



# *Derrida en Corse?* Hospitality as scale-free abstraction

MATEI CANDEA *Durham University*

A few years after the French press resonated with the immigration debates which inspired Derrida's influential thoughts on hospitality, the paradoxes of hospitality once again gripped the French public imagination, this time in relation to sanctuary given to a suspected murderer on the island of Corsica. This paper traces Corsican hospitality, in its various ethnographic, media, and philosophical/literary incarnations. Through a careful ethnographic account of the material-semiotic moves which enable events on one scale to have effects and significance on another, the paper argues that analytical or philosophical uses of hospitality as a scale-free abstraction should be treated with caution.

Invocations of Corsican hospitality transcend genre. As in other Mediterranean locations (e.g. Boissevain 1996; Herzfeld 1987), the proverbial hospitality upon which individual Corsicans rightly pride themselves coexists somewhat uneasily with a thriving 'hospitality industry'. This complex interplay marked my own ethnographic experience on the island in 2002-3. Whereas spending most or all of one's fieldwork as a house guest of a local family is an archetypal feature of 'traditional' ethnographic narratives, this option was not open to me, precisely because it had such an obvious commercial equivalent. Many people owned purpose-built guest accommodation, often in the form of converted cellars on the ground floor of their houses, which family and close friends living on the French mainland might use during their visits to the island. Such accommodation was typically rented to paying guests during 'high season'. With such a wealth of rentable accommodation about, it would indeed have been a strange pretension for an unknown young man hailing from the UK and planning to stay for a year to ask for 'hospitality' in the traditional sense. In the event, I rented a flat in a converted cellar in the centre of the village, belonging to a retired couple who lived in a large house on the outskirts. This being said, the norms and forms of non-commercial hospitality pervaded these commercial arrangements. My landlord insisted on coming to pick me up at the airport and took me straight to his house for coffee. At later dates, whenever I went over to see my landlord 'on business', he would insist on keeping me over for an aperitif or a meal. Our relationship was located somewhere in between everyday hospitality and the small-scale end of the hospitality industry, two distinct yet interwoven forms.

Equally prominent in Corsica, however, is a discourse with distinctly anthropological resonances, concerning the 'culture', 'tradition', or 'laws' of Corsican hospitality. This discourse finds support in classic ethnographic studies of the island (Caisson 1974; Ravis-Giordani 1983), but is echoed well beyond academic circles, partly as a result of the appearance since the 1960s of a vigorous and complex landscape of regionalist cultural militancy and nationalist politics, which have brought questions of culture, identity, and Corsican distinctiveness to the forefront of public consciousness and debate.

At the heart of this para-ethnographic (see Holmes & Marcus 2005) discourse about Corsican hospitality is what Lindholm (1982) has termed a 'refuge/hospitality complex' (see Marsden this volume), in which a host extends hospitality and protection to a guest when the latter is in need – paradigmatically, in the Corsican case, a fugitive from the law, who may even be a personal enemy (Ravis-Giordani 1983: 229). The backdrop for this archetypal situation of 'extreme hospitality' is the relatively high incidence of banditry in Corsica, from the mid-eighteenth century through to the 1930s, involving fugitives from the law and from personal vengeance who took to the *maquis*, often following an honour killing (Wilson 1988: 335–76). Specific historical instances of 'extreme hospitality' (passed down in the family histories of some of my Corsican friends) gave body and conviction to para-ethnographic generalizations about a Corsican culture of hospitality, which lay comfortably alongside broader French romantic stereotypes of the island, enticing tourist brochures, and the myriad generousities and commensalities through which individual Corsican hosts lived their hospitable relations with guests in the early twenty-first century.

This paper traces a series of events which took place in the summer of 2003, through which these dormant waters of Corsican hospitality *qua* tradition, cliché, and everyday practice came to the boil. It tracks the sudden transformation of Corsican hospitality into a highly controversial political issue which, for a while, seemingly threatened to topple the edifice of French republican law itself. The paper will read these Corsican debates alongside Jacques Derrida's famous philosophical discussions of the paradoxes of hospitality, which, as we shall see, echo the Corsican case in a number of striking ways.

In juxtaposing these two hospitalities, Corsican and Derridean, the paper will ask a broader question about the interplay of philosophy and anthropology: in what way, if at all, can a reading of Derrida contribute to an anthropological understanding of Corsica? Resisting the impulse to treat Derrida as a theoretical resource which 'explains' Corsica, the paper will instead parse anthropological arguments about hospitality and scale by Michael Herzfeld (1987) and Andrew Shryock (2004; 2008) with the material-semiotic tradition which recommends 'flatness' as a methodological principle (Latour 2005: 175ff.), in order to trace the ways in which hospitality, both in Corsica and in Derrida, tends to feature as a scale-free abstraction, tying together into causal chains entities of radically different sizes (individuals, nations, doors, villages, etc.).

