranean. Indeed, as Roth and Salas have noted, 'woven into the fabric of modern research is the perception that crises are revelatory, that it is through the extreme that the normal is revealed' (2001: 1). The anthropology of hospitality has drawn upon the insights of ethnographers of the Mediterranean, especially Julian Pitt-Rivers (2012 [1968]) and Michael Herzfeld (1987), and some of the most influential discussions of hospitality such as those of Derrida or Benveniste draw upon the region's classical heritage (though Shryock has offered a corrective to Kant's disparaging portrayal of Bedouins as bad hosts [2008]). The anthropology of hospitality has grounded the concept in concrete ethnographic settings, and anthropologists have criticized the ways in which discussions of hospitality in other disciplines such as philosophy and political science have tended to occlude distinctions and interplay between social scales and to blur differences between metaphor and practice. A certain 'scalar slipperiness' (Herzfeld 2012) is inherent to the practice of hospitality itself, but the cultural modes and social effects of such scale shifting require ethnographic scrutiny.

The most widely emphasized feature of hospitality is its moral ambivalence, first highlighted by Pitt-Rivers (2012) and later encapsulated by Derrida with his term 'hostipitality' (2000a): guests may be welcomed and given the wherewithal of life for a period of time, but they remain at the mercy of hosts, their rights are limited, and their status is rigorously

distinguished from that of hosts in a clearly asymmetric relationship. External factors can all too easily tip the balance between welcome and hostility: Chiara Quagliariello shows in her chapter how the spread of the political discourses of the far right and the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic have recently led to powerfully destructive symbolic anti-migrant gestures in the largely hospitable island of Lampedusa. As with the Homeric story of the Cyclops, the archetypal case of a bad host and bad guests, hospitality can all too easily turn sour. Mette Berg and Elena Fiddian-Quasmiyeh have criticized 'fatalistic' invocations of this ambivalence. The remedy they propose is an ethnographic attentiveness to the 'messiness of everyday life and its potential for care, generosity and recognition' (2018: 1), but the 'messiness of everyday life' is not alone sufficient to unpack 'hostipitality'. The neologism is in part a conflation of distinct meanings in time and place and of different scalar dynamics. In a text with which Derrida was certainly familiar, Emile Benveniste wrote that 'the primitive notion conveyed by *hostis* is that of equality by compensation: a *hostis* is one who repays my gift with counter-gift'. He goes on to say that 'the classical meaning "enemy" must have developed when reciprocal relations between clans were succeeded by the exclusive relations of *civitas* to *civitas*' (Benveniste 2016: 61). Accordingly, the concept of hospitality changed over time: '"stranger, enemy, guest" are global notions of a somewhat vague character, and they demand precision by interpretation in their historical and social contexts' (2016: 66). This is not to deny the ambivalence of hospitality that Pitt-Rivers and, later, Derrida emphasized, but rather to suggest that its welcoming and hostile facets may be subject to separate instantiations, be embodied in separate actors, or be effected at distinct scales of action.

As Berg and Fiddian-Quasmiyeh note, the inherent conditionality of hospitality is underpinned by the fact that the host 'always already' has the power to delimit the space or place offered to the other and the 'resulting hierarchies and tensions towards "new arrivals" have often been presented not only as common, but also potentially as inescapable' (2018: 3). But this power to delimit the space or place of hospitality is continually contested by actors on different scales—the domestic house may be opened for the stranger, but the role of host in migrant reception is more often taken by local NGOs or local authorities; however the dependence of these upon central state funding cycles, and the state's ownership of infrastructure used as spaces of hospitality, reinforces the central government's claims to the prerogatives of the host. Meanwhile the tensions and

hierarchies inherent to hospitality are rendered inescapable by the impossibility of reciprocity, which arises from migrant guests' lack of access to higher scales of action.

The emergence of these different scales of action can be said to have taken place with the emergence of the city state, as Isayev points out: the *xenia* of Homeric society, 'when asylum was sought at household thresholds', gave way to the city state, 'when giving refuge became the prerogative of the community as a whole' (2018: 7). As Benveniste wrote, 'when an ancient society becomes a nation, the relations between man and man, clan and clan, are abolished. All that persists is the distinction between what is inside and outside the civitas' (2018[1969]: 68). In the ancient world, hospitality depended on the 'extent of preceding connections and relationships with the hosts', and unknown strangers who were not part of these networks relied on supplication—*hiketeia*—to gain refuge. Such suppliants (evoked in Aeschylus' play of the same name) may have had no means of providing reciprocal hospitality and had, at best, only services (such as military support) to offer in their place. In the fifth-century BC Athens, the *metic*, or resident alien, 'had certain privileges and duties but without citizenship' (Isayev 2018: 9).

