

BOOK REVIEW**Bendixsen, Synnøve K. N. and Wyller, Trygve (eds.). 2019. *Contested Hospitalities in a Time of Migration. Religious and Secular Counterspaces in the Nordic Region*. London; New York: Routledge. 198 pp**

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Since the arrival of a large number of Syrian refugees to Europe in 2015, European – including Nordic – countries have adopted increasingly stricter policies towards immigration and in particular refugees. At the same time, the exposed situation of Syrian refugees motivated a new revitalisation of civil society actions and activists trying to welcome and support refugees. It is in the intersection of these two movements that the volume *Contested Hospitalities in a Time of Migration* places its empirical and theoretical work by analysing and discussing civil society's attempts of compensating the state policy's inhospitality with hospitality.

Across the individual chapters, the volume addresses the ambiguity in how Nordic countries understand and institutionalise traditionally embraced values like equality, solidarity, hospitality and altruism. They ask how hospitality (as a Nordic value) is possible in a time when European countries increasingly close their borders and adopt restrictive policies towards refugees and immigrants. In the introduction, the two editors, Synnøve K. N. Bendixen, Associate Professor in Social Anthropology at University of Bergen, and Trygve Wyller, Professor in Contemporary Theology and the Study of Christian Social Practices at University of Oslo, situate the discussion by emphasising the strong traditions of equality and solidarity influenced by Protestantism in the Nordic countries. Adding the Nordic tradition of volunteering, the editors argue that hospitality is about how 'we' deal with everyday relationships of difference, and, as an everyday practice, hospitality must be understood by examining the entanglement of the religious and secular within the context of the welfare state and civil society.

Besides the introduction and conclusion by the editors, the volume consists of two parts. The first part holds four chapters that focus on the welfare state's position in the intersection between hospitality and hostility towards newcomers. In Chapter 2, Lars Trägårdh, who is Professor of History and Civil Society Studies at Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University College in Stockholm, addresses this intersection by pointing at the difference between a bounded and

an absolute universalism of altruism. This discussion is further developed in Chapter 3 by Cathrine Thorleifsson and Anders Ravik Jupskås. Thorleifsson is a Researcher and Jupskås is a Senior Researcher and Deputy Director at the Centre for Research on Extremism at the University of Oslo. They analyse how populist movements in Sweden and Norway have utilised religion to claim a Christianity-based national identity – an identitarian Christianity – that legitimises the impossibility of including Muslims in the nation. In Chapter 4, Katja Franko, Maartje van der Woude and Vanessa Barker also address a growing inhospitality in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands by pointing to the increasing securitisation and criminalisation of migration. Franko is a Professor of Criminology at the University of Oslo, Woude is a Professor of Law and Society at Leiden Law School and Barker is a Professor of Sociology at Stockholm University. In Chapter 5, Kaspar Villadsen, who is a Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy of the Copenhagen Business School, investigates how the lack of rights to healthcare as a consequence of the criminalisation of migration challenges the idea of ‘unconditional care’.

Chapter 2 by Trägårdh offers a splendid introduction to the paradoxes within these developments. In the nation-state the social welfare rights are based on secular principles of reciprocity and an altruism conditioned by membership, whereas the Christian-inspired charity-ideal is unconditional and absolute. It is these two principles that, according to Trägårdh, either clash or entangle in the way different institutions are dealing with the refugee situation. He points at the ambivalent position of the Nordic churches as they are based on Christian ethics and global civil society membership, which embody ideas about unconditional altruism while they historically and still today also function as state-building and state-supporting institutions. Trägårdh shows how this position is embedded in the development of the Nordic welfare state, where the church loses its role as a governmental institution, whereas secular institutions such as the development-aid industry increasingly have taken over the role as moral superpowers within the realm of global solidarity. He interestingly concludes that the Nordic nation-states appear to support charity abroad, whereas the logic of reciprocity and social rights dominate at home. It leaves the churches with a potentially new role, in which they may challenge the reciprocity logic of the state when dealing with refugees by emphasising the moral imperative of the global community. Rather than replacing the reciprocity logic, Trägårdh argues, this logic still applies to citizens, whereas the other charity-logic applies to objects of ‘hospitality’.

In the second part of the volume, the charity-logic is further examined. Each of the six chapters presents one case study of a particular activity organised by either religious or secular civil society actors. Across these case studies, the issue of hospitality is presented as a counter movement to the state policy, whereas the power relations that inevitably are part of any hospitality act are critically explored. Several of the case studies investigate how the binary of host and guest, and hence who is receiving hospitality, is contested. They talk about fluid hospitality, where volunteers become guests and immigrants become hosts. This is the case in the study by Laura Bjørg Serup Petersen, who is a PhD candidate at the School for Culture and Society at Aarhus University. In Chapter 9, she shows how a festive celebration of Shrovetide, while taking place in a local Danish church in Aarhus, constructs different spaces of hospitality where the role of hosts and guests differ. Whereas the dining together in the communal room gave Arab families the role as hosts inviting Laura to join them (p. 153), all Muslim families seem to leave – apparently not feeling welcome – when the participants were invited to join a common prayer in the sanctuary (p. 154).

Kaia Schultz Ronsdal, who is a postdoctoral fellow at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo, similarly emphasises the fluidity of hospitality. In Chapter 11, she analyses how the local activists in the county of Sør-Vanger in the Arctic North supported refugees

who wanted to cross the border from Russia. The surprise to her is that these local activists insist that they were those who received hospitality from the refugees. She argues that hospitality seems to come with the other and it becomes an immaterial, a transcendent, a sensing and an embodied hospitality (p. 187). The body is also the topic of Helena Schmidt (Chapter 8) on the ambiguous meal offered to irregular migrants by a Norwegian church. Schmidt is a doctoral research fellow at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo. Her chapter is somehow disquieting reading because she addresses the limits of hospitality. She points to the man who attends out of physiological necessity and not because of an actual choice. In his case, eating becomes shameful and the communal meal not a space of celebratory hospitality. The idea of a guest and a host may not make sense, when you cannot decline, as Schmidt concludes (p. 141).

The volume is indeed a valuable contribution to research on the current dealings of the Nordic countries with immigration in a time when national borders are increasingly protected through measures aimed at keeping people out. Besides the nuanced empirical exploration of the practices and meanings of hospitality in times and spaces, the volume distinguishes itself by its perspective on the historical development of the welfare state and the role of the Nordic churches and Christian ethics herein. Furthermore, the perspective on *counterspaces*, which in this volume are spaces of hospitality that oppose the restrictions, crisis discourse and populism in the Nordic countries (p. 4), offers a much-needed examination of some of the many civil society activities addressing the presence of immigrants in the Nordic countries who otherwise meet a hostile state apparatus. However, I wonder if researchers by subscribing to the binary: 'hostile state' versus 'hospitable civil society', potentially fail to notice important aspects of the present distribution of hospitality. In the introduction, the editors shortly refer to the existence of contract-based religious–secular partnership in the areas of social work, welfare provision and integration work. However, they do not seem to apply this possibility of implicit – and neoliberal – collaboration between state and civil society to the discussions on hospitality. Chapter 5 by Villadsen might be seen in this perspective. He examines how the open clinic for irregular migrants is legally accepted by the state to solve the delicate issue of rights to healthcare, which the Danish state does not offer migrants without a legal status. In other words, civil society action may be considered – also by the state – a welcome way of securing universal ideals of human rights without compromising a strict immigration policy. A focus on complementary roles could furthermore motivate research on collaborations between local authorities and civil society, which is not included in this volume, but could hold a potential for additional nuancing of the understanding of hospitality in a time of migration.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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