### Yvan Colonna's hosts

In the summer of 2003, Corsican hospitality became a matter of public debate and political controversy in France, following the arrest of France's then most wanted fugitive, Yvan Colonna. Colonna was wanted as a suspect in the murder of the French prefect of the island, Claude Érignac. Érignac's assassination in 1997 caused

nation-wide consternation and was described by the French National Assembly as a 'terrible blow to a symbol of the Republic, and therefore, to the Republic itself' (Glavany 1998). In a way which can hardly be called metaphorical, Colonna was thus suspected not only of killing a man but also of attacking France and the Law itself.

Colonna eluded French police forces for over four years until his arrest in June 2003. Improbably, it turned out that he had been hiding in Corsica all along, inviting almost irresistible, albeit controversial, parallels with the classic figure of the Corsican bandit. Following Colonna's arrest, investigators began to charge people who were suspected of having helped the fugitive during his four years in the *maquis*. At this, official Corsican nationalist parties, which had unanimously condemned Érignac's murder in 1997, now rose in protest against the French government, denouncing what they described as the criminalization of the ancestral Corsican value of hospitality. One lawyer, speaking on Corsican regional radio in defence of his brother and client who had been accused of helping Colonna, stated that many Corsicans couldn't understand why people were being arrested merely because they had 'conformed to an ancestral cultural code' (RCFM, 1 September 2003). Intentionally or otherwise, the nationalists had established a symmetry of sorts between two 'scalings-up': where the assassination of the French prefect had become an attack by individuals on 'the Republic itself', the arrest of Corsican individuals who had helped Colonna hide became an attack on Corsican culture as a whole.

While a number of my non-nationalist Corsican friends found themselves in agreement with the nationalist claims on Corsican hospitality described above, there were also some outraged reactions from a number of Continentals and Corsicans. Some critics spoke up in the name of Corsican hospitality itself, which they felt was being sullied by the nationalists' implicit conflation of Colonna with the figure of the 'honour bandit' to whom this type of hospitality was traditionally due (e.g. Lambroschini 2003). Many, however, implicitly accepted the framing according to which this was a clash between, on the one hand, a local, traditional cultural form and, on the other, the legal order of the French Republic. Such commentators argued vehemently that French law and order could not be expected to bow before mere cultural 'atavisms'. For instance, Joseph Martinetti, co-author of a book on the geopolitics of Corsica, later commented in an interview given to the staunchly republican weekly *Marianne* that the nationalist discourse on Colonna was

flattering for public opinion and clearly aimed to build a consensus: it says that Corsicans are hospitable, that they have ancient values. But the core of the discourse about this 'principle of hospitality' is terrifying: according to those who propound it, Corsican society shouldn't be entitled to a justice system [*une justice*], but would have to make do with archaic codes of honour (Lapoix & Martinetti 2007).

In other words, Corsican hospitality, in its role as a traditional structure or cultural code, all too easily fell on the wrong side of the distinction, shored up by over two centuries of French nation-building, between the progressive forces of rationalist French freedom and the obscurantist forces of reaction (see McDonald 1989). In such debates, French republicanism has on its side the peculiar rhetorical ability to suture together the particular and the universal, which makes France, according to the commonplace oxymoron, the country of human rights (*Le pays des droits de l'homme*).<sup>1</sup>

This particular historical background is condensed in the alternatives proposed here: either '*une justice*' (which conveniently can refer interchangeably to a transcendent principle or to a set of institutions) or 'archaic codes'. Anthropologist Charlie Galibert argued in a brief but penetrating analysis (2004: 11-12) that this debate spiralled into schismogenesis, with Corsicans and Continentals increasingly divided by and confirmed in their suspicions: the former about the latter's misunderstanding of the island, the latter about the former's cultural complicity and disrespect for French law. Under this seemingly symmetrical logic, however, a more detailed analysis shows hospitality acting as what sociologists of science Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer have called a 'boundary object': 'an object which lives in multiple social worlds and which has different identities in each' (1989: 409). A boundary object is 'plastic enough to adapt to the local needs and constraints of the several parties employing [it], yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites' (1989: 393). And indeed, the nationalists were able to draw a very different meaning from hospitality, while ostensibly talking about the same thing, a meaning which turned the tables on the French universalist argument with which they were faced.

In the village in which one of Colonna's 'hosts' had been arrested, a banner was put up reading 'hospitality is not a crime', and the village was described as 'uniting in protest'. A group of nationalist protesters marched in front of the main offices of the regional government in Ajaccio, some wearing t-shirts which read, in Corsican: 'We have all helped Yvan'. The slogan was particularly carefully chosen: on the one hand, it once again indexed the culturalist claim that the action of sheltering a fugitive was not just an individual's decision, but something which 'any Corsican' would have done; on the other hand, it was reminiscent of a series of similar slogans which in each case implied a universalizing frame of reference by the claim to identity with a particular victim – paradigmatically 'we are all German Jews', the famous chant taken up by French student protesters in 1968 after one of their leaders, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, was attacked as a 'foreigner' by the leading Communist paper *L'humanité*. Through this complex of echoes and subtexts, the claim 'We have all helped Yvan' mirrored the scaling effect of French republicanism: that of locating itself simultaneously in the particular and the universal. One of the protesters, interviewed on the regional news, made the implicit explicit: 'I am proud that there are still people in Corsica who will help someone who is on the run ... it's ancestral. The thing to remember is that in Corsica during World War II, not a single Jew was sold [i.e. denounced]. This wasn't the case in France' (FR3 Corse, 11 July 2003).

