



RESEARCH ARTICLES

Hospitality

A Timeless Measure of Who We Are?

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This article provides a historical perspective to understand better whether hospitality persists as a measure of society across contexts. Focusing on Homer and later Tragedians, it charts ancient literature's deep interest in the tensions of balancing obligations to provide hospitality and asylum, and the responsibilities of well-being owed to host-citizens by their leaders. Such discourse appears central at key transformative moments, such as the Greek polis democracy of the fifth century BCE, hospitality becoming the marker between civic society and the international community, confronting the space between civil and human rights. At its center was the question of: Who is the host? The article goes on to question whether the seventeenth-century advent of the nation state was such a moment, and whether in the twenty-first century we observe a shift towards states' treatment of their own subjects as primary in measuring society, with hospitality becoming the exception to be explained.

■ **KEYWORDS:** asylum, borders, citizenship, hospitality, human-rights, refugeehood, statelessness, UN

Xenia—hospitality—is at the core of Homer's seemingly timeless epic, recounting Odysseus's return from a battle-worn Troy to his home in Ithaca during the distant mythical Bronze Age of the twelfth century.¹ Driving this *Odyssey*, one of the oldest narratives to survive from the ancient Mediterranean, is the encounter between the host and guest—often an unknown stranger. The actions and decisions taken over the threshold, whether in welcome or repulsion, serve to position society within a moral framework, and simultaneously re/define the framework itself. One of the underlying concerns of this article is to understand better the extent to which hospitality persists as a measure of society across different contexts. Ancient literature reveals a forensic interest in the tensions of balancing the obligation to provide hospitality and asylum, underwritten by the gods (as it is perhaps today by the UN), and the responsibilities of security and well-being owed to the citizens of the host community by their leaders. As such, it is also an expression of the ambivalent role of those in power as representatives of the common will. This



article provides a snapshot of instances when the discourse of hospitality becomes central to the articulation of community and autonomy, especially during transformative moments such as the emergence of the Greek polis and its city-state citizenship in the fifth century BCE. It traces a shift from the society of Homeric epic—based around elite networks—when asylum was sought at household thresholds, to that of the city-state when giving refuge became the prerogative of the community as a whole. In this later period, the challenges and opportunities of encounter transform hospitality into a marker between civic society and the international community. They expose the space between citizen rights and universal rights. How this is played out in more contemporary periods will be addressed in the final section of the article. It will reflect on the potency of hospitality as a measure of society at the advent of the nation state in the seventeenth century, and in the period of severe displacement and extreme border controls of the twenty-first century. The aim here is not to offer a comparison between ancient and modern practices, or to suggest a progressive or degenerative trajectory. Rather, the *longue durée* perspective is to position present concerns within a broader discourse, exposing the transience of current conventions, and in so doing contribute to new understandings and imaginaries.²

Ancient Contexts

In the surviving writings of the ancient inhabitants who lived around the Mediterranean, there is little interest in human mobility as a topic in itself. *Migration* as a general phenomenon does not appear as a matter of concern, either in terms of security or for the purposes of management and control (Isayev 2017a). Perhaps this is not surprising, considering the novelty of our modern conception of immigration—understood as a move across a national border for the purpose of permanent residence—which only took hold in the early 1800s (Shumsky 2008; Thompson 2003: 195). It brought with it a fear of displacement, overcrowding, and a negative perception of the incoming migrant. The institution of the passport soon followed, which became a mechanism for criminalizing unauthorized movement, and allowed for the creation of an increasingly elaborate border control industry (Torpey 2000). There is nothing of this scale from the ancient Mediterranean. Anything resembling immigration statistics is conspicuously absent in the surviving record and there is little evidence for any state boundary checkpoints where such data could have been collected. This is despite a sophisticated system of commercial treaties, taxation, and trade duties, which required monitoring and reporting. Such activities were conducted in a world with no national borders, and no regional maps-to-scale on which they could be drawn. That is not to say that there was not a persistent fear of conquest, colonial enterprise, expulsion, displacement, or an interest in the outsider. But mobility in itself was not articulated as a distinct entity separate from the practices of the everyday. Scholarship has shown that in the ancient world it was recognized as being ongoing and cyclical (Horden and Purcell 2000; Isayev 2017a; Tacoma 2016). Hence, we struggle to find any single term either in Ancient Greek or in Latin that categorizes all those on the move in the same way as the current usage of “migrant” does in English.³ *Transitor* is the Latin term that comes closest, but it only emerged at the end of the Roman Imperial period, developing through the Middle Ages,⁴ at a time when concepts of immobility became associated with virtue (Horden and Purcell 2000: 384; Pottier 2009). The appearance of such terminology signals a change (in this case pejorative) in the conceptualization of mobility and the perception of those on the move.