This form of hospitality at the level of the state and the field of citizenship was systematically described by Kant, who wrote that 'the law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality' (1957[1795]: 20)—his point being that the rights of a guest in a foreign state are limited and temporary, giving the philosophical grounding for various forms of 'resident alien' to be formalized, such as refugees, resident workers, and so on. As Shryock points out, 'the development of legal fictions such as "the citizen", an essential component of Kant's "free republic", is perhaps the most radical generator of bad hosts and bad guests ever devised, largely because it uses the notion of equality to patch up the incompleteness of the spaces in which hospitality is performed' (2012: S30). He asks: how does one care for people outside the domestic space? Candea joins Rosello (2001) and Shryock (2008) in criticizing the 'metaphorical extensions of the logic of hospitality to larger entities… particularly in [public] debates around immigration' (Candea 2012: S43): in these debates, Rosello argues that 'the vision of the immigrant as a guest is a metaphor that has forgotten that it is a metaphor' (2001: 3). Candea highlights the use of 'a certain type of scale-free philosophical abstraction, imported from post-structuralist philosophy…figures such as Levinas's "other", Carl Schmidt and Giorgio Agamben's "Sovereign", Slavoj Žižek's

explorations of "the neighbour", and of course the Host and the Guest of Derridean fame' are not 'straightforwardly explanatory'; Derrida's 'interpretive acrobatics' (Shryock 2008) [do not] 'shed light on the actual relationships, tensions, and ethnographic complications of hospitality' (2012: S45; cf. Shryock 2008: 406 n.4).

And yet, the anthropology of hospitality after Derrida has often followed the successful strategy of taking Derrida's insights into the paradoxical nature of hospitality and re-grounding them in ethnography (Shryock 2008; cf. contributions to Candea and Da Col 2012). Julian Pitt-Rivers led the way to a concrete, situated approach to hospitality, showing its inherent ambiguities and tensions and outlining features of Mediterranean hospitality such as its peculiar modes of reciprocity (the ancient *xenia* [Herzfeld 1987]) (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1968]). The possibility or expectation of reciprocity is assumed to be present, even if this requires a certain fiction, and the reciprocal exchange of hospitality is frequently played on in a variety of ways, sometimes in a subtle ritual sequence (Herzfeld 1987). In other cases, such as migrant reception (where the host, as municipality, reception center, or even the state itself, belongs to a different social scale than the guest), the implicit absence of the possibility of reciprocity may highlight and reinforce power asymmetries. These beg the question of whether reciprocity itself may exist on some other level, as it does on Crete according to Herzfeld, where 'the *materially nonreciprocal* exchange is recast as an *ethically and virtually reciprocal* one' (1987: 80). As the Spanish beggar says on receiving alms in Pitt-Rivers' seminal account, 'may God repay you' because, he implies 'I cannot' (2012[1968]: 509). Benveniste also connects hospitality with sacrifice, noting that the word '*hostia*, is connected with the same family [as hostis, hospis]: its real sense is "the victim which serves to appease the anger of the gods", hence it denotes a compensatory offering' (Benveniste 2016: 66). Indeed, *hostia* is defined elsewhere as 'a sacrifice of atonement' (Lieber 1841), suggesting antecedents for the ritual aspects of the hosting of the dead that we discuss in our chapter. Conversely, the scalar interplay between asymmetric concrete host-guest relations and an abstract egalitarian plane implying potential reciprocity can permit domestic acts of hospitality, in which migrants become hosts, to work in small ways to subvert these power asymmetries.

Migrant hospitality presents ample potential for transcultural slippages, equivocations, and, at best, mutual misunderstandings—the expectations of guests are frequently misaligned with those of hosts and vice versa, or