Suddenly, Corsican hospitality, as an atavistic, ancestral cultural code, is revealed as the tip of the iceberg, the local extrusion of hospitality as a universal ethical principle – of Justice, in other words. The tables are now turned on France, collectively accused of failing to challenge the law at a time when the law was unjust. It is now the law of the land which is reduced to the merely contingent status of an archaic code. The scales have been reversed: where French Law loomed over Corsican particularism, Corsican Hospitality now looms over the contingency of French law.

### ***Derrida en Corse***

At this point one is strongly reminded of Jacques Derrida's now famous discussion of the paradoxes of hospitality. Unlike Pitt-Rivers (1968), who portrayed hospitality as a structural – if ambivalent – mechanism whose unwritten laws (born of 'sociological necessity' – 1968: 27) helped to manage the tension between the authority of the host

and the intrusion of the stranger, Derrida sharpens the ambivalence into an actual aporia, portraying hospitality as an ideal which requires and yet is negated by its practice (1997: 71ff.).<sup>2</sup>

Derrida (see Candea & da Col this volume) traces a constitutive and irreconcilable tension between two principles. The first is absolute, unconditional hospitality, which

implies that you don't ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself. Even if the other deprives you of your mastery or your home, you have to accept this. It is terrible to accept this, but that is the condition of unconditional hospitality: that you give up the mastery of your space, your home, your nation. It is unbearable. If, however, there is pure hospitality it should be pushed to this extreme (Derrida 1998: 70).

Paradoxically, however, this openness (which is for Derrida a figure of Justice) requires that which it negates: the mastery of a home in which to welcome the guest. The host must be in a position to shield his guest from external forces, including and particularly the force of the law and the prying eye of the state, ever eager to efface the boundary between the private, the at-home, and the public (Derrida 1997: 45-62).

How should we relate Derrida's philosophical pronouncements on hospitality to a particular ethnographic setting? The question has been asked before: Andrew Shryock (2008) has found striking connections between Derrida's work on hospitality and the narratives of the Balga Bedouin with whom he worked. Shryock suggested that these parallels might stem in part from a broadly shared cultural context, pointing to Derrida's upbringing as an Algerian Jew (2008: 409), but might also index a shared human desire for interactions which radically break with standard, everyday social or political frames of reference. Both of these arguments could contribute to explaining the singular fit between Derrida's theories and the Corsican nationalists' use of hospitality to turn the tables on French law. There is a third and rather more prosaic connection, however: the Corsican nationalist claims about hospitality in 2003 occurred against the backdrop of 'a widespread, diverse, and multicultural debate about hospitality' (Rosello 2001: 2) which had grown in France in the late 1990s in the wake of two high-profile public cases. The first was the expulsion of a group of undocumented immigrants who had sought shelter in a church; the second was the prosecution of a woman, Jacqueline Deltombe, for knowingly putting up an undocumented migrant (Rosello 2001: 23-48). Both of these '*affaires*' had generated extensive public coverage and debate, as well as a surge in publications around the history, philosophy, ethics, and sociology of hospitality. Derrida's thoughts about the relationship between hospitality, asylum, and the state emerged against this background and fed into it, alongside the work of other public intellectuals, film-makers, and novelists, who explicitly deployed the notion of hospitality as a lens through which to examine the tense relations between states and migrants, and to rethink postcoloniality more generally (Rosello 2001: 23-48; Shryock 2008: 409-11).

Although I have found no explicit mention of Derrida or of these earlier discussions in the arguments over Corsican hospitality which I have been tracing above, the resonances were nevertheless striking. For instance, a co-villager of one of Colonna's 'hosts', interviewed on national television, said: 'When someone comes to your door ... you don't ask for his identity card. You give him hospitality. Then, when he's feeling better, he goes, and that's it. It's as simple as that'. The mention of the identity card here echoes the prominent recent debates about documented and undocumented migrants,

rather than the case of the presumed killer Colonna, whose French nationality was never in doubt. Similarly, the 'We have all helped Yvan Colonna' slogan echoed the public manifesto of a group of French film directors in response to the Deltombe affair, which began: 'We are guilty, everyone of us, of having recently put up illegal immigrants' (quoted in Rosello 2001: 44).

Derrida thus emerges not simply as a theoretical resource for approaching the Corsican case, but, much more directly, as an element of the ethnographic landscape under consideration here: the prominent Parisian professor had played an important role (alongside a myriad of other academics, protesters, and cultural critics) in hospitality's transformation into a particular kind of rhetorical object in France, one which connected Kant, culture, French republicanism, immigration, ethics, and the law (Shryock 2008). Derridean and Corsican hospitality share, in other words, a particular, historically situated polemical context.