In terms of hospitality, in the context of people seeking refuge in the ancient Mediterranean, technically it was not the entry into the land under the jurisdiction of another community that was sought after, but subsistence, patronage, and protection in its broadest sense. The likeli-

hood of attaining refuge would in large part depend on the extent of preceding connections and relationships with the hosts. Some people would have already been “known” to the hosts, meaning they already had ties of kinship or *xenia*, and hence were part of reciprocal networks of protection, even if those were ancestral. Ship merchants, for example, such as the eighth-century BCE Corinthian exile Demaratus, could call on friends and contacts to provide assistance. In Demaratus’s case, the Tarquinians of Italy, with whom he had traded for years, allowed him and his entourage to make Tarquinii their new home, and his offspring became one of the first kings of Rome (Dionysius of Halicarnassus 3.46–49; Livy 1.34–35; with discussion in Isayev 2017a: chapter 3). This article does not focus on such privileged “outsiders” but rather on the “unknown” strangers, who rely on supplication—*hiketeia*—to gain refuge. It considers the role and predicament of such suppliants who are not part of their potential host’s networks, and who lack the means of providing reciprocal hospitality, having only services to offer in lieu (often military), and possibly not even that.

The hosts, in granting refuge, could distinguish between accessing the land and accessing the membership privileges of the community that occupied that land. Hence the possibility of gaining the status of a resident alien—*metic*—who, in fifth-century BCE Athens, had certain privileges and duties but without citizenship (Kasimis 2013, forthcoming). This status was the likely outcome of the successful plea by the *Suppliant Women* in Aeschylus’s tragedy (Bakewell 2013: 58, 103–105, 121–125). Centuries later, the Roman statesman Cicero, in his *De Officiis* (3.11.47), expressed the distinction more explicitly, by stating that while “it is right not to permit the rights of citizenship to one who is not a citizen . . . to debar foreigners from using the city is clearly inhuman.”²⁵ Such a distinction would become difficult to articulate with the advent of the nation state from the seventeenth century onwards, once territory and membership overlapped. The resulting “old trinity of state-people-territory,” as Hannah Arendt ([1951] 1968: 358) referred to it, created a particular form of statelessness (Gundogdu 2015: 2–5), in which the dimension of physical placedness became part of the difficulty in accessing human rights.

A Measure of Early Ancient Society

Some of the most recognizable episodes from the ancient world in which hospitality is chosen explicitly as a measure of society are to be found in the early stories of divine visitations. They are in part about the importance of hospitality rituals; more significantly, they also demonstrate the way in which responses to guests and suppliants served to articulate the nature of individuals and communities. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the hero’s son Telemachus does not disappoint the goddess Athena when she arrives disguised as a family friend, during Odysseus’s long absence from home (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 1 at 115–124). The young man proves to be a model host, even under the tyranny of the suitors who have entrenched themselves in the house, consuming the family’s resources as they wait in hope of gaining his mother’s hand. The story foreshadows their punishment to come, and the favors which Athena will grant to Telemachus and his father. Composed around the same period, the infamous biblical story of Sodom recounts how Lot alone welcomed the strangers into his home, unaware of their divine status and their mission to find but 10 righteous men in the city (*Genesis* 19.1–38). Lot’s unequivocal hospitality saved him from the divine wrath that was to destroy Sodom. It is starkly juxtaposed with the threatening treatment received by the visitors from the city’s other inhabitants.

Most commentators of this story focus on Lot’s extreme act in trying to prevent the Sodomites from harming his guests by offering them his virgin daughters instead (Jipp 2013: 145). It seems beyond comprehension. Lot’s story is that of a patriarch who is able to offer his daugh-

ters to the Sodomites to protect the guests, hence it is gendered in a particular way. We might compare it to the predicament of the 50 Danaids in Aeschylus's tragedy of the *Suppliant Women* written several centuries later. As discussed below, these daughters of Danaeus seek refuge to avoid a forced marriage and precisely the type of acts which Lot is willing to endure to protect the guests. There is no question or concern about the agency of the daughters in the story of Lot. Conversely, in Aeschylus's tragedy, produced against the backdrop of Classical Athens in the fifth century BCE, the flight of the Danaids from Egypt to Argos becomes a challenge to patriarchal frameworks. It is the daughters who drive the action of the play, despite the presence of their father whose inability to protect them in Egypt has forced him to accompany them in seeking asylum. There is much more to explore in the way that hospitality is gendered, exposed in the divergence of these two episodes alone, and we will return to this briefly below. In broader terms, the biblical account is a discourse on the extremes of unconditional hospitality and its use as a measure of virtue. It hones in on the struggle of balancing the obligation to protect the outsider and that owed to the members of one's own household and community.

