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**IN THE NAME OF ALTERITY: THE INSUFFICIENCY AND NECESSITY OF
POLITICAL HOSPITALITY IN WELCOMING THE FOREIGNER**

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ABSTRACT

Franco-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida devoted a substantial corpus to the exploration of hospitality. Derrida did not conceive of this topic in a merely mundane manner: the provision of sustenance and shelter to guests in our homes. Rather, Derrida used such a conception of hospitality as a skeleton upon which to develop a body of thought that ultimately results in an impasse, or what Derrida calls an *aporia*, between an unconditional requirement of hospitality that is ideal but impossible to practice, and a conditional limitation of hospitality that is imperfect but always offered in actuality. What I attempt to do in this essay is to explore an *aporia* that calls for us to both (1) welcome the guest, particularly the foreigner-guest, face-to-face, without asking *anything*, even a name, of him or her, but to also (2) intelligently calculate the risk that is presented by particular guests and types of guests, and, furthermore, to recognize and call the guest by his or her proper name, that title which makes him or her individual. The proper name is the primary vehicle by which this essay travels through the Derridean conception of hospitality (a conception heavily influenced by Derrida's longtime interlocutor, Lithuanian-born Judeo-French philosopher and Talmudic commentator Emmanuel Levinas). We discover how crucial *the name* is to identifying the guest in a number of ways, and thus how it is used against the guest to associate him or her with certain threats. However, there is something friendly in the name as well, and this is ultimately what the essay advocates: to transport the inherently friendly and welcoming spirit of unconditional hospitality to its conditional counterpart.

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Introduction

In an interview with the French newspaper *Le Monde*, Franco-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida is first asked what he means when, in his book *Of Hospitality*, he opposes “the law of absolute, unconditioned, hyperbolic hospitality” to “the laws (in the plural) of hospitality, namely, the conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men or women who give a welcome as well as the men or women who receive it.”¹ Derrida responds that decisions of hospitality must always operate in negotiation of this antinomy or, as he calls it, *aporia*, a response that can be summed up in one line: “This is the double law of hospitality: to calculate the risks, yes, but without closing the door on the incalculable, that is, on the future and the foreigner.”² Derrida maintains that *the* law of hospitality, the impossible absolute, must be used as a guiding principle, an ideal upon which “the best arrangements . . . , the least bad conditions, the most just legislation,” i.e. the *working* conditions of hospitality toward the foreigner, must be predicated.³ This view of hospitality recalls the thought of Derrida’s long-time interlocutor Emmanuel Levinas concerning the political. Levinas notes that initially the I, or in Derridean terms the host (*hôte*), is held hostage (*hôtage*) (a term that Derrida uses as well)⁴ by the other, or in Derridean terms the guest, but in the same breath states that the host is “in principle responsible” in this way “*prior to* the justice that makes distributions, before the measurements of justice.”⁵ In other words, what Levinas calls the political presents the host with a third, another Other (*l’autrui*) whom the host must

¹ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 75 and 77.

² Jacques Derrida, “The Principle of Hospitality,” trans. Ashley Thompson, *parallax* 11, no. 1 (2005): 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 6, translator’s brackets.

⁴ For example, Derrida uses exact Levinasian vocabulary in describing the hostage in his essay comprised of lecture notes, “Hostipitality.” See page 365 of *Acts of Religion* (cited below and listed in bibliography).

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 216, emphasis mine.

recognize, and at this time the host must begin to arbitrate and divide his time and efforts between these multiple others. The political, then, indicates an evolution of the host's relationship with the guest from the wholly ethical, in the spirit of the Derridean notion of absolute hospitality, to the political, in the spirit of conditional hospitality which involves laws of varying degrees and kinds.

The foreigner, however, is a victim of this emergence of the political. This is because, subsequent to the shift from the ethical to the political (the political always already being intrinsic to human relationships), human interaction—and hence the laws of (conditional) hospitality—becomes less about interpersonal negotiation and more about relations between and appraisals of international political entities, ethnicities/races, nations, states, religions, cultures, subcultures, language groups, and so on. The foreigner is impaired by this phenomenon because her image develops in kind. Ashira, to use a fictitious but timely example, is treated less as an individual while residing in the United States than as a speaker of Arabic, a practitioner of Islam, and an emigrant of Saudi Arabia. That is to say, Ashira is treated less as a sovereign individual than as the member *of* several groups. The view of her as a threat in an Islamophobic United States rests not on her personal résumé but on her political and religious associations. She is essentialized, certainly, persecuted, perhaps, excluded, and possibly even physically threatened because she wears a veil, quotes the Koran, says her prayers in Arabic in the direction of Mecca (perhaps during the workday, perhaps during the school day), identifies herself as a Muslim, and even because her accent is un-American and her skin color is slightly dark. Indeed, the chances are significant that Ashira is not welcomed unconditionally as a vulnerable guest of the United States and given the chance to shape her own visage as so many white, bourgeois, heterosexual, Euro-American males are, for example.

I argue in this essay that what accounts for the exclusion, occlusion, and preclusion of (and violence against) the foreigner is the inability to recognize and engage him or her on a face-

to-face level—that is, the instinct to demand the guest’s name thoughtlessly and prejudicially. The host group is a political element—an amalgamation of people of similar qualities, language, and/or other characteristics. It follows that any foreigner encountered by this element (the measure of sameness, as opposed to alterity or otherness) is encountered not as a sovereign individual but as a fragment *of* some greater entity—the country of origin, the religion of one’s family or culture, etc.—with which the host may or may not have a pact, peace treaty, or understanding. In making this case, I explore Jacques Derrida’s work on hospitality (which in turn is heavily influenced by Emmanuel Levinas). While doing this I cannot help but reference Derrida’s personal experiences on occasion, since much of his life and *oeuvre* seem to contribute to both a treatise on and a testimony of hospitality and its vicissitudes. Moreover, the case that I make falls directly along the lines of Derrida’s bifurcation of hospitality. We might notice, if we contemplate the separation, that unconditional hospitality, while impracticable, is much more conceivable on an individual (or ethical) level. Any potential threat from the other is easier to assess and manage when one is focused on the appraisal of *one* other. Contra absolute hospitality, however, political hospitality (the laws of hospitality) becomes increasingly stringent as threats, in tandem with the people who embody them, proliferate. The latter form of hospitality, which operates on the macro-level, such as that of the state, functions in such a manner as to cast a net over the (incalculable) eventualities of millions, perhaps billions of others. In order to make this endeavor more manageable, precautions must be essentialized (no exceptions) and enforcement impartial (i.e., equality before the law). In arguing my thesis I will be implicitly encouraging an attempt at ethical, face-to-face (or one-on-one) encounters before implementing large-scale policies of hospitality, such as those concerning immigration. In that effort, however, the argument will ultimately realize a freshly constructed *aporia* in the Derridean corpus, an *aporia* which is the heart that pumps blood through the body of this essay: Unconditionally, one should welcome the foreign other face-to-face, and yet political

considerations require one to calculate the risks presented by the foreign masses; moreover, ethical considerations carrying over to their political counterpart require one to honor the other in several ways by associating him or her politically in order to separate him or her ethically, i.e. to separate him or her from the threat. I will develop this essay by developing an analysis of this *aporia* over two chapters. The first chapter will advocate the unconditional half of the *aporia* by exploring the essentializations of the other and how they inhibit (and inhabit) hospitality. But this chapter will also lead in the direction of the latter, political component of the *aporia* with its discovery that unconditional hospitality must be perverted in order to truly recognize and respect the foreign other as an individual other. That is to say, in order to separate this foreign guest from the always-already essentialized group, a group that always precedes the individual foreigner-guest. The second chapter, supported by the case of the stateless person or refugee, will demonstrate the uninviting quality of a complete face-to-face approach to the other qua unique, undiminished (and so unnamed) alterity. I will bring these two chapters together with a much shorter third chapter discussing the difficulty of the *aporia* qua theory and how this translates to our action on the *aporia* discussed in this essay. Furthermore, this entire project will come to revolve around one element: the proper name. This is the vehicle with which we will traverse this network of hospitality and its aporetic central hub. As a result of this analysis, I will have demonstrated the irresolvable *aporia* and by proxy have exhibited the resonance of the deconstructive approach in considering issues of hospitality.