### *Pitt-Rivers en Corse*

This Derridean-style hospitality with its universalizing and state-challenging horizon, reconfigured at the hand of Corsican nationalists, muted a rather more limited narrative – one closer to the balanced and measured sociological laws outlined by Pitt-Rivers (1968). A clue to this came in Corsican friends' narratives concerning the situations of 'refuge/hospitality' before the Colonna case. One friend told me of her grandfather who had agreed to shelter in his house a dangerous bandit who had knocked on his door in the 1930s. When the police came for him, however, the bandit happened to have left the house and was sitting under a tree at the bottom of the garden. The host did not stop the police from entering the house, nor did he attempt to hide his inconvenient 'guest', who was clearly visible through the back window. The police cocked their rifles at the bandit there and then, but the host expressly told them he could not allow them to shoot him from his house – they would first have to step outside.

This account points to the abstract and territorially limited nature of refuge/hospitality (see Pitt-Rivers 1968: 26–7), and was further contextualized by the narrator in terms of a broader ambivalence about bandits themselves. As Wilson has pointed out, ideal-typical distinctions commonly drawn between the tragic and respected '*bandit d'honneur*' and the feared and ruthless '*mercenary bandit*' (*parcitore*) often tended to collapse in practice (1988: 339, 357), and the armed bandits' request for refuge could occasionally be perilously close to a home invasion. As Shryock puts it, following Derrida, 'welcome resembles trespass' (2008: 419) – the solution of strict and somewhat casuistic adherence to a limited territorial hospitality is a Pitt-Riversian, rather than a Derridean, response to this ambivalence. Another instance of this type of highly restrained account of the laws of hospitality was the response of a retired Corsican police officer who had told a journalist, three years before Colonna's arrest: 'If Yvan Colonna knocks on this door one night, I'd open up and take him in. Then, at 8 in the morning I'd say, "Alright, mate, now off you go". And that's when I would call the police' (Pivois 2003).

These spatially and temporally limited, emotionally restrained responses bring us back to Pitt-Rivers's sociological laws of hospitality, the kind of Corsican hospitality which Ravis-Giordani describes as 'the very opposite of spontaneous behaviour' (1983: 229). This 'sociological' hospitality implies a partial and temporary challenge to the law of the land, but does not even remotely index the kind of absolute openness which



would imply a propensity to relinquish mastery of one's own home. Nationalist appeals to Corsican hospitality in 2003 drew on this register, but they also availed themselves of the rhetorical legacy of Derrida (and others), whose efforts to produce 'a conceptual wedge to separate political constraints from ethical ones' (Shryock 2008: 410) had helped to establish the language of hospitality as a particularly potent ground for challenging the claims of republican 'Justice'. Derrida might well 'sound like a Bedouin' (Shryock 2008), but Corsican nationalists have also increasingly come to sound like Derrida.

### Ambivalent feedback

Reading Derrida thus tells us something about Corsican hospitality, albeit not in the sense one might first expect. Reciprocally, Corsican debates over hospitality can shed some light on what might at first seem an obscure or overwrought passage in Derrida's discussion of hospitality, in which he ruthlessly pursues the aporia to its logical extremities. Hospitality requires sovereignty over an 'at-home' ('so I can receive whom I wish', Derrida 1997: 53), and this is the very seed of its negation, since '[w]herever the "at-home" is violated, wherever such a violation at any rate is perceived to have taken place, we may predict a privatizing, indeed a familist, indeed – if we enlarge the circle – an ethnocentric and nationalist, and therefore virtually xenophobic reaction' (Derrida 1997: 51). This may seem a somewhat extreme, perhaps even slightly shrill, logical deduction, and yet it finds an echo in Corsica, where hospitality is in fact invoked with surprising frequency to justify or explain inter-community tensions.

A striking public case of this occurred later in the summer of 2003, following an article in the *Figaro* newspaper in which journalist Christine Clerc recounted how continental policeman Francis, and his wife Myriam, were driven out of the Corsican village in which they had settled a few months previously, after their car was blown up one night. Christine Clerc, a continental journalist with a long experience of writing about Corsica, was staying in the same village at the time of the events, and wrote an emotionally charged piece which was published the week after the couple had left (Clerc 2003).

During my stay in Corsica, I had heard on a number of occasions of similar 'expulsions' of incomers from Corsican villages (although mostly the incomers were North African rather than continental). Corsicans who told these stories held a range of opinions about them, but it was not uncommon for justification to be given precisely in terms of a violation of the laws of hospitality. People would say, knowingly, that for this kind of thing to happen, these people must have *done* something<sup>3</sup> – and this was also the reaction of many of my Corsican friends to the case reported by Clerc, which, alongside the Colonna case, loomed very large both in the local news and in local conversation in the summer of 2003.