It is the im/possibility of such hyperbolic hospitality that is of interest to Derrida, who uses the Homeric epics to explore its extremes (Derrida [1997] 2000: 3–5, 15, 22). Within them, especially in the *Odyssey*, hospitality is not merely positioned as pivotal to the culture, it provides the spectrum for its measure, from the barbaric to the civilized. For those who know the story in Book 9, the image of the Cyclops Polyphemus proceeding to eat the guests—Odysseus and his comrades—acts as an enduring symbol of a bad host, his name becoming synonymous with barbarism. He is unmoved by the evocation of Zeus as the protector and avenger of suppliants, and the threats of divine vengeance on those who transgress the rules of hospitality (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 9 at 265–280). The episode also serves to demonstrate the barbarism of the Cyclopeans as a whole. In contrast, Book 7 portrays the welcome that Odysseus receives at the royal house of Arete and Alkinoos on Scheria, which is legendary. These nobles take in the shipwrecked stranger who has nothing to offer but his bare life, having just washed up on the shore. Nevertheless, he is cared for and given a place at the princely table, before even being asked his name or where he is from.

Recounted in this familiar cursory way, these two accounts appear as archetypes of good and bad hosting, but once the details of these encounters are examined they become less so, and the agency of others begins to play a greater role, not least that of the guest. Within the Polyphemus story, the rules of host–guest relations were first broken not by the Cyclops, but by Odysseus and his men who entered the house uninvited and began to help themselves to what they found there without permission. Viewed from this perspective, they appear less as mistreated guests and more as raiders who got their due punishment. They may even share some characteristics with the parasitic suitors who consume the resources of Odysseus's own house in Ithaca while he is away. In Scheria too there are other elements at play. That the destitute Odysseus is able to reach the center of Alkinoos's royal house to fall at Arete's knees in supplication is because of divine intervention. Athena, looking out for her favorite hero, gives Arete's daughter Nausicaa the courage to approach Odysseus when she finds him on the shore, and to direct him to her parents' house. Then the goddess veils him as he makes his way through the city and over the threshold, until he arrives in their presence.

Whether someone in such a destitute condition would have been otherwise allowed to enter the royal household and receive such hospitality becomes questionable. Furthermore, we are told that the reason Odysseus cannot just walk through the town openly is that its inhabitants are likely to be hostile to strangers. Their hostility is explained by the relative isolation of Scheria, implying that perhaps they were not used to seeing strangers in their midst. This may go some way in highlighting the wisdom and generosity of Scheria's elite rulers, but as a general

comment on society's non-elite as being more hostile to strangers, it is problematic. One of the other exemplary hosts in the *Odyssey*, Book 14, is Eumaeus, the poor swineherd who lives on Odysseus's estate in Ithaca. Although he exists on the edges of Greek elite-warrior society, his hospitality reveals him as a hero at its center. His offer of *xenia*, no less than that which Odysseus receives in the royal palaces, serves to position these characters at the virtuous end of the spectrum.

Hospitality at the Birth of the Polis—City-State

The epics of Homer, written down in the eighth century BCE, depict a face-to-face society, which also pervades the biblical world in the Book of *Genesis*, believed to have been composed around the same time (ninth to seventh centuries BCE).⁶ In such a society, hospitality and refuge are sought at the doorsteps of individual householders—who are one and the same as the host. The ultimate decision to grant *xenia* rests with them. The position of the host becomes more ambiguous with the onset of Greek city-state culture of the Classical period (fifth century BCE), especially if those who seek refuge arrive in groups and make their appeals not at house thresholds, but at the public altars and sanctuaries. This is exemplified in the exchange between the suppliant's carer Iolaus and the men of the city in Euripides' *Children of Heracles* (1.90–95):

Iolaus: They are Heracles' sons, strangers, who have come as suppliants to you and your city.

Chorus: What is your errand? Is it your wish to address the city? Tell us.

Under these new conditions, the nature of agency—the possibility for action—of those seeking refuge becomes, necessarily, differently expressed (Isayev 2017b). New democratic institutions, which we know most about from Athens in the fifth century BCE, mean that responsibilities and obligations are more diffuse. As before, the principles of *xenia* (hospitality or guest-friendship) and *hiketeia* (asylum) remain protected by the gods, among them Zeus, in his attribute as Xenios (protector of guests) and Hikesios (protector of suppliants). In fulfilling these divinely sanctioned duties, community leaders now had to take account of the will of the *demos*—the people—who could support or deny their position of power.