Chapter 1

Face-to-Face

In today's globalizing world, contact between diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic groups, among others, is more common than at any other point in human history. To be sure, this is positive in many ways, but such frequent contact also accentuates some of the distortions that are intrinsic to communication between dissimilar groups. Today's United States is a convenient example, as domestic aversion to immigration from Mexico and Central America and a war on terrorism fixated on extremists from Muslim-majority nations demonstrate. These "others" of the United States are colloquially perceived to be, in the case of illegal immigrants from Latin America, criminal, poor, manipulative, and opportunistic, and, in the case of Muslims, especially Middle Eastern and Arab Muslims, fundamentalist, overzealous, violent, and resentful. Similar situations have erupted daily in other nations around the world. Immigrants from Zimbabwe have been lynched for their presumed predation of South African jobs,⁶ African immigrants in the southern province of Calabria in Italy have come to blows with residents of Rosarno for similar reasons,⁷ and China is experiencing a reassessment of its views on race as it becomes more multicultural.⁸ As these cases demonstrate, we are often shown an essentialist, prejudiced, and unwelcoming depiction of the global façade in lieu of the pluralist and cosmopolitan community that we are reputed to be fostering at this point in human history. Because of the threats (comparatively) common to a group of people, each individual within that

⁶ Celia W. Dugger, "Rising Anger at Other Africans Fuels South Africa Attacks," *New York Times*, December 20, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/21/world/africa/21safrica.html?_r=1.

⁷ Rachel Donadio, "Race Riots Grip Italian Town, and Mafia is Suspected," *New York Times*, January 10, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/11/world/europe/11italy.html?th&emc=th>.

⁸ *New York Times*, "China's Changing Views on Race," December 13, 2009, <http://roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/13/chinas-changing-views-on-race/?8au&emc=au>.

group is deemed representative of those threats; the few who harbor such threats make things worse for the many.

It is interesting to note, in light of the above accounts, a statement that Derrida makes in his essay “Hostipitality”⁹: “We do not know what hospitality is.”¹⁰ This statement is not as straightforward as it seems. Derrida is not necessarily interested in delimiting a definition of hospitality qua term or concept. Rather, he perceives that we do not know exactly what an act of hospitality *looks* like. We know what most of the words mean, that is, we possess a mutually comprehensible lexicon of hospitality that contains key terms like “invitation” and “guest.” But even this dialect lacks a handle on the few terms which are, incidentally, the most important. For instance, Derrida refers to his own statement, that we do not know what hospitality is, as “a performative contradiction which bids welcome by acknowledging that we do not know what ‘welcome’ means and that perhaps no one welcomed is ever completely welcomed....”¹¹ Derrida reminds us that he issues this proposal in his own language and so is “receiving, inviting, accepting, or welcoming” us in French, where he is “master in [his] own home.”¹² This gesture, offered from host to guest (*hôte à hôte*), is a performative contradiction due to the fact that host and guest are lost as discrete individual terms in the French. The statement in turn leads to a conditioning of the welcome, since an unconditional welcome would be silent¹³ and would witness the guest (*hôte*) usurping the host (*hôte*) as master of the house.¹⁴ Indeed, Derrida’s understanding of the welcome, offered from within a language and culture with which he is familiar and comfortable, is inherently limited in its offering as a result of its linguistic

⁹ This is an essay apart from the one of the same name mentioned in the Introduction, which was composed from lecture notes.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” trans. Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki* 5, no. 3 (2000): 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ Otherwise, the foreigner suffers the violence of a language “imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc.,” something Derrida does by issuing his proclamation in French. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123; 125.

exclusivity and hence its propensity to “[fold] the foreign other into the internal law of the host.”¹⁵ This limits both the meaning of the “welcome” and its scope. It becomes clearer: we do not know what hospitality looks like—we do not know to whom it is offered if it is not offered to all.

At the same time that Derrida’s statement circumscribes the character of the welcome guest, it does the same for the unwelcome or uninvited stranger—not surprisingly, the words “foreigner” or “stranger” (*hostis, étranger, xenos*) develop in counterbalance to the word “welcome.” Derrida notes that in determining the other as stranger (as *strange* to the host, as foreign or unknown), the host “is already introducing the circles of conditionality that are family, nation, state, and citizenship.”¹⁶ These circles are not highly interpersonal, however. They are, in fact, more or less vague generalizations of safety intended to indicate to the host a respective level of threat. Moreover, they are all bound to language. For instance, the host’s family is able to share a conversation in a domestic tongue that includes memories, idiosyncratic remarks, inside jokes, and nicknames. The family is (nearly) the most intimate—the safest, the most *familiar*—circle of conditionality that a host can grant. The family can not only cross the threshold without resistance from the host, but many family members are hosts themselves, residing, as they do, on the same side of the threshold as the master of the house. Moving outward on this whorl of conditionality, the city, village, or province, and often the nation, shares a common language and so there is often a brand of trust within this circle that is still comforting but more distant—American citizens, for instance, do not welcome all English-speakers through their doors. The latter circle also has the potential for increasing marginalization: discrimination against dialect and accent, for example. Even circles of conditionality such as religion share a lexicon of deities to be praised, prayers to be intoned, and blasphemy to be avoided. Indeed, even the face of the other speaks volumes, as we connect markers like skin color, physiognomy, and

¹⁵ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” *Angelaki*, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

clothing styles to signifiers that are either damning or welcoming; there is a semiotics of the face that is taken to be as telling as a spoken language. Finally, the threshold between sameness (deriving from what Levinas calls the “Same,” whom we are calling the “host”) and alterity is rooted in communicative soil. The first threshold of hospitality, Derrida states, is between the private and the public, which entails that “private mail in the classic form (the letter, the postcard, etc.) ... circulate without control.... It must be neither read nor intercepted. The same is true, in principle, for the phone, the fax, e-mail, and naturally for the Internet.”¹⁷ The private thoughts of the host, articulated as they may be through these media, comprise the first threshold over which anyone residing outside of the host’s circle of sameness is discouraged to cross (and this aversion to intrusion gets increasingly *hostile* as one advances toward the perimeter)—that is, at least without the invitation of the host.

The purpose of noting this linguistic stripe spanning the whorl of hospitality is to illustrate how impersonal the circles of conditionality can become and therefore that, just like the welcome guest, we do not know what the stranger or foreigner looks like either. The lexicon required for inclusion in each of these circles expands as the capacity for hospitality narrows. One’s “private” dialect is absolutely exclusive—initially immanent—but is most likely to be divulged in private correspondence with family and friends and is then still limited according to circles of intimacy, the nuclear family being among the closest in most any society. This private idiom in turn overlaps with a larger glossary exclusive to the family, and so on along various concatenations running through social life, subculture, religion, and occupation, until one finally reaches the bounds of the language group where intimacy and hospitality are as guarded and as reserved as ever. Once at the borders of the language group, however, there is nowhere else to go; intimacy is exhausted. Derrida himself recognizes that “exiles, the deported, the expelled, the rootless, the stateless, lawless nomads, absolute foreigners, often continue to recognize the language, what is called the mother tongue, as their ultimate homeland, and even their last resting

¹⁷ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 49.

place.”¹⁸ There is little, if any, room for intimate communication outside of the native language and so there is little structure with which to build trust, friendliness—in short, a hospitable atmosphere. Maybe our foreigner-guest waits here, then, at the limits of conversation.

And yet, we must ask ourselves: What does translate across the linguistic border? Or at least, what translates with the least adulteration, with the greatest integrity? Perhaps the proper name? The proper name is the universal communicative structure between languages and the anchor of one’s identity. Granted, the names Pierre in French and Peter in English are virtual cognates, but Pierre remains Pierre when he visits the United States and Peter remains Peter to Francophones when he studies at the Sorbonne. As Derrida notes, “a proper name cannot be translated like another word in a language” and in fact “does not belong to language,” or at least “to the ordinary functioning of language.”¹⁹ Obviously, then, there is a difference between the name as such and the name of a particular, singular person, but this objection which we have allowed to cross the threshold of our discussion, though uninvited, has something to offer to us as hosts. Indeed, the name is illustrative of the tension between group and individual, between a group of others and the one other who seeks refuge in my dwelling, whether that dwelling be nation or neighborhood, religion or residence. This tension can be summed up in a question: How to separate the proper name from the name proper *to* a person? This question is, of course, illustrative of the sort of dwelling in which we reside during the exploration of this essay, where we inhabit the center of a deconstructive tension—the midst of an *aporia* that simultaneously leads in neither direction and in both.

Derrida notes that “a proper name is never purely individual.”²⁰ It instead associates the individual and so removes or vitiates absolute alterity. “[T]he difference,” Derrida continues, “one of the subtle and ungraspable differences between the foreigner and the absolute other is that the latter cannot have a name or a family name; the absolute or unconditional hospitality I would

¹⁸ Ibid., 87-9.

¹⁹ Ibid., 137.

