



## **HOSPITALITIES, HOSTILITIES: NARRATIVES AND REPRESENTATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**Grenoble Alpes University 19-20 November 2020**

In the context of transnational migrations of populations today, and as millions of people leave their homelands and their homes for reasons of war, economy, religion, politics or climate change, this international conference aims at unravelling and making sense of the practices and the representations of hospitality in our time and in the past.

Etymologically, the word 'hospitality' shares the same root as the word 'host', which refers as much to the hosting party as to the guests. The implicit semantic reciprocity ought therefore to be addressed in the light of practices, perceptions and representations of hospitality: what does it mean to experience hospitality, whether as in 'being hospitable' or as in 'being hosted'? As in many languages, 'Hospitality' and 'host' also share a common etymology with 'hostility'. This close parentage also ought to be questioned, with hostility as the seemingly inseparable shadow of hospitality.

In Homer's *Odyssey* and for the philosophers of Antiquity, as in the texts of the Bible, there was an almost sacred dimension to practising hospitality, welcoming the other as a guest in one's home, unconditionally. As a response to the problems of statelessness, Hannah Arendt argued in *Origins of Totalitarianism* and 'We Refugees' that any person on earth, regardless of their legal status as a national or resident or non-resident alien, can legitimately expect hospitality from the political community in which they reside. And yet, Jacques Derrida's concept of 'hostipitality' indicates that hospitality, understood as unconditional, is always parasitized by its opposite 'hostility' (Derrida, 2000). For Derrida, hospitality originates at the borders, in the initial surprise of contact with an other, a stranger, a foreigner. It has to do with the ability of opening up and making place for what happens, what literally takes place. But Derrida's philosophy hinges around the paradoxical need for unconditional hospitality and the very impossibility of unconditional hospitality. He questions the potential reversibility of unconditional hospitality into hostility: "How can we distinguish between a guest and a parasite? In principle, the difference is straightforward, but for that you need a law; hospitality, reception, the welcome offered, have to be submitted to a

basic and limiting jurisdiction” (*Of Hospitality*, 59). The equilibrium between those two indissociable aspects of the notion of hospitality, openness and closedness, depends on specific circumstances which need to be examined and reflected upon in the relationship between hosts. In the same way, the duration of the stay varies from one culture to another and is a critical aspect of the possible passage from hospitality to hostility. As Mette Louise Berg and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh argue, Jean-Luc Nancy’s reflection on ‘being together’ and ‘being with’ (*Being Singular Plural*, 2000) may offer a more fruitful perspective to build more human and generous societies (*Migration and Society*, 2018, 4).

Hospitality should be envisioned on different scales: at the level of individuals, families, local communities, religious, ethnic or linguistic communities; at the level of a specific diaspora and at the level of a nation. One aim of the ‘Hospitalities, Hostilities: Narratives and Representations’ Conference is to examine how narratives of hospitality and hostility in literature and the arts weave in the two notions and represent the complex ways in which doorsteps and thresholds, borders and boundaries are crossed as hospitable refuges, made invisible, or reinforced as hostile barriers. What is the role and status of communities in the context of hospitality and home-making? Another aim is to read narratives of hospitality and hostility as opening a space of creativity where new horizons of ‘being together’ and ‘being with’ might be invented to build more humane societies.

The notion of hospitality and hostilities in the history of diasporic peoples is of paramount importance. The Irish have experienced the narrow margin and blurred frontier between hospitality and hostility in their long story of emigration, from the Famine to the more recent economic upheavals. Since the early 2000s Ireland has, for the first time, become a host country to many migrants, both European economic migrants and asylum-seekers, and short-term expats. While originally hospitable to many, Ireland has more recently responded to the influx of asylum seekers by implementing a policy of direct provision - detention centres – which has been severely criticized by human rights agencies. Additionally, the level of hate crimes towards immigrants has reached unprecedented levels over the past few years, signalling unveiled hostility towards the ‘undesirables’.

We have invited papers on literature, civilisation, history, cinema, the visual arts and performance studies which address the questions of representations of hospitality and hostility in their relation to aesthetics, ethics and politics and from postcolonial and transnational perspectives, particularly :

- the responses to the arrival of forced migrants and their own responses to variations in hospitality and hostility.
- The experiences of diasporic peoples in history
- issues of visibility, invisibility and/or silencing.

We also invited papers theorizing the notions of hospitality and hostility from the point of view of social sciences, especially anthropology, geography and philosophy. This implies examining the ways in which public and private hospitality schemes are organized to host incoming migrants and refugees, and questioning the notions of responsibility, community, rights and duties of both hosting and hosted parties. The reciprocity inscribed in the double meaning of the word ‘host’ also raises intimate questions of how various modalities of opening up to the other, or closing up to the other with reactions of hostility, create situations of self-alienation, jeopardizing chances of peace-building.

Finally, the idea of unconditional hospitality to fellow humans also encompasses ecocritical issues: how is home-making to take place in a context of climate change? How can humans contribute to making the world a hospitable place to live in, decentring the relationship from a host-to-host binary relationship to a wider ecological perspective?

**Organizers:**

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A limited number of travel bursaries will be available for France-based refugees, asylum-seekers, and other conflict-affected individuals who are interested in attending the conference. Interested individuals are invited to submit a brief 250-word paragraph to [marie.mianowski@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:marie.mianowski@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr) outlining their request for a travel bursary, including the estimated cost of their return travel (within France) to and from Université Grenoble Alpes.

The conference is part of a broader series of events coordinated in 2019-20 by the Université Grenoble Alpes IDEX HOMES (Hosts Migration Exchanging Stories) project, under the auspices of the French National Research Agency in the framework of the “Investissements d’avenir” program (ANR-15-IDEX-02), GIS EIRE, and ILCEA4 (Univ. Grenoble Alpes).

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The conference will be held at :

**Maison de la Création**  
**SFR Création**  
**Université Grenoble Alpes**  
Domaine universitaire

### **Guest Speakers:**

**Ruth Gilligan**, author of *Nine Folds Make a Paper Swan* and *The Butchers*, lecturer at the University of Birmingham.

**Hari Kunzru**, author of *The Impressionist*, *Transmission*, *My Revolutions*, *Gods Without Men*, and *White Tears*. His work has been translated into twenty languages.

**Emiel Martens**, filmmaker, author of *Gifts from Babylon* (2018, 24 min) and *Welcome to the Smiling Coast* ([www.welcometothesmilingcoast.com](http://www.welcometothesmilingcoast.com)), Assistant Professor in Media and Culture Studies at the University of Amsterdam and the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

**Perla Serfaty**, author of *Un chez-soi chez les autres?* (2006) et *Enfin chez soi? Récits féminins de vie et de migration* (2006), Senior Lecturer in sociology at the University of Strasbourg. Senior Lecturer in sociology at the University of Strasbourg.

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