The case above validates Derrida's concerns, highlighting the power of (violated) hospitality as a language in which to justify exclusion and retribution. This language also played a prominent role in Corsican nationalist representations of Corsican-French relations more generally. Since the 1970s, the cartoonist Battì Manfruellì has provided highly vivid illustrations of certain concepts, narratives, and moods central to Corsican regionalist and nationalist structures of feeling. In one particularly long storyboard, drawn in stark black and white, Battì sets out a silent narrative whose title word, 'Hospitalité', is drawn in a progressively decaying script, with the final letters

nearly reduced to dust, save the final *t*, which stays standing as the cross of a gravestone – the text here is its own context.

The allegorical cartoon features a Corsican shepherd progressively crowded out and finally trampled underfoot by an increasing crowd of suited incomers, to the first of whom he had extended a gracious hospitality. Unlike the rounded nose of the shepherd, the incomers' noses are a strikingly pointy cone. The Corsican-speaker at this point recognizes a visual pun, since the Corsican name for the continental French, *pinzutu*, literally translates as 'pointy'. Batti has turned a non-figurative term (usually attributed to the *tricorne* hats worn by the French troops who invaded Corsica in 1769) into a phenotype. The shepherd's dog snarls as his dead master fades into dust and, in the final plate, takes to the *maquis* and watches, in hiding, the revels of the victorious incomers. Behind him a decaying wall carries, in huge letters, the word 'fora' – 'get out'.

Batti drew this cartoon in 1986, at a time when the underground paramilitary organization the FLNC (Corsican National Liberation Front) targeted the symbols of 'French colonial power', destroying tax offices, post offices, hotels, and banks with plastic explosives. 'Civilian' casualties in these attacks were few and unintentional. But the 1980s and early 1990s saw the height of *ad hominem* intimidations of Continentals (via destruction of property or anonymous death threats), aiming – often successfully – to create an exodus of continental civil servants. Constituting the visual background of these troubled times were the graffiti reading *IFF* (*I Francesi Fora* – French out!), to which Batti's final plate refers.

In this context, the fact that Yvan Colonna was a Corsican man sheltered by Corsicans from French law introduces a deep uncertainty at the heart of these debates. That is to say, despite the occasional reference to the abstract figure of the fugitive (and, paradigmatically, Jews in hiding during the Second World War), discussions of hospitality in 2003 were often closely associated both in nationalist and in everyday discourse with discussions of *solidarity*. One friend noted, in reference to the cases of Corsicans taking in bandits in the early twentieth century, that the bandits were often 'bastards' ... but then the policemen were all *pinzuti*. Seen like this, hospitality-as-solidarity becomes little more than segmentary fission and fusion, as Galibert (2004: 11–12) points out. What appears locally as a principle of openness to the other (the enemy, the stranger to the family or the village, etc.) is revealed by a scale-shift as a coalition of the same (Corsicans) against the 'really' other: the continental French. Here is, in a very concrete sense, the potential outlined by Derrida, for hospitality to turn from a principle of openness to the other, into a principle of ethnic closure upon the self.

But the above-mentioned case of journalist Christine Clerc also highlights a second path whereby hospitality gives way to hostility: two days after Clerc's article was published, a four-wheel drive was parked across the drive of the house in which the reporter was staying, its windscreen plastered with scaled-up photocopies of her article. Later a group of villagers reportedly confronted the journalist, accusing her of 'questioning their sense of welcome and insulting Corsica'. Although still convinced she had done the right thing in publishing, the journalist herself concurred: 'It was [my] reference to hospitality, that cardinal Corsican virtue, which hurt the inhabitants of [the village]' (Chayet & Chichizola 2003). The next morning, she woke up to find seven bullet-holes in her own car. As villagers gathered around her vandalized vehicle, one woman declared that she was 'against violence', 'for the Republic', but 'against the *Figaro*



article'. Clerc noted that 'in this conception of things, the victim is held responsible' (Chayet 2003).

Hospitality as a boundary object is, in other words, notably double-edged. On the one hand, powerful claims can be made by accusing hypostasized meta-hosts of inhospitality – as, for instance, Tahar Ben Jelloun did to France (Ben Jelloun 1997; see Shryock 2008) and Christine Clerc and others to Corsica. On the other hand, such claims leave one open to the charge of being an ungrateful guest who has 'insulted' the hospitality of one's hosts.

### **(The problem with) scale-free abstractions**

Once again, we seem to find in Corsica a clear counterpart of the paradoxes of hospitality highlighted by Derrida's discussion. However, to leave it there, to locate (as Derrida does) such paradoxes at the heart of 'hospitality itself', would be something of an explanatory sleight of hand. Rather, I will argue that the ease with which hospitality turns into hostility in the debates above is in great part related to their 'scale-free' nature. Unmoored from the specifics of time and place, hypostasized meta-hosts and meta-guests swap places with dizzying rapidity: Corsicans, Continentals, Corsica, and France emerge now as disempowered victim, now as powerful perpetrator (see Candea 2006), recalling Derrida's equally scale-free 'interpretive acrobatics' (Shryock 2008: 409). How did we get to this, when the actual guests and hosts involved in the various debates above are variously a reporter, a village community, an allegorical shepherd, a nationalist and his friends, Corsica as a whole?