²⁰ Ibid., 23.

like to offer him or her presupposes a break with hospitality in the ordinary sense, with conditional hospitality, with the right to or pact of hospitality.”²¹ So we see that the name, while it recognizes the irreplaceable person²² of the foreigner-guest, simultaneously takes away from her individuality and so prejudices her in several ways. We observe from Derrida’s last statement that this is not always negative. Derrida refers often to the pact of hospitality, “the right to nationality or citizenship as a *birthright*—in some places linked to the land and in others to blood,” and queries in *Of Hospitality* whether “it also extends to the family, to the generation, to the genealogy.”²³ If the right to hospitality is inherited, much like family wealth, then the successor guest is of course very fortunate to have been assured the refuge of hospitality through no effort of her own. To use myself as an example: If as a white, Western-looking individual I am welcome on an American or NATO base in Afghanistan, regardless of my (undisclosed) business, I am unaware of my privilege and in fact quite fortunate for the sanctuary. Through no action of my own—though I might have a duplicitous agenda, perhaps even intention to harm—I have inherited, through my white skin, American English accent, Western dress, and other traits bequeathed to me by circumstance, the right to sanctuary in a war zone that is, incidentally, *hostile* (we see the host inhabiting this violent word and the *hostility* inhabiting the *host*) to persons of my façade, namely, white, Western, mostly male individuals.

But I anticipate my welcome too soon. Indeed, I am more likely to be welcome than, for example, Afghans, on the surface of things, but what question would be asked of me should I seek refuge on an American military base or, in a general context, in a friendly nation? What

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lewis R. Gordon’s essay “Irreplaceability: An Existential Phenomenological Reflection” delves into our topic from a phenomenological perspective and makes similar strokes. Gordon notes that “[t]he encounter with another human being is the prime condition of irreplaceability. No one else can be Harry or Mary [the Harry or Mary that *we* know]” (196). Gordon calls human beings “open phenomena” incapable of being replaced in the same fashion as the chair we sit in or the sunset at which we gaze. This is because human beings are irrevocably attached to certain other human beings, producing memories and achieving a post-mortem resonance. They carve a particular niche and articulate a unique perspective on the world through both themselves and others. See Lewis R. Gordon, “Irreplaceability: An Existential Phenomenological Reflection,” *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 38, no. 2 (2003): 190-202.

²³ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 21.

request, if honored, would confirm my inheritance? It would pertain to matters of identification: Can you provide some form of identification, a passport, visa, driver's license, to authenticate what we *see* of you, that you are friendly to us and provide no threat? Can you *identify* yourself as the *one* individual whom you claim to be, apart from all other individuals who walk this earth, and yet still descendant of a national lineage that is welcome here? Listed on this identification would be my name, my full name, my *autonym*. Attached to this *autonym* (which contains a *patronym*, a link to my forebears), moreover, would be the chain of names that not only links in tributaries through the watershed of my social existence, but submerges me in a sea of nomenclature: a *demonym*, American; a *toponym* describing my geographic location in the United States; possibly an *apronym*, denoting me as a student or scholar; all of these in hopes of discovering that I am not a *pseudonymous* other who poses as friendly but threatens those inside the walls, that is, in hopes of discovering that I am *synonymous* with peace and *antonymous* to the threat. We note the case of the Jordanian suicide bomber, Humam Khalil Mohammed, welcomed as an informant onto U.S. Forward Operating Base Khost in Afghanistan.²⁴ Described as a “double agent,” his case reveals the duplicity of the name: he was initially denoted as an informant but his “enemy” status was revealed in the wake of the explosion. He was spoken for by Jordanian intelligence, an entity friendly to the United States; his status as ally was inherited through the pact granted to another ally, Jordan. In the end, however, he betrayed the pact. We might also note that this pseudonymous double agent used an online alias to promulgate anti-Western and anti-Israeli (he was of Palestinian descent) sentiments. Indeed, lost in the pact was not only the alterity of Mohammed and his right to be judged face-to-face, but also the threat inhabiting that face—the grimace of aversion.

²⁴ Richard A. Opiel, Jr., Mark Mazzetti, and Souad Mekhennet, “Attacker in Afghanistan Was a Double Agent,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/05/world/asia/05cia.html?scp=8&sq=forward+operating+base+khost&st=nyt>.

Residing in the pact is an indication of the tension that we explore, namely, the *aporia* that asks us, simultaneously and without objection, to welcome the foreign other face-to-face while calculating the risk that this other presents based on a chain of names—associations that link into the political—starting with the name of the guest himself. In other words, this right to hospitality or refuge contains the “irreducible pervertibility” of unconditional hospitality that Derrida often glosses.²⁵ This pact is what will transition us into our second chapter, where we will discuss its necessity in assessing the risk of the welcome, and, moreover, in allowing the other to be “linked” and so protected and nurtured. But for the time being we intend to subvert the pact, to call for its erasure, or at least its circumvention. Here we are discussing why it is necessary to welcome face-to-face, that is, anonymously and without prejudice, outside of the circles of conditionality, outside of all circles of sameness—*inside* the realm of absolute alterity. There is no invitation in this realm. An invitation indicates that a person has been called upon by the host and so is in some sense known; the selection indicates a prejudicial instinct to beckon the familiar—it indicates a choice. But the uninvited guest is not chosen. Such a guest is the immigrant, the refugee, the displaced or wandering foreigner.

In his essay, “*Alors, qui êtes-vous?: Jacques Derrida and the Question of Hospitality*,” Michael Naas writes:

There would be no hospitality, no rigorous concept of hospitality, no hospitality worthy of the name, without an unconditional welcoming of the other before any exchange [of information, such as the name], a welcoming of an other whose identity and character are thus not assured, an other, therefore, who may in fact pose a threat to us, who may cause us to question our right to what we call “our home,” or who may in fact try to evict us from that home and from everything we consider “our own.”²⁶

²⁵ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

²⁶ Michael Naas, “*Alors, qui êtes-vous?: Jacques Derrida and the Question of Hospitality*,” *Derrida From Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 22.

Naas sympathizes with Derrida's desire to think (at) the limits of the question of hospitality, where an uninvited guest (*hôte*) arrives "before any powers or possibilities [of the host], any identities or identifications, before the French word *hôte*, for example, has been read or interpreted to mean *either* host *or* guest, before any difference between host and guest, the one who invites and the one invited, before, it seems, any *power* or *capacity* to ask a question like *Comment t'appelles-tu?* [What is your name?]"²⁷ This position is certainly influenced by the situation of the pre-political Levinasian Same who is hostage (*hôtage*) to an absolute Other (*l'autrui*), a situation that Levinas calls "pre-logical."²⁸ Once the third person (*le tiers*) emerges, however—and there is always already a third—Levinas says that "one must [begin to] pass by way of logic, one must make comparisons," and one "cannot neglect anyone" in order to focus on another.²⁹ But just as Derrida and Naas remind us that the conditions of hospitality must be predicated on an unconditional (if impossible to honor) law, Levinas reminds us that "[i]f the face [the nameless face of the singular, original, absolute Other] had not appeared, one would have a purely violent multiplicity."³⁰ The intimacy and ethical obligation demanded by this originary figure prefigure the attitude necessary to cultivate an agreeable political atmosphere, or, as Levinas would call it, a nonviolent multiplicity.

So we see the seeds of the Derridean *aporia* of hospitality sown by Levinasian phenomenology. While this does give us insight into the unconditional mandate inherent in the Derridean *aporia*, we must come to understand Derrida's idea face-to-face. Firstly, Naas reminds us that "unconditional hospitality is not some goal or telos toward which we must strive; it is not some utopic ideal on which we must keep our eyes fixed."³¹ Rather, unconditional hospitality subtends conditional hospitality insofar as "it remains the only hospitality *in the name of which*

²⁷ Ibid., 23.

²⁸ Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be?*, 67.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Naas, "Alors, qui êtes-vous?" 24.

any hospitality can be offered.”³² Unconditional hospitality, then, is an “ideal” in the sense that it is an originary principle, a trajectory that must be reinvented each time it is applied, much like democratic ideals of tending to the concerns and needs of all. Denizens of representative democracies, for example, know that imperfection is intrinsic to the democratic experience—despite even the best and most noble efforts on behalf of elected agents—if only because of the sheer finitude of time and resources. In fact, a healthy representative democracy is set up for the betrayal of its own ideals: sound decision-making by elected, hopefully competent officials arbitrates between the most and least urgent issues, always one at the expense of another, but also always in the *name* of a democracy that is sensitive to the needs of all constituents. Derrida instantiates this thinking in his essay “Force of Law,” where he uses the example of the judge who must make his decision in the form of “a reinstating act of interpretation.”³³ The judge “must preserve the law...and also destroy or suspend it enough to have...to reinvent it in each case, rejustify it, reinvent it at least in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation of its principle.”³⁴ Such is the case with unconditional and conditional hospitality. In order to avoid a violent multiplicity in an always-already conditioned situation, we are, at the *start, before* any others come along, that is to say, in the *ideal* context, required to welcome the other unconditionally, without identification, without name or origin. But what does such unconditional hospitality look like, and why is it beneficial to understand it?

Naas refers to unconditional hospitality as “offered to the anonymous *arrivant*, to the absolute other, before any identities or names have been given, before the other has been identified as either human, god, or animal, as either living or dead.”³⁵ Considering the arena within which we are working in this essay, we will in some sense condition our contemplation of unconditional hospitality. We are obviously working within a global *human* network, and while

³² Ibid.