The advent of polis society, therefore, meant that the ultimate decision to grant hospitality/asylum was no longer the remit of individual households, but the prerogative of city-state leaders and their *demos*. Encounters between hosts and guests now served not only to characterize the nature of community, but also to address the pressure points surrounding the duties of the state and its members. This is particularly evident in the Greek tragedies of Euripides' *Children of Heracles* and Aeschylus's *The Suppliant Women*, which also confront the conflict between divine authority (or customary law) and secular authority (that which is legally sanctioned). The plays destabilize the seemingly incontrovertible hierarchy that positions suppliants as the least powerful, with the polis in the middle, and the gods as the most powerful of all (Zeitlin 1992: 207–211). Initially it is this structure that appears to govern the action in the *Children of Heracles*, performed circa 430 BCE. Within this mythical story, the suppliant children with their grandmother Alcmena, under the care of Heracles' friend Iolaus, appeal to Athens and its king Demophon from their sanctuary at the altar of Zeus. They seek Athenian protection in their escape from Eurystheus, the king of Argos, who demands their return as they are his subjects. In refusing to give up the suppliants, who would likely be killed by Eurystheus, the Athenians have to face Argive aggression. As the Chorus of Old Men resign themselves to war, their lament reveals the expected power relations (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: 1.750–770):

I pray, and raise your shout to heaven, to the throne of Zeus and in the house of gray-eyed Athena! For we are about to cut a path through danger with the sword of gray iron on behalf of our fatherland, on behalf of our homes, since we have taken the suppliants in. But it is cowardly, O my city, if we hand over suppliant strangers at the behest of Argos. Zeus is my ally, I have no fear, Zeus is justly grateful to me: never shall I show the gods to be inferior to men.

The suppliants are objectified and seem to be the ones with least agency—the power to act—yet it is their successful plea for protection that has led to the necessity for war, thus subverting the power relationship. If indeed the hierarchy was so rigid, then it would be difficult to explain the need for, and success of, supplication rituals, or conversely decisions to deny hospitality or mistreat the suppliants, despite the possibility of divine retribution.

Moralizing strands pervade legends of divine anger in response to the mistreatment of suppliants (Herodotus 6.75.3; Sinn 1993: appendix III). Punishments in the form of earthquakes and tidal waves are a particular favorite, like the one that buried Achaean Helike in 373 BCE for mistreating the suppliants who took refuge in its Poseidon Sanctuary (Pausanias 7.25.1).⁷ These stories serve to show not only the potential consequences of divine threats, but also the extent to which they were ignored. It remains questionable what effect pressure by a higher power, such as the gods (or the UN today), actually has on decisions taken at the time of encounter. That some power remains, ironically, can be seen in the extent to which states tried to exploit technical ambiguities to avoid responsibilities owed to suppliants, while still appearing to follow the recognized “international” moral codes.⁸

In the ancient world, avoidance schemes included attempts to draw suppliants away from the protection of the gods through trickery, of the kind that the Athenians resisted in Euripides’ *Children of Heracles* (1.257–258). Athens is praised for its refusal to give in to deception, by luring the children away from the protective sanctuary of Zeus, at the suggestion of the Argives, who wanted the suppliants turned over to them so they could be put to death. The Athenian response has affinities with the underpinning principles of the *non-refoulement* clause in Article 33 of the UN 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. Other methods of avoiding responsibility in the ancient world included rules that prohibited seekers of refuge accessing sites, such as sanctuaries, where they would be deemed under the protection of the gods, and hence inviolable.⁹ Such acts resemble those of states in the twenty-first century who excise their entry points, such as airports or sea ports (or in Australia the whole country, for those entering by boat) so that they cannot be used for the purpose of claiming asylum.¹⁰ Yet, however exclusionary the rules of individual states may be, there appears to be a continuing interest in giving the impression that the duties of hospitality, and obligations owed to those seeking refuge, were/are not being ignored. It is one way of symbolizing “civilization” and at the same time demonstrating state power and sovereignty through the granting of asylum. This assertion of power, exhibited through the choice to host, has also been harnessed by communities, such as the city, operating on a different scale to that of the state, as we will see below.

A challenge for any polis in the Greek Classical period was how to secure a position at the “civilized” or virtuous end of the spectrum, especially for those with imperial ambitions such as Athens and Sparta. In honoring the duties of hospitality, a polis showed itself to be respecting the will of the gods and hence in their favor. Therefore, enemies could be charged with disregarding their responsibilities towards suppliants, as Athens and Sparta had done reciprocally prior to their clash in the Peloponnesian War in the last decades of the fifth century BCE (Thucydides 1.126–128). Athens’ self-presentation was of a polis that was open to refugees and outsiders, without undermining its myth of autochthony—the belief that its primordial inhabitants sprung from the land (Horden and Purcell 2000: 384; Purcell 1990; Wilson 2006: 32). The city’s

hospitable character was showcased as a juxtaposition to that of their Spartan enemies, whom the Athenians accused of being inhuman for throwing out “foreigners.”¹¹ These were political claims. In real terms there may have been little difference in how the two adversaries behaved on the ground, especially in light of Athenians’ highly controlled access to their citizenship. We know that when the Plataeans, on the takeover of their homeland by the Thebans, came to request asylum from Athens for the second time in 373 BCE, their claims were denied. One of their points of appeal was to stress that such a denial would risk harming Athens’ long-standing reputation of hospitality, as recorded by Isocrates in his fourteenth speech *Plataicus* (1–2, 53). In this case its reputation, apparently, mattered less than the diplomatic and military necessities of the situation at this historical juncture, which required that Athens reject the plea of the Plataeans.