The notions of guest and host cultures, guest and host communities, guest and host societies are commonly used throughout the social-scientific literature. And yet when one 'zooms in' to what has been described as a 'host community', one finds it is made up of some individual 'hosts', perhaps, but also of people who deal with strangers in different ways: as paying customers, as indifferent passers-by, as intruders. It would indeed be surprising if the combined effect of these multiple individual reactions to strangers could straightforwardly, by the simple process of 'zooming out', translate into a kind of macro-organic 'host'. It would be surprising, in other words, if a 'host community' were to look or behave anything like a 'host'.

Far from casting any light on this problem, Derrida himself plays fast and loose with differences in scale, as if phenomena described on one scale automatically extended to others. We have seen this in the above-mentioned passage on xenophobia. Elsewhere, noting that, in classical Greece, guest-friendship (*xenia*) extended to the patrilineal descendants of the contractors, Derrida concludes:

[T]his is not the mere extension of an individual right, the extension to the family and to the generations of a right given in the first instance to the individual. No, what this reflects ... is the fact that, from the outset, the right to hospitality involves *a house, a lineage, a family, one kin-group or ethnic group*, receiving another kin-group or ethnic group (1997: 27, emphasis added).

By what mechanism does Derrida travel from a house to an ethnic group, from a family to a nation? What exactly is he doing when he 'enlarges the circle'? As Marilyn Strathern puts it, 'To draw a comparison, or make an analogy, is not necessarily to impute connection: it may indicate a resemblance, rather than a relation ... yet the very act of comparing also constitutes a making of connections, and evokes a metaphorical relationship' (Strathern 2004: 51). Is Derrida suggesting resemblances, pointing at existing connections, or producing new metaphorical relationships?

This is once again where I think Derrida's writing is more useful as an ethnographic object than as a theoretical guide. For it prompts us to ask: why should hospitality so often be associated with this particular form of analogical thinking in which the microcosm is supposed to correspond to the macrocosm? Whence derives its supposed power to relate into causal chains entities on different scales: people and peoples, houses and nations, thresholds and borders? Such metaphorical extensions of the logic of hospitality to larger entities have been explicitly criticized by Rosello (2001) and Shryock (2008), particularly in debates around immigration, where 'the vision of the immigrant as a guest is a metaphor that has forgotten that it is a metaphor' (Rosello 2001: 3). My prime concern here is less with criticizing such usage, however, and more with analysing the workings of what is perhaps too easily dismissed as mere metaphor.

### Shifting scales is hard work

In the above account, we have seen hospitality deployed to effect a number of quite potent scale-shifts and reversals, which I would hesitate to describe as merely metaphorical: hypostasized as a traditional Corsican cultural form, hospitality referred the agency of Colonna's individual hosts to a collective cultural entity, whose codes they 'merely obeyed'. In reference to hospitality extended to Jewish fugitives during the Second World War, hospitality gave Corsican culture far broader and more universal resonance than French law. Elsewhere, hospitality emerged as a rallying call to unite whole villages in support of a prosecuted host, or in reaction to a perceived insult addressed to a village as a collective host.

As Giovanni da Col and I discuss in this volume, Michael Herzfeld (1987) was the first to point to the scalar properties of hospitality, its way of enabling dominated or smaller entities to englobe or encompass larger ones. For Herzfeld, this relies on and helps establish an 'essential homology between several levels of collective identity – village, ethnic group, district, nation. What goes for the family home also goes, *at least by metaphorical extension*, for the national territory' (1987: 76, emphasis added).

Parsing these insights with Bruno Latour's (2005) discussions of the ways in which actants manage to deploy themselves on different scales, I would argue that such operations of hospitality upon scale need to be considered as more than metaphorical – or, rather, that we need to attend to the materiality of 'metaphors' (*metaphorein* – transportations) themselves. Hospitality, becomes, in Latour's terms, a kind of 'standard' which launches 'tiny bridges to overcome the gaps created by disparate frames of reference' (Latour 2005: 177). Hospitality as a 'standard' renders individuals, villages, and nations commensurable – and thus, in some respects, interchangeable.

However, foregrounding hospitality's role as a practical way of shifting scales also takes us away from the image of identities arranged in neat concentric circles (house, village, nation). In practice, there is always space for negotiation and debate: is the scaled-up version of hospitality the accommodation provided by a hotel chain ('the hospitality industry'), is it the collective warmth of a well-disposed population, or is it something else again (Herzfeld 1987)? Should hospitality be used as model to think about immigration, or should we rather imagine the nation as a scaled-up factory, say, or hotel?

The point is not to reject all metaphors, but to choose one's metaphor carefully: each of these alternatives enables certain forms of politics and disables others (Rosello 2001: 34–5). Such questions are always up for grabs, because, however convincing the

analogical model of levels of identity may seem, there is rarely in point of fact one single way of scaling up or down: you can take different paths which get you to different places.