³³ Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law,” *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 251.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Naas, “*Alors, qui êtes-vous?*,” 24.

it is very valuable—and very pertinent to Derrida’s work—to consider the *absolute* other, we are bound to considering the foreigner who crosses borders of society, geography, class, etc., not the foreigner who crosses borders of genus or mortality. Without a doubt, there is an unconditional facet strictly within the human sphere of hospitality, one that I have been discussing throughout this essay. The name is a significant barrier for unconditionality: it *tells* the host something, something which allows him to discriminate against the guest—to *invite* the guest if he so chooses. Unconditional hospitality within the human sphere, then, must be that which requires no identification of any kind, and it so happens that Naas himself provides us with an example of such a form of hospitality, i.e. that form which requires no name. In the following few pages, we will glean his insight into a Homeric instance of unconditional hospitality.

Homer’s *Odyssey* could be seen as an epic narrative that plots a path meandering among the finest shades of hospitality, from the most skeptical hosts to the most credulous, from the cyclops Polyphemos to the Lotus Eaters. Along this wending trail travels the eponymous character, Odysseus, who Naas describes in his book *Taking on the Tradition* as “the archetypal refugee.”³⁶ After having been racked and disoriented at sea and having spent seven years under the “divine but oppressive hospitality” of Calypso, Odysseus has come to a point where he is “[h]omeless, tempest-tossed, naked and vulnerable.”³⁷ The once proud warrior has reached a state of humility created out of his separation from fellow Greeks and his beloved homeland of Ithaca. At this point, shipwrecked once again, he washes onto the shore of Phaeacia. Upon waking he queries, “Wretch that I am, whose land have I come to now? Are the people barbarous, arrogant, and lawless? Are they hospitable and godfearing?”³⁸ The first question upon waking, before considerations of food, clothes, or shelter, is of hospitality. Guest to a foreign land, Odysseus is vulnerable to the whims of the people of Phaeacia. He hopes to be welcomed kindly.

³⁶ Michael Naas, *Taking on the Tradition: Jacques Derrida and the Legacies of Deconstruction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 156.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Walter Shewring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 69-70.

Naked and covered with brine, Odysseus tears his way through the forest and approaches the Princess Nausicaa, daughter of Alcinous, king of Phaecia, and her entourage. Fearing Odysseus, Nausicaa's followers run. Nausicaa, however, remains resolute. At this point Odysseus beseeches her to "have compassion" in light of "all the calamities I have borne."³⁹ Nausicaa, not knowing what to call him, uses the honorific "Stranger [Foreigner, *Xenos*]" to communicate with him. She informs him that he "shall not go short of anything" while on her island and calls back her entourage, exhorting them, "Girls, stand still; where are you running at sight of a man? Do you think he comes of some *hostile* race?"⁴⁰ Odysseus is soon led by Nausicaa to the city of Phaecia where Alcinous treats him well and offers him shelter and sustenance without so much as asking his name. "Only after having thus been entertained," says Naas, only after having already penetrated the land of the Phaecians where he is free to do them harm, to exact the threat of the foreigner-guest, "is Odysseus expected, although not required, ...to tell the king and those around him who he is and from where he has come."⁴¹ Odysseus does divulge his origins and tells a story of his woes, but only as a result of a desire inspired by the bard Demodocus, who recounts the tale of Troy in evocative verse. In the end, Odysseus offers his true name and origin not by request but by his own will.

An aside: Washed upon a shore? Wet and covered with brine? Does this not resonate in today's United States? One might recall the pejorative term "wetback" used to indicate Mexican immigrants crossing the Rio Grande or the many Cuban immigrants who, much like Odysseus, ride watercraft vulnerable to submersion in hopes of reaching the dry shores of a (seemingly) friendly nation. And yet, we think we know the proper names of these migrants—and we do know certain names. They are Cubans, Mexicans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, but we often just call them "Mexicans," "Hispanics," or some derogatory slur as a blanket term. We also think that we know their intentions. They desire to pilfer our jobs by dint of their abject

³⁹ Ibid., 71.

⁴⁰ Ibid., my emphasis. We see again the ubiquity of hostility in each exchange of hospitality.

⁴¹ Naas, *Taking on the Tradition*, 156.

existence, which commands no other benefits than a paltry wage. Hidden in their Spanish is duplicity and stupidity. They bear children in this nation who automatically become U.S. citizens and they never pay the medical bills. And many of them are criminals in their own country who are escaping punishment—only to run drugs in *our* nation, harass *our* women, and steal *our* money. Right? This is all beside the point at the moment, but we will see how names protect these individuals, these foreign others to the United States, while at the same time allowing us to *intelligently* calculate the risk of their entry. For now we will analyze this instance of unconditional hospitality in the *Odyssey*.

First, Odysseus is a refugee. After seven years of a highly conditioned hospitality with Calypso and a gauntlet of inhospitable seas, Odysseus lands by fate on an island which he can only *hope* harbors folks more forgiving than his previous hosts, hence his initial inquest: “Are [the people of this land] hospitable and godfearing?” He is a refugee insofar as he is rootless and vulnerable. Seeking asylum, he can only pray to the gods, to the head of the pantheon, Zeus Xenios, to the god of strangers,⁴² for goodwill and protection from whomever he encounters. He in fact knows nothing of the island or its people but is so completely powerless, with no route or method of escape, that he must depend completely upon the charity of his hosts. We recall the religious patriarch Abraham who “came to this earth as a ‘stranger, a hôte...’ and a kind of saint of hospitality.”⁴³ He too entrusted his fate to providence, to the word of God who ordered him “to depart, to leave his land and the house of his father, transforming him into a hôte...”⁴⁴ Shadowed by Athene, Odysseus is similarly protected but is unaware of this protection; he is operating on the acts of dependence (a sort of faith) intrinsic to the refugee who must be *granted* asylum due to his dismal position, i.e., with nothing to offer.

⁴² Leon R. Kass, *The Hungry Soul* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1999), 102.

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 369.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

But Nausicaa, too, is taken by surprise. Like Odysseus she encounters the unexpected: the uninvited guest. This visitation⁴⁵ overwhelms Nausicaa and her followers, but unlike the others Nausicaa does not retreat from it. “The trace [of the face, the Levinasian manifestation of the Other] of the visitation disjoins and *disturbs*,” says Derrida, “as can happen during an unexpected, un hoped-for, or dreaded visit, expected or awaited beyond all waiting, like a messianic visit, perhaps....”⁴⁶ Perhaps Nausicaa is unfazed because she meditates on the trace exhibited by Odysseus: exasperated, naked, malnourished, and vulnerable, Odysseus exemplifies humanity in its fragile finitude but also in its potential—or at least in its commonality. Indeed, she asks why her companions run at sight of a *man*. Do they think he is a member of some hostile race (species)? Nausicaa is sufficiently disturbed by this familiar but altogether foreign trace (the trace of the anthropoid pantheon of Greek gods, perhaps, who solicit hospitality in the guise of human travelers) to stay and listen to Odysseus’ appeal. Rather than shun the uninvited guest she *welcomes* this visitation unconditionally; she knows not even a name but must welcome the *xenos* as exactly that: an uninvited stranger who seeks hospitality in ultimate vulnerability. “Stranger,” she says, you “shall not go short of anything.” I will protect you, “Stranger,” you radical other of whom I know nothing, not from where you come nor what your occupation is. This unique, unknown other cannot be guaranteed to come from “some hostile race” and so in tending the balance of absolute hospitality—whether to be ultimately skeptical or ultimately receptive to the uninvited guest—Nausicaa tips the scales in favor of the latter and leads Odysseus to provision and safety. Taken by surprise by this surprise visitation, she reacts favorably, and Alcinous and the Phaeacians bear out her welcome.

⁴⁵ Derrida uses this word to describe the uninvited guest: the one who *visits*, not one who is beckoned. The word has qualities of the supernatural, as one might describe an encounter with ghosts (we see our foremost word residing here), aliens (again, another term with which we grapple), or the divine as a “visitation.” See *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, page 62.

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 62.

This unconditional welcome reveals the necessity of the face-to-face welcome, the welcome without names. Names attach the guest to other entities (ethnic groups, nation-states, religious groups, etc.) and by doing so enter the guest into a relationship of reciprocity, a pact or “contract of hospitality that links *to* the foreigner and which *reciprocally* links the foreigner”⁴⁷—a contract in which the foreigner guest is expected to offer something *to* the host. In Odysseus’ case, this is not possible: he has not even the clothes on his back and by giving his name he risks being excluded from pacts established by the Phaeacians, or, if engaged in a new pact, of not being able to reciprocate the offering. He is literally in a position of complete surrender in which he must rely on the magnanimity of his hosts—but also a position which, paradoxically, requires the complete surrender of his host. His only offering, initially at least, is a tale of woe, a case for asylum. Otherwise, his anonymity is his greatest protection since he can hide in the folds of namelessness without expectation of remuneration, for he has been attached to no wealth, to no land.