Who Is the Host?

In the ancient Mediterranean, hospitality was a sought-after badge which ancient poleis strove to gain and hold onto, irrespective of their actual policies and attitudes towards the outsider seeking refuge. With the coming of city-state culture, there had to be a reconfiguration of the host–guest transaction, especially when it concerned groups of suppliants who addressed the community *en masse* or as a city. As already noted above, it was no longer the house threshold where such supplications were made, but public sites such as altars and sanctuaries where suppliants were protected by the gods. The Athenian dramatists, through their intrinsic exploration of the mechanics of such scenarios, were able to foreground the profound transformation of their society and what it meant to live in a democracy with imperial ambitions. An understanding of the meaning of the polis could be accessed through the simple question posed by suppliants seeking refuge: Whom to ask?

This problem of whom to address their appeal to is one of the opening scenes of Aeschylus’s play *The Suppliant Women*, performed in the middle of the fifth century BCE. A shore at the edge of Argos is the backdrop for the mythical story, which tells of the flight of the Danaids, the 50 daughters of Danaeus, who escape from Egypt to avoid a forced marriage. Gripping the sacred altars of the sanctuary, they appeal to the Argive king Pelasgos for protection in his city. The following dialogue takes place between Pelasgos and the Danaids (Aeschylus, *The Suppliant Women*: 1.365–375):

Pelasgos: You are not sitting at the hearth of my house.
If the city as a whole is threatened with pollution,
it must be the concern of the people as a whole to work out a cure.

Danaids: You are the city, I tell you, you are the people!
A head of state, not subject to judgement,
you control the altar, the hearth of the city.

Within this passage we witness a clash between the outdated aristocratic frameworks of an oligarchic regime (which the Danaids voice in their response) (Bakewell 2013: 13, 30–32; Cole 2004: 63; Zeitlin 1992) and the rise of the new democratic state which appeals to the will of the people—the *demos*. Through the king’s words, the audience of Classical Athens is reminded that the private, exclusive guest-friendship, which underpinned inter-elite horizontal ties, and hence their authority, no longer had a place in the new polis society (Bakewell 2013: 13, 30–31; Garland 2014: 13; Walbank 1978: 2–3). The play proceeds with the king going back and forth between the sanctuary and the city, to consult his people, until finally they agree to take in the

suppliant women, despite the risk of ensuing war with the Egyptian suitors, who demand the return of the Danaids (Aeschylus, *The Suppliant Women*: 1.365–375).

Deliberations on whether to take in suppliants are also at the core of Euripides' *Children of Heracles*. Here, however, the community is not explicitly consulted by their king, Demophon; rather, the will of the city's inhabitants is represented by the Chorus of the Old Men of Athens, who are the first to respond to the suppliant pleas for help. In his acknowledgment of the divisive nature of the decision, Demophon's concern shows an interest in the will of the people, and the difficulty of finding any single resolution (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: 1.415):

Now you will see crowded assemblies being held,
with some maintaining that it was right to protect strangers who are suppliants,
while others accuse me of folly. If I do as I am bidden, civil war will break out.

The anxiety of some of his city's citizens in taking in the children is not presented as an anti-migrant stance. Rather, the discourse is around ascertaining priority of obligations. What measures is the community expected to take in adhering to: (1) the will of the gods, (2) its fellow citizens, (3) the suppliants? The initial threat of war by the Argives does not deter the decision to put the suppliant children under their protection. However, an oracle indicates that Athenian victory will only be guaranteed if a noble maiden is sacrificed to Persephone. The gods can be cruel! This is a step too far for the hosts. Demophon, their king, states that he is not willing to sacrifice his own child, or force any of the Athenians to do so (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: 1.410–415):

Therefore, consider these facts and join with me in discovering how you yourselves may be saved and this land as well, and how I may not be discredited in the eyes of the citizens. I do not have a monarchy like that of the barbarians: only if I do what is fair will I be fairly treated.

Their desperate predicament leads Macaria, one of the maiden children among the suppliants, to offer herself for sacrifice, thus allowing the rest of her family to be saved, and the Athenians to be victorious (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: 1.500–506):

Then fear no more the Argive enemy's spear! I am ready, old man, of my own accord and unbidden, to appear for sacrifice and be killed. For what shall we say if this city is willing to run great risks on our behalf, and yet we, who lay toil and struggle on others, run away from death when it lies in our power to rescue them? It must not be so. . .