used as justifications for being 'bad' hosts or guests, sometimes providing even deeper potential for tension than the misalignments of interests in a shared cultural context (Shryock 2012). Herzfeld has given a vivid illustration of the way in which hospitality may be used as a veiled act of aggression or trickery: 'The most extreme play on the theme of reciprocity is found when, as sometimes happens, animal-thieves invite their victims or the police to join them at a feast: all unaware. The guests then eat the stolen meat! This is structurally analogous to giving asylum to one's blood enemy. It confers superiority to the host in two registers simultaneously: it marks his respect for the sacred laws of hospitality, while placing his foe, however superior politically, at his mercy' (Herzfeld 1987: 79). In reflecting on the roles of migrant reception centers as hosts and migrants as guests, it is tempting to see a scale-shifting reflection of this scenario: former colonial powers who have plundered African and Asian countries receive migrant 'guests' from these countries and offer them (minimal) food and shelter, knowing all the while that their hospitality is simultaneously a display of wealth acquired at the expense of their guests. Given Kant's scathing comments on colonialism in the context of his discussion of hospitality—he describes the European colonizers as bad guests who carry 'inhospitable actions' to 'terrifying lengths' (1957: 21)—there is a compelling moral argument to make for a debt of hospitality owed by Europeans to denizens of former colonies. Discussing the relationship between migration and memory, Glynn and Kleist have noted how different actors 'cite contrasting memories of the past to argue for the inclusion or exclusion of new immigrants' (2012: 6). However, those who host migrants do not show a great deal of awareness of the colonial past, and when migrant reception awakens their historical consciousness, it more often evokes memories of the atrocities committed under fascism against local populations such as the Jews, Roma, or political dissidents. When people do draw parallels between the past colonization of other lands and the present migrant arrivals, the former is remembered as the popular exodus to settler colonies such as Argentina or the USA, rather than the scramble for Africa, and so the parallel is depoliticized.

The interplay between scale, scales of memory, and scales of governance is a constant in these essays—local mayors and local populations are often in favor of migrant reception, while the central state is hostile. Quagliariello shows in her contribution how over time migrant hospitality evolved in Lampedusa from being primarily domestic, with migrants hosted in the homes of local people, to being gradually taken over by the state, as

officially sanctioned structures were set up, and domestic hospitality came to be outlawed. Malakasis shows in her chapter how hospitals (whose name testifies to their historic role as structures of hospitality) operate on a scale that is neither that of the state nor that of the domestic setting.

This tension between scales is complemented by a cross-cutting tension between relations of hospitality and rights-based approaches, which arises from the contrast between the asymmetric nature of relations between hosts and guests and the egalitarian universalism that underpins human rights discourse. In our own research, we have noted that while some migrant 'guests' see their position partially through the lens of expectations of domestic forms of hospitality, tinged with the unrealizable implication of future reciprocity, some migrants' 'hosts', as humanitarian workers, are partly motivated by convictions of social justice in the face of global social and economic inequality. Nevertheless, exploring migrant reception as hospitality allows us to get past the universalizing analytical strategy of humanitarian reason, to try to make sense of the culturally nuanced and variable modalities of host-guest relations. For example, following Marsden's (2012) use of Copeman's notion of the 'virtues of utility', we may observe the ways in which emergency workers are spurred to action by a desire to help others, suspending moral judgments on the individuals whose lives they try to save. Here, rather than adhering to an articulated moral code, their actions are first useful and only then rationalized as moral. Conversely as hospitality moves up scales, what start out as humanitarian acts may become justified as demographically and economically useful, as the social integration of migrants (transforming hospitality into assimilation) is justified on the grounds of low national birth ratios and the depopulation of the countryside—this move may be thought of as appealing instead to the 'utility of virtue'. Hospitality itself dissolves through the process of 'integration', as guest and host become assimilated to each other, though their difference can be re-awakened by nativist rhetoric, which casts immigrant minorities as the unwanted guests of hostile hosts.

Rights-based approaches can be understood in terms of kinship. Migrant hospitality tends to be discussed in the mode of humanitarian reason, which evokes the 'global fraternity' of humanitarianism. In so doing, it risks occluding cultural differences and particularities and historical relationships between different peoples. The universalism of the idiom of global fraternity has been questioned from the point of view of Amazonian ethnology by Carlos Fausto, who notes that Derrida's

'"spheres of amicability" determined by social distance are hard to define in Amazonia. The other and the stranger are not coterminous'; unlike in Amazonia, the 'Euro-American notion of friendship does not imply a constitutive otherness; it tends towards fraternity rather than enmity' (2012: 198). In Amazonia, instead, the friend is 'an affine, an other, the nearest enemy, the prey closest at hand' (2012: 205). Not only in Amazonia however but also in the Mediterranean 'cousinage' rather than fraternity has played a role in articulating relationships between different peoples from opposite shores of the sea (Ben-Yehoyada 2017; cf. Quagliariello this volume).