But the notion is also intended to point to the materiality of the processes at stake here. Hospitality as a social practice is grounded in specific objects, sites, and boundaries – houses, thresholds, coffeepots, televisions, tables, and chairs – and its form is thus profoundly modified by attempts to scale it up, be it into mass tourism or into an ethical model for citizenship and statecraft (Shryock 2004; 2008). Such attempts are possible, but they take work. The nationalists' scaling up of individual acts of defiance by Colonna's hosts into a Corsican challenge to French law certainly involved rhetoric, but it also involved printing banners and t-shirts, mobilizing people to wear them, giving a physical presence to the abstractions of a 'hospitable People'.

Even the most evidently conceptual or symbolic work described in this article, such as Batti's allegorical depiction of Corsica and France as shepherd host and suited guest, or Derrida's own involvement in scaling hospitality up to the level of French public debate, is still achieved by concrete means, with pen and paper, in particular places, and has effects only insofar as it is read, shown, heard, and discussed (cf. Latour 2005: 187).

Thus, the individuals who blew up the policeman's car produced by their anonymity a situation in which the victims felt the village as a whole was chasing them out. This framing of the village was further solidified by the newspaper article, which tied together the anonymous act and the past and present behaviour of other villagers into one coherent narrative about the inhospitality of the village, and implicitly of Corsica. This in turn mobilized angry villagers, who – irrespective of the ways in which each of them might treat his or her actual guests – found themselves transformed one morning into an element of an inhospitable meta-host on display before an even bigger encompassing public: the nation, as represented by readers of a popular daily newspaper. These processes of scaling are entirely traceable to entities and processes on the ground (a blown-up car, a journalist's observations written up and emailed to the Paris headquarters of the *Figaro*, the mass printing and circulation of said daily, etc.). Hospitality, as a shared focus in this controversy, also operates in this irredeemably local way: as a boundary object circulating through talk and print, read into actions and silences, fought over, disbelieved, and so forth.

### **Why a village is not a house**

It is important to point this out, lest we forget the multiple gaps which have been papered over in deployments of hospitality as a scale-free abstraction. As Ravis-Giordani observes, the experience of walking into the streets and squares of a village as a stranger is quite different from that of stepping into a hospitable house (1983: 182). Village streets are internally a public space (for co-villagers) but a 'private' space for outsiders. Yet there are no concrete mechanisms of opening or closure, and no way, therefore, politely to request the right to enter. There is no door to knock on, no host to whom a demand for hospitality could actually be addressed. These concrete objects and situations of interpersonal hospitality (a door to knock on, a threshold to cross) are precisely what enables actual hosts and guests to distinguish in each concrete instance 'welcome' from 'trespass' (Shryock 2008: 419). In the complete absence of such structures, the stranger would remain forever in a state of undecidability, between intruder and guest, and the village would become one of the 'heterotopias' of which Foucault (1966) said that they 'seem to be pure and simple openings, but ... generally hide curious

exclusions. Everyone can enter into these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion – we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded'. Luckily, procedures of pragmatic integration at the level of the whole village do, nevertheless, exist, and the most obvious is precisely inter-individual hospitality itself, which, as Pitt-Rivers points out, incorporates the stranger practically into a host community, but only via the intermediary of their individual host (1968: 15–16).

Crucially, however, the process whereby the guest is welcomed, all at once, into the household does not have a direct collective equivalent. Needless to say, buying or renting a home in a Corsican village does not in and of itself achieve that effect. Other practical avenues of incorporation have to be found, and in practice generally are. A newcomer into a Corsican village can of course in time come to feel 'integrated'. But this looks nothing like stepping over a threshold. It takes a long time and involves quite a lot of initial awkwardness, as well as some hard work in managing relationships and learning to know people, places, things, and stories (Candea 2010). The ways in which it can go wrong are multiple, but they are irreducible to a single model of hospitality offered and subsequently violated or withdrawn.

To say this is not in any way to minimize the plight of the continental couple, nor is it to justify the violent retaliation against the continental journalist who denounced it. The point is simply that the journalist's location of responsibility at the level of the village (or, indeed, implicitly, of Corsica) was one particular form of scaling-up, and one which, like the nationalists' scaling-up of individual acts of complicity into conformity to a cultural or ethical imperative, produces its effects by muting some complexities. The same can be said of Derridean invocations of Hospitality as a scale-free abstraction.

### **Coda: on playing host to abstractions**

A certain type of scale-free philosophical abstraction, imported from post-structuralist philosophy, is being given increasing weight in anthropological accounts – 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. These figures are left in something of an anthropological limbo, however: while they tend to be drawn on for inspiration in some general sense, they are not after all straightforwardly *explanatory*, as if Derrida's 'interpretive acrobatics' could somehow shed light on the actual relationships, tensions, and ethnographic complications of hospitality in Corsica. To make that mistake would be to rediscover the simplifying work which was done, for Durkheimian functionalists, by the organic analogy: by postulating meta-logics of relationality ('sovereignty', 'othering', 'hospitality'), scale-free abstractions mistaken for analytical tools would make it easy to speak of and make assumptions about collective hypostasized entities such as cultures, states, societies, and so forth, as if the work of analysing these were little more than a straightforward process of 'zooming out'.