This episode raises issues about gender relations and hierarchies of power, which may at first glance appear straightforward. Both in this play and in Aeschylus's *Suppliant Women*, it is the most vulnerable members of society—women and children—who seek refuge *en masse* from communities whose men make the decisions about whether to allow them access. Such a scenario fits with our expectations of ancient patriarchal society, but on closer examination of host-guest/suppliant encounters, a subversion of traditional roles becomes notable. The Danaids of Aeschylus's tragedy, as the female suppliants of Euripides' play, are the ones who speak with the most powerful voice. It is their agency that directs the action of the plays, even if that means sacrificing oneself: the Danaids' threat of death, and hence pollution of the sanctuary, forces the Argive king Pelasgos to plead with his community to allow them entry. Macaria, through choosing to be sacrificed, exhibits male qualities of virtue—it is her heroic act that allows the men of Athens to go to war, be victorious, and prove their own heroism. These suppliant women are visible in a way that the women of the host community are not. The women of the poleis, whether Argos or Athens, seem distant from positions of power and decision making, unlike

the female figures of the earlier pre-polis society of interconnected warrior elites, who appear in Homeric epics. Episodes such as the one of the destitute Odysseus, clasping the knees of Arete, the queen of Scheria, in supplication, indicate the presence of women as figures of power and influence within the household.

In Euripides' tragedy of the Classical period of the polis, decisions about how to respond to suppliants who sought refuge also frame a wider discourse on the positioning of sovereign entities within the inter-state system. Froma Zeitlin (1992: 211) refers to suppliant transactions as the earliest form of foreign relations. When the Chorus of Athenian men is put under pressure by the Argive herald's bullying tactics for Athens to give up the suppliants, not least by trying to drag them from the altar himself, they remind him of Athens' sovereignty, stressing the transgression of his acts (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: l.110–115). The Chorus challenges the Argives' tyrannical attempt to institute the use of their own laws within Athenian jurisdiction, threatening it in the same way as they had other states who offered the suppliants protection (Burnett 1976). Demophon's emphatic response to the herald is (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: l.284–287):

Clear off! I am not afraid of your Argos. You were not going to remove these suppliants from Athens and disgrace me. The city that I rule is not Argos' subject but sovereign.

Athenians proceed to emphasize that they are the protectors of the weak and destitute. In their reflection on the decision to help the suppliants, the Chorus echoes the Athenian slogan of generosity (Euripides, *Children of Heracles*: l.329–332).

It is always the desire of this land to side with justice and help the weak. Therefore she has borne countless toils on behalf of friends, and now too I see another such struggle coming upon us.

The historical context of the play's performance, in the second year of the Peloponnesian War, is relevant here. It may be a comment on Athens' reassertion of sovereignty in the face of aggression from its rival Sparta, where the ability to grant asylum becomes a statement of state power and autonomy. Or, conversely, it may be foreshadowing the appraisal of Athens' treatment of autonomous entities as the war progressed. Thucydides, in his not uncritical account of the war, exposes the disparity between Athenian adherence to democratic principles in conducting internal affairs, and acting akin to a tyrant in external dealings, at times forcing autonomous states into submission. This is captured in Book 5 (84–116) of his *Peloponnesian War*, in his stark dramatization of the dialogue between the men of Melos—a neutral state—and the Athenians who were poised to destroy it in 416 BCE. In justifying their actions, the Athenians resort to outlining the reality of the power relations of the two states, implicitly acknowledging that autonomy and freedom are not enough to be allowed to act independently (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*: 5.89):

you know as well as we know that what is just is arrived at in human arguments only when the necessity on both sides is equal, and that the powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must.

The Athenians of Thucydides' historical narrative have taken on the role of the tyrannical Argives in the tragedy of Euripides' *Children of Heracles*. It is they, the Athenians, who are in the role of the outsiders, arriving not as suppliants but as the uninvited, imperially sanctioned "raiders," who demand allegiance and resources. It is their aggression that leads to people fleeing and seeking refuge in others' homes. In light of Athens' role as tyrant, is Euripides' play about the

city's ancestral hospitality an attempt to assert its place at the moral end of the spectrum, or is it a critical comment on the irony of its role in creating the very suppliants it rejects?

Conclusions and Afterthoughts

In the ancient context, the literature reveals that communities were keen to position themselves as being hospitable to strangers and open to those who came to seek asylum, whatever their actions may have been on the ground. This was an important measure of society and it allowed states to present themselves as "civilized." By casting their enemies as doing the opposite, they could be shown to be barbaric and inhuman. Ancient authors also reveal the intricacies and challenges of making such decisions. They use the discourse of hospitality to reflect on societal relations, the real place of power and the moral dilemmas of leaders and communities. With the onset of democratic polis culture, we can trace some of the transformations in the nature of this discourse. To what extent does it make hospitality and asylum more difficult? And for whom?