A further angle of ethnographic exegesis is suggested by Derrida's emphasis on Kant's insistence that hospitality is not a matter of philanthropy, but of right (2000b: 3). For migrant reception workers to be characterized as 'humanitarian' suggests a philanthropic moral impetus, but often they are indeed acting on convictions of rights; here there may be a convergence with the position of refugees, who do not become guests because they expect charity, but because they believe they have the right to asylum. Yet the idea of a 'law of hospitality', an expression applied in different ways by Pitt-Rivers and Kant, is challenged by Derrida when he exposes hospitality as a double bind: 'on the one hand I should respect the singularity of the Other and not ask him or her that he respect or keep intact my own space or my own culture … [but on the other]… I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language… That's why it [hospitality] has to be negotiated at every instant, and the decision for hospitality has to be invented at every second with all the risks involved, and it is very risky' (1997, in Shryock 2008: 410). The contributions to this volume give accounts of the risky negotiations navigating the double bind of hospitality.

Malakasis' contribution focuses on pregnant migrants and on the clinic as a space of care, sovereignty, and everyday life. In this context she explores the guest-host dynamics between state-employed healthcare personnel and migrants. In her treatment of scale, she asks whether the hierarchical character of hospitality is indeed compatible with a rights-based framework, and she demonstrates that here hospitality and rights are complementary rather than opposed. Hospitality is framed bureaucratically (not domestically) in the hospital setting, but this does not mean that it is a 'unitary host' any more than the state. The nation-state, Malakasis argues, consists of 'diverse hosts…positioned vis-à-vis migrants either as

individuals or as representatives of collectives or entities such as the public maternity clinic', and, in most settings, it is 'hard to disentangle' the administrative and the interpersonal.

Quagliariello's contribution offers a rich description of the changing of an iconic space of migrant hospitality over time. She provides a critical appraisal of the image of the Lampedusan or Mediterranean 'culture of hospitality' and of the purported link between supposed moral values and propensities to hospitality, by showing how practices of and attitudes towards hospitality are historically contingent. Relations with the other take on different forms according to different actors, whether ordinary families or NGO or state migrant reception actors, echoing Malakasis' distinctions between 'diverse hosts'. Over time, practices of domestic hospitality became de-legitimized, and new social divisions were produced, along lines of scale (between local and national or international actors) and between those in favor of or against state forms of migrant reception. This can be understood in terms of historically and spatially contingent expressions of domestic 'caring for others' and state 'managing others'.

Our own contribution considers the treatment of the remains of migrants who have died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea and how this treatment can be interpreted in terms of hospitality. These human remains are often unidentified, and their treatment involves a series of forensic processes, as well as burial in municipal cemeteries. We explore how on different scales of action the mortuary practices evoke other kinds of memorialization, and forensics and burial become ritual processes for restoring connections to other people and restoring personhood while provoking affective resonances with Italy's fascist and colonial past.

In this book we attempt to use the anthropology of hospitality to illuminate ethnographic accounts of migrant reception in the Mediterranean. 'The Mediterranean is back', as Naor Ben-Yehoyada has argued (2015: 184), in large part because 'the problem of how to deal with strangers' (Pitt-Rivers 1977: 94) has become central to the international news cycle and European politics awash with images and discourses about migration. While all of our contributions evoke the classic ambivalence of (hostile) hospitality (Derrida 2000a), they also analyze how it shifts across scales, for instance, as local actions are made to stand for—or to confound—national or regional ideologies or identities, the ritual enactment of ideals of hospitality, and petty expressions of hostility to these actions. The negotiation of the double bind of hospitality emerges clearly, as, for instance, when semi-hostile institutional regimes of minimal hospitality, exercising

biopolitical control, are met with a proliferation of minute acts of political and domestic resurgence. The hosting of migrants indeed may be 'constitutive of the social order', as Navaro-Yashin writes, a form of the 'domestication of the abject' (2009: 6).

If Pitt-Rivers' work led the concept of hospitality in anthropology to be associated with the Mediterranean, Herzfeld later argued that despite its usefulness as a more descriptive and less sweeping term than honor (the concept most strongly associated with Mediterranean anthropology), we should take care not to view hospitality as the 'principal definiens of Mediterranean society', but rather to let it contribute to 'a more critical inspection of the notion of "Mediterranean society" itself' (1987: 88). These essays make no attempt to define a distinctive Mediterranean hospitality, but instead seek more modestly to explore the potential of the concept of hospitality to illuminate the spatial and scalar dimensions of morality and politics in Mediterranean migrant reception.

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