But always implicit in the unconditional welcome is a threat; Nausicaa is equally as vulnerable as Odysseus. The startling visitation takes the princess by such complete surprise that she has no time to prepare for it, and, aside from considering whether to welcome Odysseus, she must consider how, in this intimate face-to-face encounter, she could possibly refuse him. This visitation—what we would properly describe as an encounter, a face-to-face meeting, considering the implications for both host and guest, both *hôte* and *hôte*—illustrates what Derrida learns from Levinasian phenomenology about “the limit of the liminal itself” where “the trace of the other”⁴⁸ passes or has already passed the threshold, awaiting neither invitation nor hospitality nor welcome.”⁴⁹ This situation “which is not a response to an invitation,” says Derrida, “exceeds

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 21.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, “The Trace of the Other,” in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

⁴⁹ Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, 63.

every dialogical relation between host and guest,⁵⁰ thus exceeding the pact and every relationship of reciprocity. The guest has already crossed the threshold and stands waiting. The line between host and guest blurs, and so the French word choice *hôte* is vindicated for its ambiguity. Now the host, equally as vulnerable as the guest, is at risk of losing her position of mistress-of-the-home, of ceding her space to the guest—hence the risk. Such penetration and potential usurpation are subject entirely to trust. If the foreigner-guest, like Odysseus, is seeking asylum for honorable reasons and himself intends no harm toward his host, then the unconditional welcome is successful and even laudable. But such is humanity that equally as many cases of a threatening foreigner-guest (e.g., our Jordanian-Palestinian double agent) emerge to counter the idealistic instances of absolute face-to-face engagement. It is in recognition of this misfortune that we invert our aporia to its underside. The necessity exists to calculate the threat of foreigner-guests, the other and those who stand alongside the other, and so we will now move from the ethical welcome to the political welcome. In the latter we must now consider a third (and fourth and fifth...) who “does not wait,” who “comes at the origin of the face and of the face to face.”⁵¹ Adumbrated in the face of the unique other is this third person who adds to my considerations and forces me to thematize and to compare. This third forces me to *name* in order to separate, and so it is not only in consideration of the threat emanating from untold others that we require the name to best welcome the guest, but also in consideration of recognizing the unique individual residing in the name(s) attached to each guest.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 31.

Chapter 2

Calling the Name

Jewish writer and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, world renowned for his Holocaust memoirs and novels, knows something of how it feels to be stateless. Having been liberated from Buchenwald as a teenager, Wiesel was thrust into an amorphous existence where he lacked a destination and an identity. After being welcomed by the French government upon liberation, the train that Wiesel and other Jewish orphans were riding to France stopped at the French border and its passengers were asked to disembark. Wiesel and the others on board were asked by a police official, in French, if they desired French citizenship. Wiesel neither spoke nor understood any French at the time, but when he saw his companions raise their hands he instinctively refrained from doing the same. Keeping a low profile—existing without an authentic or public identity—was the key to survival in the death camps and Wiesel was not far enough removed from the horror to discontinue such behavior. This perceived misstep led to years of “stateless” status for Wiesel, during which he was constantly harassed when he attempted to renew his French residency permit or to travel into and out of his quasi-homeland. “In Europe all bureaucrats look alike,” says Wiesel, “but the French are the worst. They detest foreigners if they are refugees, stateless, or without resources, and since I fell into all three categories, I was a source of boundless irritation to them. They would stare at me with hostility, treat me as an intruder.”⁵² Opinions on a particular brand of bureaucrat aside, we notice the amount of frustration that Wiesel harbors during this rootless chapter of his life. Surely Wiesel’s statelessness liberated him

⁵² Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 140.

in several ways, for instance, by spawning his interests in journalism and global travel. It also anchored him more deeply in the Jewish faith, since his identity as a Jew was among his few nomenclatural consistencies. But the pain of statelessness countered with the relief of being offered a United States passport—at being offered the prospect of nominal citizenship—are evident in his prose and tell us undoubtedly of his aversion to the moniker “refugee”:

The refugee’s time is measured in visas, his biography in stamps on his documents.

Though he has done nothing illegal, he is sure he is being followed. He begs everyone’s pardon: Sorry for disturbing you, for bothering you, for breathing. How well I understood Socrates, who preferred death to exile. In the twentieth century there is nothing romantic about the life of the exile, be he a stateless person or a political refugee.

I know whereof I speak. I was stateless, and therefore defenseless.⁵³

After about a decade of this anguish, however, Wiesel was offered solace: “When I had needed a passport, it was America that had given me one.”⁵⁴

This story is not prescriptive by any stretch of the imagination: were we to maintain the chain of events but swap the French bureaucrats with United States immigration officials and transpose the U.S. passport with a French one, we would end up with a similar story, and similarly with any other nation or nations on earth. Wiesel’s recollection of his years as a refugee are primarily illustrative of the agony and vulnerability that accompany statelessness—or, really, any situation where one finds oneself uprooted and unprotected, without a prevailing identity, a situation which could entail anything from the pariah status exhibited by religious excommunication to the displacement consequent of civil war. We cannot help but note the vocabulary of *hospitality* laced throughout these few excerpts of Wiesel’s, words like “hostility,” “intruder,” “refugee,” “stateless,” “exile,” and “foreigner.” We even see how the gesture of

⁵³ Ibid., 300-1.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 301.

unconditional welcome, offered to the foreigner-guest “without resources,” can become “a source of boundless irritation” to the host. From whom could France exact remuneration for its hospitality to Wiesel? From the Jewish people, the diasporic population that it was and is, despite the existence of a Jewish state? The simple point is that no remuneration was forthcoming: the welcome, unconditional at first, since no pact was granted, was worn out and conditioned severely down the line, where Wiesel eventually found himself as the marginalized, non-citizen asylum-seeker. The economy of hospitality, a residuum of political hospitality, was unreciprocated by Wiesel and so he suffered.

The first chapter discussed the unconditional, face-to-face welcome and ended with the conclusion that such a welcome was untenable, that it must be perverted in order for both host and guest to reside together. The chapter in fact suggested that in order for the guest to be properly safe and recognized, circumstances that can only be fully assured by avoiding neutralization of the guest’s absolute alterity, the guest must be named in some substantive way. In Wiesel’s case, while he carried an identification card everywhere with him (he was in fact called *more* often to identify himself because of his status), he had a name that terminated in at least one important direction: namely, that of citizenship. Indeed, we also noted in the first chapter how names are linked, that they lead to other descriptive monikers, demonymic, ethnonymic, patronymic, pseudonymic labels that construct the entire named person. In a proper name, then, which happens to be the most aptly translated signifier across languages, there is an entire story and orientation. For Wiesel the proper name failed him because the only story that his name could tell was historical: about where he *was*, who his parents *were* (before they perished in the death camps), about what village or country *did* claim him. Virtually the only lines written in his nomenclatural text after the Shoah, however, were those designating him as a wandering Jew, a diasporic throwback orphaned and in need of refuge. France had no pact with the Jews *per se*—this was a world of nation-states now, and anyway the world was never very fair

to Jews before the existence of Israel—and it was bound to receive no return on its investment of hospitality. Without altogether rescinding its welcome, France let its guest go hungry.

At this moment where Wiesel stands vulnerable, Derrida links us to his own philosophy. Derrida begins the third chapter of his book *Monolingualism of the Other* with an affirmation about names, calling himself “perhaps...the *only* Franco-Maghrebian”⁵⁵ at a bygone meeting of both French and non-French Francophones, despite the fact that he imagines issuing this statement to his good friend Abdelkebir Khatibi, who also attended the conference and hails from Morocco.⁵⁶ Derrida’s ultimate point in discussing such names—he finally prefixes “Judeo-” to “Franco-Maghrebian” in the epilogue,⁵⁷ honoring his Sephardic Jewish heritage—is not combative, however. Rather, Derrida wishes to make the point that “an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures.”⁵⁸ This cuts both ways of course. The tendencies of colonialism, to occupy and appropriate, are intrinsic to every culture.⁵⁹ But Derrida also notes that these occupations are never authentic and never absolute, as the occupied object, whether it be land or language, always belongs in some measure to somebody else, to both colonizer and colonized, hence another bold assertion: “My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other.”⁶⁰

As David Carroll points out in his essay on Derrida’s *Monolingualism*, structures such as language “are not natural and can be changed” and manipulated by both oneself but also by so

⁵⁵ The “Maghreb” referring to North Africa, consisting of the countries Algeria (Derrida’s birthplace), Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.

⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

many *others*, and names are included in this structural amorphism.⁶¹ This linguistic stream flows into Derrida's main argument that *identification* (literally only the *act* of identifying: a word indicating a lack of the finality implicit in an established *identity*) is perpetual and *identity* is fleeting. This is only obvious, however, insofar as it is a problem. For both Wiesel and Derrida—both of Jewish heritage, both shaped in no small measure by French culture, and both ultimately residing away from their original homelands—identification became a problem. We already know Wiesel's story, but for Derrida things went somewhat similarly. Growing up in Algeria, Derrida experienced a loss of citizenship during World War II when Vichy France decided to reclassify Algerian Jews as Algerian “natives.”⁶² Because of this, his secondary schooling was also punctuated. This chain of events resonated greatly with Derrida. As Carroll notes, it is “as if all his *nostalgérie* had at its core this experience of injustice and thus was opposed to what could be called ‘nostalgic nostalgia,’”⁶³ thus contributing to what Derrida calls his “negative heritage.”⁶⁴ What Derrida learns is that, “[i]n essence, a citizenship does not sprout up just like that. It is not natural.”⁶⁵ Eventually his citizenship was returned, and ultimately, in order to attend the best university for his path of study, Derrida moved to France, where he lived and taught until his death. Even then, however, as a Franco-*Algerian* Derrida labored under a colonial eye. Again his negative heritage emerged as Derrida found himself neither here nor there, neither in Algeria nor in France. Carroll continues:

...[A]fter leaving Algeria for the first time in 1949 [for school], [Derrida] felt he had to repress, and in fact thinks he did successfully repress, the most obvious exterior signs of his Algerian “roots.” Not necessarily his accent when speaking French, the speed with which he talked, or the tone and volume of his voice, but rather, and more important,

⁶¹ David Carroll, “‘Remains’ of Algeria: Justice Hospitality, Politics,” *MLN* 122, no. 4 (2007): 912, <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/journals/mln/v122/122.4carroll.pdf>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 908.

⁶³ *Ibid.*.

⁶⁴ Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 53.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

anything too explicitly “Algerian” that might appear in his *writing*, anything, one would imagine, that could be treated lightly or haughtily dismissed by the French philosophical and literary establishment, by his professors and then later by those who spoke and judged from a position of cultural superiority and authority, and acted as if they occupied the place of legitimate heirs of French thought and culture.⁶⁶

This narrative of a negative heritage, during which Derrida identified as “neither French, nor Arab, nor Berber, neither Catholic, nor Muslim, and even though Jewish, a stranger to Jewish culture as well,”⁶⁷ demonstrates the central point of this chapter. Even though the names attached to the proper name, in this case those of citizenship, are manufactured by human interplay, the proper name is (or at least has the potential to be) a protective capsule inside of which the foreigner-guest, especially the refugee, can prosper. Wiesel and Derrida were considered suspect, amorphous, even despised strangers to their respective governments *until* they were sure citizens.⁶⁸ Wiesel secured such a position with the acquisition of a U.S. passport, Derrida with a prolific career in French letters spent *in* France, teaching predominantly French students. While I do not propose that either of these men abdicated or shunned his “negative” heritage, we must, however, recognize that a measure of peace was more forthcoming to each once he belonged, irrevocably, to a protective “homeland.”

It is very interesting that Derrida should have appended the alternative title “The Prosthesis of Origin” to *Monolingualism of the Other*. Indeed, throughout this essay we have contemplated attachments, most of which are fabricated as a prosthetic leg might be, for example. We depend on this leg—we instinctively trust our balance and proper movement to it, but are meanwhile unaware that we really do not have a leg to stand on: citizenship, despite the final

⁶⁶ Carroll, “‘Remains’ of Algeria,” 905.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 913.

⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that President François Mitterrand finally offered Wiesel citizenship a few decades after Wiesel initiated his path to U.S. citizenship. Wiesel declined the offer. *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, 301.

words of the previous paragraph, *is* revocable, language *is* a fabrication, and we are only *named* insofar as others (primarily our parents or extended family) attach appellations to us. Certainly the patronym or matronym, an inextricable part of our proper name, is inherited, but this was likewise granted at some point in the line of descent. That being said, however, we must recognize the fact that we inherit certain names, including much of our proper name. This inheritance leads to the pacts that were sometimes denied, sometimes granted to individuals like Wiesel and Derrida. These pacts pervert: they violate unconditional hospitality with their corruption of alterity, for pacts tell something to the host that allows the host to guarantee the guest is welcome, thus allowing the host to *invite* the guest into the home. But these pacts also protect: the contract (transaction, indicating reciprocation) of hospitality, though coming at a cost, grants asylum to the named individual who possesses a past and a patrimony.

And yet, what of the guest who is granted no pact, who is in fact the object of aversion? If we declare that a political hospitality is necessary to protect the refugee then we had better account for the individual who is not only unprotected, like Wiesel or Derrida, but is perhaps *hated* because of her perceived hostility. We speak here of the Mexican immigrant who requests hospitality in the United States, the Togolese who looks to work in Italian citrus orchards, the Arabic Muslim who seeks to travel West, and the Westerner who seeks to travel East. We have discovered that the privileged members of the pact who can identify themselves as such—with a U.S. or French passport, for example, as Wiesel and Derrida could, respectively—benefit from this political hospitality that calculates the risk and allows the invited guest to enter. But no such invitation is forthcoming to the enemy or the vagrant, who has nothing to offer except perhaps harm. What benefit does this foreigner-guest, the uninvited, even avoided refugee, get from political hospitality, the hospitality conditioned to protect the host and (certain) guests?

First, we must take this time to identify the major problem with political hospitality which emerged in the first chapter. Our *aporia* leaves two equally desirable but mutually

exclusive options: either (1) to welcome the foreigner unconditionally on a face-to-face level, as infinite alterity that must not be neutralized; or (2) to calculate the risk of the hostile guest's crossing of the threshold (the threshold of the figurative home whose entryway might include anything from the doorway to the border checkpoint) by analyzing his affiliations of citizenship, religion, ideology, or anything else indicative of enemy status. The problem with unconditional hospitality, we discovered, is that the name leaves both host and guest slighted and vulnerable: the guest has no discernible rights without identification and is therefore dependent on charity, and the host is at risk of dishonoring the guest with an anonymous gesture but also at risk of inviting a hostile stranger to overtake him as master of the house or to harm his household. The caveat of political hospitality is equally as problematic: the guest is lost as individual, named person in the sea of nomenclature that surrounds her and so is no longer guest as such, but a guest with a prefix, a welcome or unwelcome guest. In other words, political hospitality indicates a shift from a welcome conversant with a single individual to a welcome in which the interlocutor is a group bigger than the guest, a group which is believed to be constitutive of the guest's character and comportment. The latter is the group with whom the pact is made; this includes the patrilineal or matrilineal line of descent, the nation of citizenship, the religion of heritage or of choice, the ideology adhered to, and so on.

This is the violence of political, or conditional, hospitality: we are left welcoming not a guest but a *type* of guest, and in this sense we *are* welcoming a particular guest, only this guest is an emissary—or, rather, an example. For example of this exemplarity, Ross Benjamin and Heesok Chang, in their essay “Jacques Derrida, the Last European,” make the effort of illustrating “[t]he rhetorical maneuver by which European man can come to stand for humanity in general.”⁶⁹ The authors issue a description that can serve to illustrate the problem of political hospitality,

⁶⁹ Ross Benjamin and Heesok Chang, “Jacques Derrida, the Last European,” *SubStance* 35, no. 2 (2006): 147, <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/journals/substance/v035/35.2benjamin.pdf>.

calling the subject (read “the guest”) a “paradox of exemplarity: an inscription of ‘the universal in the proper body of a singularity.’”⁷⁰ This is all to say that in the name of our singular foreigner-guest lie her exhibitions of universality: her foreignness but more strongly, to take an African woman as an example, her blackness, her Ivoirité (to use a very current and critical example in a very contradictory way⁷¹), her Muslimness, perhaps her criminality, should she have ever been convicted, and so on down the line. This single woman, who is radically particular and irreplaceable, is homogenized into one or several groups with whom I, as host, have familiarity, and, incidentally, with whom I have established pacts of trust or distrust, welcome or dismissal. How is political hospitality to possibly benefit her?

We must here add to the tension of the proper name. We have discovered that inasmuch as the proper name benefits the recipient of the pact, it also harms the one who is excluded from the pact. However, we must also recognize that inasmuch as the proper name marginalizes the unwelcome foreigner-guest, such marginalization is twofold and can work to the advantage of the stranger. Indeed, the absence of the pact can marginalize the foreigner to the edges of the host’s company, but it can also push the foreigner to the margins of the groups (to which the pact was refused) to which she reputedly or in actuality belongs. We cannot speak for the host’s injustice: if the host refuses the welcome for unfounded reasons, a phenomenon observable, for instance, in the politics of skin color in the American South even to this day, then we might not even desire to try to push our thesis forward, for inauthenticity would be the only way to penetrate the master’s household. However, if the host refuses the pact to certain groups for just reasons, a trend

⁷⁰ Ibid., 147. The internal quotation comes from Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 72.