Proposing that in certain ancient-world contexts the treatment of outsiders was a core measure of society does not mean that the decisions to welcome and protect the guests and suppliants were necessarily favorable. Rather, it is to show some of the ways that such an outlook shaped strategies for appeal and deliberation of what action to take. It also indicates that the refusal of hospitality is framed as the exception that needs explaining, rather than its opposite. Cicero's powerful statement that to deny outsiders access to the city is inhuman echoes this sentiment. Such an outlook fits a society in which mobility was perceived as an everyday norm, rather than something outside it. The issue for authorities, who anticipated such ongoing mobility in their policies, was not how to keep outsiders out, but how to keep one's own community members in the same place for long enough to count them, tax them, and recruit them into the army (Isayev 2017a). We would expect that historically, the protection, well-being, and the will of fellow citizens would have been the priority for any consideration and especially true for the decision makers whose positions of power depended on the will of the *demos*. As a measure of society, however, the welfare of one's own community members appears less prominently in the literature. It was people in the position of guests and suppliants who were explicitly protected by the gods.

In the centuries and millennia that follow, we note shifts in the positioning of mobility and obligations owed to outsiders. As was briefly suggested above, there is some indication that in the late Roman Imperial period the notion of immobility gains in value. The intensified interconnectivity of the twenty-first century has not made immobility a privileged position in the same way. While sedentism is assumed as the norm, and incomers of a certain class/background may be treated as abhorrent, mobility itself, conversely, is the anticipated privilege of passport holders from the so-called Global North. It is they who have the potential for the most extensive protected legal movement, and it is the nation states to which they belong that have the most tightly controlled borders that prevent outsiders from coming in.

This latest permutation of approaches to mobility owes much to seventeenth-century discourse centered on cosmopolitanism and the values associated with free movement (Benhabib 2004: 27, 40; Kant 1983). Within it, justifications of mobility, in terms of colonial ventures and expanding empire, developed alongside sovereign entities' exclusionary policies, which saw hospitality become the exception. Vincent Chetail traces the turning point in the writings of the seventeenth-century natural law theoretician Samuel von Pufendorf, for whom the admission of foreigners became determined by the host states' own interest, and granted as a favor (Pufendorf [1672] 1749: book 3 at 3.251–252; Chetail 2016: 911). The position was further consolidated by

the more extreme approach of Christian von Wolff, who approved the states' discretion to admit outsiders to be enforced by criminal sanctions (Chetail 2016: 911). His views were underpinned by the belief that "in a state of nature there is no right to emigrate" (von Wolff [1749] 1934: vol. 2 at 3.83.154). Although beyond the scope of this investigation, we may observe that the imperial enterprise, which provided the platform for such attitudes, was unlikely to have been explicitly recognized as the end product of a particular "emigration," nor would those over whom empire was extended have been cast in the role of the host. These few excerpts from seventeenth-century discourse capture a moment of states' reframing of their responsibilities owed to outsiders—as a favor rather than an expectation.

Twenty-first-century public perception of migration as an exception to an otherwise sedentary existence buttresses exclusionary state policies, which increasingly frame "migrants" as undesirable for the well-being of nation states. Does this attitude reflect a shift in the key measure of society to the way in which states treat their own subjects? The following observations of some current practices are cited here by way of one possible preliminary response. They do not purport to capture the complexity of the situation. That there has been a shift may be observed in the now acceptable justification for military action against other sovereign states on the principle that "they—or political regimes—default on legitimate statehood by virtue of their antidemocratic or nonliberal behavior; in so doing, they undermine the ethic of coexistence that sustains the society of states" (Elliot 2010: 287). Sovereignty itself appears to be conditional on the "appropriate" treatment of one's subjects (Long 2013: 22). For Nicholas De Genova, it is not hospitality but *deportation* that becomes the locus for theoretical elaboration of the "co-constituted problems of the state and its putative sovereignty, on the one hand, and that elementary precondition of human freedom, which is the freedom of movement" (De Genova 2010: 39). The contradictions, inherent within an international system of liberal nationalism that allows for such scenarios, leave those seeking refuge in a state of limbo that makes it difficult for them to access human rights.

A further sign that the measure has shifted away from hospitality is apparent in Joseph Carens' challenging study of the *Ethics of Immigration* (2013: 195). Within it, he addresses the merits and risks of open borders, assessing the necessary precondition for fluidity across them. In so doing, he appraises the European Union as a model, pointing to the relatively similar democratic governance structures of its states and their comparable economic positions. Part of his analysis confronts the question: "Why should democratic states take in refugees at all?"¹² In outlining the disparity between some of the wealthier states that resist taking in refugees and less well-off states that do, he controversially warns against romanticizing refugee-receiving states, in that to a certain extent their openness may be the result of the inability to keep refugees out rather than the willingness to let them in (Carens 2013: 195). Is the implication here, in part, that such states have weak governments which do not have the capacity to put the well-being of their own subjects first? He may have been thinking about such countries as Lebanon, for example: by 2015, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a quarter of its population was made up of refugees, and by 2017 that proportion had almost doubled. By way of comparison, the one million people who arrived in Europe seeking asylum in 2015 represent 0.2% of the total European population.