There is, however, a way for anthropology to play host to such scale-free abstractions without relinquishing their own disciplinary at-home. That is to treat them with the consideration and partly detached care due both to guests and to matters ethnographic – as I have attempted to do with hospitality in this paper. In most academic discussions of hospitality, as in discussions of Corsican hospitality by nationalists, journalists, and others, 'hospitality' features as a broader structure, pattern, or paradigmatic principle, something which frames, explains, or motivates the actions of individuals 'on the

ground'. At its largest, hospitality is a universal ethical imperative which informs the actions of individuals or serves as a standard by which to judge them. At its smallest, it is a local cultural form which frames and gives meaning to the actions of a relatively small group of people. In this paper, by contrast, hospitality has been shrunk even further, and treated not as something which encompasses, frames, or explains people's actions, but as an object of contention, concern, and debate. 'Corsican hospitality' is a nebulous entity which some people want to preserve, which others doubt the existence of, which others still identify as making them act, and so forth. While it provides a seemingly common language in the debates above, hospitality more often than not seems to be a common language in which to argue and disagree, a language of accusation and disappointed hopes, a language of insult and wounded pride. Hospitality, it seems, is 'schismogenetic' (see Bateson 1935).

One might be tempted to conclude, following Derrida and others, that this has something to do with the ambivalent nature of Hospitality itself (as a scale-free principle or structure), its inherent propensity to collapse into its opposite. And yet closer examination shows that points of tension in practice coalesce around scale-shifts: when an individual's action is taken to be representative of an entire group, or, conversely, when an entire group is seen to act against a single individual.

By contrast, cases in which specific interpersonal relationships are carefully managed tend to remain in the realm of ambivalent politeness, tempered obligation, and cordial familiarity, as in my landlord's careful negotiation of the interface between private and commercial hospitality: hospitality there really does become an object for co-operation across different social worlds – more than this, it becomes a way in which these different social worlds begin, tentatively, to be woven together. When these relationships break down, as they sometimes do, one is at least in a position to know who one's enemies are.

In other words, if we suspend for a moment the temptation to simply 'apply' Derrida to Corsica, and take instead a careful ethnographic look at what is going on, we will find that it is not hospitality itself which is schismogenetic, but rather the abrupt scale-shifts which suddenly pit an individual against a whole community, or subsume one individual's action into a collective will. This in turn leads one to wonder whether part of the reason why Derrida finds such a radical antinomy at the very heart of hospitality, part of the reason why his hospitality seems to be constantly, breathlessly buffeted from absolute self-annihilating openness to the most virulent xenophobia and back again, is precisely because he chooses to unmoor his discussion from the concrete objects and forms which, in practice, allow people to decide where welcome ends and trespass begins. By contrast, Pitt-Rivers, who, despite his own universalizing tendencies, keeps both feet in his ethnographic material, finds ambivalence at the heart of hospitality, but also the means to stabilize it.

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> On this peculiar propensity of French republicanism to claim legitimacy both from a specific location in time and place *and* from a claim to standing for abstract principles which transcend time and place, see Candea (2010).

<sup>2</sup> There are strong echoes here of what Derrida (1991) does to Maussian discussions of the gift (see Laidlaw 2000).

<sup>3</sup> A number of nationalist splinter-group militias formed during the late 1990s and early 2000s who targeted North Africans and Franco-Maghrebians in Corsica, accusing them of drug-dealing and criminal offences (see Candea 2006 for a more general discussion of racism and 'reverse victimhood').

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## ***Derrida en Corse ? De l'hospitalité comme une abstraction sans échelle***

### *Résumé*

Il y a quelques années, la presse française s'est faite la chambre d'écho d'un débat sur l'immigration qui inspira à Derrida des idées influentes sur l'hospitalité. Les paradoxes de l'hospitalité s'emparent à nouveau de l'imaginaire public français aujourd'hui, à cause cette fois du refuge qu'un homme soupçonné de meurtre a pu trouver en Corse. L'auteur retrace ici l'hospitalité corse sous ses différentes incarnations ethnographiques, médiatiques, et philosophiques ou littéraires. Par un compte-rendu ethnographique scrupuleux des déplacements matériels et sémiotiques qui permettent aux événements à une échelle d'avoir un effet et une signification à une autre échelle, il recommande de se méfier des usages analytiques ou philosophiques de l'hospitalité considérée comme une abstraction dépourvue d'échelle.

Matei Candea is a lecturer at the Department of Anthropology, Durham University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge (2006) for work on alterity and relationality in Corsica. He is the author of *Corsican fragments: difference, knowledge and fieldwork* (Indiana University Press, 2010), and editor of *The social after Gabriel Tarde: debates and assessments* (Routledge, 2010). His current research focuses on human-animal relations in science.

*Department of Anthropology, Durham University, Dawson Building, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK.  
matei.candea@durham.ac.uk*