⁷¹ Adam Nossiter, “Many in Ivory Coast May Be Left Out From Vote,” *New York Times*, February 6, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/07/world/africa/07ivorycoast.html?scp=3&sq=ivory+coast&st=nyt>. This nation struggles openly with its essence and unfortunately it is being used against many, with the inquisition divesting some one million “foreigners” and non-Ivorians of their right to vote, which is a key measure of full-fledged citizenry. The case is of course interesting for its frank arbitration of the parameters of an abstract method of identification.

discernible in today's U.S. policy toward "hostile" Muslim nations,⁷² then we can offer our thesis as hope for the stranger or refugee. We might take as example the phenomenon of "no-fly" lists established by the American Transportation Security Administration (TSA). These lists, which grow increasingly exclusive in proportion to the threat, are comprised of individuals who are not to enter certain nations, namely the United States, via airplane for fear of a terrorist attack.

What does the existence of this list of proper names tell us? What is manifested by this unwelcome manifest? We cannot help but notice that it calls for the deconstruction of the proper name. What we have emphasized so far is the potential for the name to emphasize the enemy; hence the necessity of the *pact* to evoke friendship. As Edith Wyschogrod notes in her essay "Autochthony and Welcome: Discourses of Exile in Levinas and Derrida," the friend/enemy dichotomy is implicit in the etymology of the term hospitality.⁷³ The Indo-European root *ghost* lies at the root of the Latin *hospitalitas* and by consequence our modern English word "host" and the duplicitous if dubious French word *hôte*. We are reminded also of its trace in the Latin word *hostis*, which denotes the "enemy or stranger as in *hostile*"⁷⁴ and which contributed to the conception of Derrida's neologistic brainchild "hostipitality." We recall the visitation of the uninvited guest, which is doubly startling for both its surprise and its potential to overwhelm. Asks Wyschogrod, "Does not the German *Gastfreundlichkeit*, hospitality, ... evoke its root *Geist*,

⁷² It is worth appending an explanation to this suggestion, since this issue, especially with the resurgent policy of profiling airline passengers in the wake of the failed Christmas Day airplane bombing in Detroit in 2009, is among the most controversial of our times. I do not mean to push forward assuming that it is right to broadly ban passengers from Yemen and Somalia, for example, from entry into the United States. Rather, I mean to suggest that we recognize the threat implicitly and explicitly expressed by "target" nations of the United States' highly conditioned hospitality, such as the preponderance of Yemenis involved in major terrorist attacks against Western interests and the lawless state of the latter nation that reinforces its potential as a breeding ground for Islamic extremism and its consequent fanatical acts, and advance the forthcoming thesis from there.

⁷³ Edith Wyschogrod, "Autochthony and Welcome: Discourses of Exile in Levinas and Derrida," *Journal of Philosophy & Scripture* 1, no. 1 (2003): 38, <http://www.philosophyandscripture.org/EdithWyschogrod.pdf>.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* My emphasis in the direct quotation.

spirit or ghost, so that one is reminded of the spectral possibility of the enemy in the guest?"⁷⁵

We have already exhumed the literal resonance of such haunting, as the proper name of the guest (and so by proxy the entire enterprise of hospitality) can evoke the friend or enemy by its connections to patrimony and place, fraternity and faith, among so many others. And yet we must remember Derrida's words about the untranslatable quality intrinsic to the proper name, which places it outside of language and so strangely, one might imagine, inside a sort of universal lexicon. If stamped in this singularity of the proper name is a host of universal qualities, then this singularity is all the more accentuated by its unique provision of shelter to the universal. In this sense, the singular proper name plays host to the universal and dictates how the universal manifests itself. The proper name, then, can also serve as an emphatic, even separating or distancing apparatus in addition to its homogenetic purpose. If this ineluctable name, a marker that brands us within an origin without our choice, cannot avoid the stamp of universality, it can be co-opted in an effort to circumvent its negative qualities.

The no-fly list tells us, then, that the threat *is* essentialized—and regrettably so. Most names on the list are those affiliated with Islam in one version or another and many come from the most hostile (to the U.S. and the West) Muslim-majority nations of the world. But there are comparatively only a few names on this register. Indeed, the hospitality implicit in U.S. foreign policy recognizes the obstinate double-bind: to welcome all who request entry, but to calculate the risk and shut doors to those who represent a threat. At this macro-level, we see the highly political nature of hospitality. Groups negotiate pacts with groups, which in this case would be the Western bloc negotiating with Muslim-majority nations. The welcome is arranged and heavily conditioned. Names are gathered. By living a life that is non-threatening to others, certain (most, by a yawning margin) citizens of the latter nations avoid the blocking of the border checkpoint, the veritable threshold. They are not refused hospitality. At the lower levels, the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

levels of the face-to-face, it gets easier to establish themselves as guests. They are able to demonstrate their goodwill, their reciprocal offering of peace in exchange for peaceful hospitality. By establishing a unique identity as a non-threatening Ashira, she can prosper as a welcome guest. Even if obfuscated by clouds of prejudice, even if seemingly distant, can we not then perceive a subversion of the enemy-ghost that haunts hospitality? Can we not now part the veil of the vilified visitation in order to imagine a friendly spirit inhabiting hospitality's household?

If we follow Derrida, then we have to believe that the latter is possible. In the interview with *Le Monde* Derrida states:

Pure hospitality consists in welcoming whoever arrives before imposing any conditions on him, before knowing and asking anything at all, be it a name or an identity "paper." But it supposes also that one address him, singularly, that he be called therefore, and that he be understood to have a proper name: "You, what is your name?" Hospitality consists in doing everything to address the other, to accord him, even to ask him his name, while keeping this question from becoming a "condition," a police inquisition, a blacklist or a simple border control. This difference is at once subtle and fundamental, it is a question which is asked on the threshold of the "home" and at the threshold between two inflections. An art and a poetics, but an entire politics depends on it, an entire ethics is decided by it.⁷⁶

Let us meditate on this quotation. If we consider it for just a moment, we begin to perceive the background of this Derridean injunction illustrated so vividly through the name: Indeed, conditional hospitality, the political progeny of its absolute, ideal forbear, the type of hospitality meant to *protect* both the host and guest, comes *after* the fact. The assumption of peace is always already the first assumption of hospitality—preparation for war, for *hostility* is consequential. If

⁷⁶ Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," 7.

we consider the *raison d'être* of hospitality, it becomes clearer. We are asked to welcome *any* foreign other who is in need before any conditions are established; we are asked to provide for the guest not out of enmity, but out of kindness and *friendliness*. Only after disagreement and violence erupt are we *forced* to condition our welcome. At this point, proper names become all the more important for their ability to mark *me* and *you* as friendly, peaceful individuals. Derrida quotes Montaigne describing his friendship to Etienne de la Boétie in “The Politics of Friendship”: “We sought each other before we had seen one another, and through the reports we heard about each other, which caused a greater striving in our feelings than that occasioned by the sense of the reports, I believe through some ordinance of heaven: we embraced each other through our names.”⁷⁷ The friend haunts the name as much if not more than the enemy. The name is always *for* the Other (*l'autrui*), says Derrida:

It implies the Other in the very act of naming, its origin, its finality, its use. Responding always supposes the Other in the relation to oneself; it preserves the sense of this asymmetrical “anteriority” even within the seemingly most inward and solitary autonomy of reserve..., of one’s heart of hearts, and of the moral conscience jealous of its independence—another word for freedom. This asymmetrical anteriority also marks temporalization as a structure of responsibility.⁷⁸

The friend comes first, before we enter the game, but the enemy is adumbrated in the friend’s eyes in a fashion correspondent to the adumbration of the third in the eyes of the Levinasian Other, so that the enemy is always there the moment we enter the game, despoiling the ideal of unconditional hospitality by forcing us to protect ourselves. We invert this with present enemies: if Muslims, for example, especially fundamentalist Muslims, have become vilified, it is because

⁷⁷ Quoted in Jacques Derrida, “The Politics of Friendship,” trans. Gabriel Motzkin, *The Journal of Philosophy* 85, no. 11 (1988): 639, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2026938>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

we have overlooked the trace of the friend in the so-called enemy's eyes. It is because we have overlooked that trace manifesting itself in the sovereign individual with a proper name outside of language, an individual appellation attached to which is a *personal* résumé that houses universal baggage, yes, but baggage that is housed within a domicile that might be peaceful all the while.