When Carens wrote his book, published in 2013, although people were already fleeing war, persecution, and drought to seek asylum in the millions, the displacement to Europe caused by the conflict in Syria was not yet at its peak, which it was to reach by 2015. Carens was also writing prior to Germany's decision, that same year, to allow some one million people the opportunity to claim asylum within its state borders. The controversial (rather than celebrated) decision taken by Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, to take in the substantial number of asylum

seekers in 2015 was not explicitly in response to internal pressure to take in asylum seekers. As Carens proclaims, “I do not imagine that moral criticism moves the world, at least not often” (Carens 2013: 311). There are economic and historically contingent reasons as to why Merkel was able to make this decision. These took into account both the UN directives that outline the responsibilities owed to people seeking refuge, and the need for an intake of newcomers to make up for Germany’s falling birth rate. Decisions made in the ancient world context considered here were likely driven by similar concerns, but the discourse was differently framed; inhospitality was the exception that needed justifying.

As a final observation, by way of contrast we can point to the concurrent dynamism of such citizen-initiated movements as the City of Sanctuary,¹³ and refugee support organizations that operate outside of official state structures. Although it may be questionable to what extent their activities of hospitality, support, and protection of refugees affect state policies, such actions help to position the city as its own agent. Furthermore, over the long term, by creating contexts where diverse groups can come together and interact, such initiatives contribute towards shifting public discourse, which in the end is the main driver of policy. The emerging power of cities is evident precisely in the tensions with national agendas over questions of mobility and welcome. By choosing to provide alternative models of hosting to those of the states, Cities of Sanctuary—seemingly going against the grain—create environments where being inhospitable is what needs to be explained.

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■ NOTES

I am grateful to the editors and anonymous readers of this article, for their thoughtful and important suggestions, which have helped to sharpen the ideas presented here.

1. *Xenia* is the Ancient Greek term that encompasses what we refer to today as hospitality. Its more specific meaning is guest-friendship. One understanding of *xenia*, then and now, is expressed in the co-created publication, *Xenia* (<http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/xenia/>) and also explored through the initiative www.viewalmaisha.org. These initiatives and their participants, near and far, have been seminal for thinking together about the meaning and potential of hospitality across centuries.
2. The investigation that follows draws on, and develops, some of the points made in an exploratory article on the possibilities for agency in contexts of displacement, prepared for the *International Review of the Red Cross* (Isayev 2017b).
3. Terms do exist for the foreigner/outsider in Ancient Greek—*xenos* (although initially the term could also be used to mean host), or enemy—*polemios*; and in Latin for the friendly outsider—*hospes*, and the one who is much less so, an enemy—*hostis* (originally the term was also used to mean stranger or foreigner). None of these express the same sentiment as the modern usage of “migrant.” Instead they

- focus on the specific relationship of the individual to the host community (Cicero, *de Officiis* 1.12.37; Varro, *Lingua Latina* 5.3, with discussion in Isayev 2017a: Chapter 2).
4. Ammianus 15.2.4 (Lewis and Short 1900).
 5. Translation by the author, adapted from the 1928 translation of Cicero's *De Officiis* by Walter Miller. Subsequent citations refer to the same edition.
 6. The composition of *Genesis* was likely to have derived from the literary tradition found in the Northwest Semitic inscriptions of the ninth–seventh centuries BCE (Arnold 2008: 14–17; Emerton 2004).
 7. Also, the Spartan earthquake is blamed on their ejection of Helots from the Poseidon Sanctuary in 464 BCE (Thucydides 1921: 1.128.1).
 8. For evidence of a Greco-Roman assumption that supplication was a universal practice, see Naiden 2006: 19.
 9. One example was the prohibition of foreigners' entry into sacred precincts (Chaniotis 1996: 73). For others, see Garland 2014: 117.
 10. For some examples, see Carens 2013: 198–200.
 11. Thucydides: 1.144.2, 1.67, 1.39.1, 2.39.1; Herodotus on Sparta being closed to strangers: 1.65.6–9; 1.69–79 (with Garland 2014: 95–98, 126; Sinn 1993: 67–84, 71).
 12. In his response he identifies three primary kinds of reasons: causal connections, humanitarian concerns and the normative presuppositions of the state system (Carens 2013: 195).
 13. For a critical analysis of the City of Sanctuary movement, see Bagelman 2016.

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