Chapter 3

Moving On: the Haunting of the Undecidable

In “Force of Law” Derrida states that “[t]he undecidable remains caught, lodged, as a ghost at least, but an essential ghost, in every decision, in every event of decision. Its ghostliness [*sa fantomaticité*] from within all assurance of presence, all certainty or all alleged criteriology assuring us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision.”⁷⁹ We witness here another apparition, one that has been haunting this essay throughout: the *aporia*. There is no particular destination in mind concerning this spectral concept; to quote Derrida, “*Aporia* is a non-path”⁸⁰ between two “destinations.” “Force of Law” is in fact designed to point the latter out by illustrating, via the concept of justice, the general division between the ideal and the actual. Citing Montaigne’s assessment that, “being unable to make what is just strong, we have made what is strong just,”⁸¹ Derrida emphasizes the performative *force* behind the manifestation of justice in laws, the proaction necessary to instantiate some form of the just in concrete policy.⁸² One cannot help but perceive this performative force as always already a perversion of the just—a “reinterpretation” or reinvention, as Derrida later suggests⁸³—that is, a conditioning of an impossible ideal. Force will get us somewhere *per jure*, yes, but perforce it takes us farther from justice qua absolute ethical law. Thus an impasse between an inadequate because impossible ethical law and the possible but inadequate because unethical set of political laws. The suggestion of *aporia* as “non-path” hinges on this equally desirable/equally undesirable impasse

⁷⁹ Derrida, “Force of Law,” 253.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 239.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 251.

between the conditional and the unconditional. As we showed with the example of hospitality, specifically through the proper name, either of these choices is salutary in one respect, but harmful in another. The non-path is the *aporia* or between: the impassable crevice that negotiates the two.

Again, we see the parallel between the theoretical discussion of the *aporia* and the treatment of hospitality (at its aporetic (in)junction) in the first two chapters. Indeed, in considering this (in)junction of hospitality or any other similar (in)junction, we must acknowledge that Derrida's work in "Force of Law" is primary to the aporetic structure of "conditional/unconditional" insofar as it discusses the legislative aspect of this division. The previous two chapters of the present project asked us to consider a just hospitality, the first and only hospitality to be so, a pure hospitality that encounters the foreign other as radical alterity and so unconditionally as a welcome guest, in relief (or vice versa, as the case may be) of its conditional complement, a political hospitality perverted from the start by its performative and so impure and imperfect application. It becomes clear, then, that we were asked to consider justice in a different realm but inside a similar paradigm. The *aporia* that was issued was intended to elucidate how, unable to make an unconditional and just hospitality strong enough to stand on its own, we are forced to consider another option that, while it has the potential to be as just as possible, is unjust in its application of prejudices and exclusive invitations. Our *aporia*, then, as I suggested at the end of the second chapter, asks us to traverse an impassable middle through which we might be guided by the spirit of friendship.

But in even suggesting the possibility of guidance I seem to have contradicted the suggestion of *aporia* as a non-path. How do we pass through an impasse? We have to recall that a notion of suspense is implicit in the *aporia* as Derrida conceives of it.⁸⁴ This suspense, in the spirit of Derrida's notion of *différance*, is indefinite. Resolution, like meaning, is fleeting,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 248.

endlessly deferred by the exercise of deconstruction. Derrida describes this moment in Husserlian terms as an *epokhē*, but abundantly clear is the importance of this “anguishing moment” to the task of deconstruction, and thus the task of negotiating the *aporia*.⁸⁵ While noting that this moment “is not a simple moment,” Derrida states unequivocally that “its possibility must remain structurally present to the exercise of all responsibility if such responsibility is never to abandon itself to dogmatic slumber, and therefore to deny itself. From then on, this moment overflows itself. It becomes all the more anguishing.”⁸⁶ We recall the example of democratic practice that was used in the first chapter when illustrating the relationship between unconditional and conditional hospitality. This and other examples tell us that the concept behind reinvention, reinterpretation, reinstitution, etc. seems to be a key component in negotiating our double bind. While *aporia* might be construed as a non-path, it is equally clear that Derrida sees some type of trajectory or at least orientation in directing our progress. We cannot simply lie down in apathy when faced with this deconstructive tension—it is not a problem which we cannot solve. Though Derrida calls this non-path a “nonpassage” and a “not knowing where to go,” he also describes the *aporia* as a paralysis “that is not necessarily negative.”⁸⁷ This *aporia*, in Derrida’s words, leaves us “before a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such.”⁸⁸ Derrida calls the *aporia* paralyzing and undecidable not because we are unable to “solve” a problem, for “in this place of *aporia*, *there is no longer any problem.*”⁸⁹ Rather, Derrida suggests that in this situation we can “no longer even find a problem that would constitute itself.”⁹⁰ We lack a foundation on which to build as a result of the antinomic bifurcation, and so we violate the logic of presupposition

⁸⁵ Ibid., 249.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 248-9.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 12.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

intrinsic to a soluble dilemma.⁹¹ It is in the case of the *aporia*, then, that while we cannot establish a teleological trajectory, we can at least establish an ethical trajectory rooted in the ineluctable political context that is always already surrounding us. In other words, while, as Naas pointed out, we are not moving toward a particular “goal” in establishing a practical approach to hospitality, we *are* oriented by a juridico-ethical call for justice for and recognition of the guest. There is no “solution” before us, but there is the call to *continue* without absolute guidance and thus the call to continue as best as we can. The orientation that I suggested, then, is simply continuity—the refusal of paralysis. Though the undecidable might haunt our endeavors to offer a friendly hospitality in the same manner as the *hostis* does, we as hosts must toe the line, each in a novel way. Our task is ethical reinvention of the impossible welcome: our task *is* the impossible. We can never know whether we accomplish our task because there is no telos, and so added to the impossibility of offering a just welcome is the impossibility of reflecting on the results. We reside, then, within a double impossibility, a (perhaps absurd) dwelling that has been visited upon us without invitation, and it is from within the boundaries of this impossible abode that we must offer the welcome to the myriad guests who will not and cannot wait.

⁹¹ Ibid., 45.

Conclusion

I have discussed the aporetic tension of hospitality so carefully elucidated by Jacques Derrida and his protégés, and on somewhat distinct terms. By adding a uniquely articulated *aporia* to the Derridean corpus of *aporias*, I have also broken new ground—or have at least dug deeper into the caverns already penetrated. Indeed, this was my hope for this essay from the beginning, as stated in the introduction: to reiterate and reinvigorate the deconstructive approach to hospitality by illustrating the negotiation between two opposing yet equally necessary forces. Yet while I have explored and advocated this approach, one thing becomes abundantly clear: the deconstructive take on hospitality is hardly reassuring; rather, it is brutally forthright. Much like the subject it studies, it welcomes the topic of interest in only to ultimately interrogate it. Naas illustrates the latter point well: “If deconstruction is indeed hospitality, then it is not a hospitality that leaves what is welcomed intact or unharmed, that leaves it safe and sound, and that, while allowing it perhaps to live on, offers the illusion of some final salvation. Indeed, for Derrida fidelity to the tradition consists precisely in *not* leaving it safe and sound, intact or unharmed.”⁹² The former essay, if nothing else, proves Naas’ suspicion to be correct. Revolving around the concept of names and naming, its project was much larger in its effort to show how stubborn the modal tension of hospitality remains.

That all being said, however, I did establish a position in this essay. While I recognized that it is impossible to honor unconditional hospitality since the moment we enter the game we are forced into developing the conditions of an economy of hospitality, I have also demonstrated how the proper name both encourages and enjoins us to honor the individual foreigner-guest in his or her potential for friendliness *before* his or her potential for hostility. As I moved forward, I

⁹² Naas, “*Alors, qui êtes-vous?*,” 31-2.

attempted to successfully resettle the spirit of the face-to-face to its conditional dwelling.

Whether I failed or not is debatable, but I make no mistake about it: this essay was written in the name of unconditional hospitality.

An inevitable question, of course, is: Where to go from here? We must always ask how our research has pushed us forward and inspired original thought. It is my hope that the name be glossed more thoroughly as a vehicle for hospitality. While I recognize its importance in the Derridean corpus of hospitality and friendship, for example, and how his disciples have picked up on this, we might find that there is more to the name than the simple appellation by which the guest would like to be recognized. As Derrida recognizes, there is the pact between lines of descent, which includes the name; there is also the host of terms by which the guest is identified outside of the proper name. And yet all of these monikers converge upon the proper name. The proper name, then, is a mode of transportation through each modality of hospitality. Its tendrils pervade every facet, whether with its presence or its present absence, and so there might be much more to boarding this means of philosophical conveyance than meets the eye. In total, I can only hope that this essay provoked thought in its topic of study—the written material which was glossed and the preexisting thoughts that were exchanged. To be sure, there are not only new directions to go *from* Derrida, but so much more in the margins, interstices, and in the very face of his work. His work was the primary pillar of this essay and, judging by the fact that only a minute fraction of his *oeuvre* was explored, we are told that there are still volumes of outcomes to be drawn from his work. We can only welcome his words as best as we can, and hope that he welcomes us too.

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