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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Everyday Hospitality and Politics

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The article explores everyday hospitality and politics through inclusive forms of integration initiatives in everyday life and urban communities in Denmark and Norway. It investigates how local initiatives and creative social strategies by local actors can empower and include refugees and immigrants in local communities. This article is based on participant observations of urban communities in Denmark and Norway working to welcome refugees and create new cross-cultural meeting places. We argue that people mobilize and take action when faced with emergency, and that the many welcome initiatives organized around theatre, food, dance and music can rework difference. The cases relate to the discussion of hospitality, the production of meaningful meeting places in a local context and the embodied encounters promoted by these activities. This article discusses everyday hospitality and politics in light of the transition in the Nordic welfare states, which has made the debate around inclusion of refugees and immigrants in local communities and the welfare state centre.

Keywords: Hospitality; Encounter; Welfare state; Integration; Embodiment

Introduction

In the Nordic countries, as is the case in many other European countries, the challenges of globalization and immigration have given rise to a racialized discourse on 'strangers'. In the Nordic societies, populism, nationalism and racism have been assembled into a powerful political discourse (for a discussion on racialization in the Nordic countries, see Keskinen & Andreassen 2017). The discourse draws on a social myth claiming the existence of a political and cultural elite forming an alliance with rootless international (and European) elites and with foreigners (immigrants and refugees) in this way threatening the values of ordinary people as well as national identities in general (Hervik 2019; Dyrberg 2000; Zizek 2011). This development has primarily been forwarded by right-wing populist parties, but it has eventually trickled into a wider part of the political spectrum. In the Nordic countries, it has to be understood in a complex relationship to the Nordic welfare states. Their self-images have been ones of liberal and tolerant nations with high values of equality as to class, gender and ethnicity as well as a strong social cohesion, all forwarded through a well-developed welfare state. They have performed a long-standing interest in global humanitarian issues, and they

have in this way built up an imagination of both external and internal solidarity. This solidarity forms the foundation of the welfare states, but it has to a large degree been unacknowledged that the presupposition of solidarity has been a relatively homogeneous population (see Gullestad 2002; Koefoed 2015; Molina 1997, 2011; Pred 2000). In a world of increasing migration and mobility and consequent cultural diversity, this discrepancy has become more conspicuous. The celebration of the welfare states has fused with imaginations and fear of the other to produce 'welfare nationalism' (Franko, van der Woude & Barker 2019; Koefoed & Simonsen 2007).

However, even if this discourse has gained prominence, it is not alone on the public scene. Amongst groups both within and outside the frame of the welfare states, the humanitarian dimensions of welfare ideas are upheld also in relation to 'strange' newcomers. They are practised in the form of welcoming new inhabitants and creating spaces for encounters across difference, performed either in opposition to or supplementing public initiatives (see also Bendixsen & Wyller 2019). In the Cit-egration project (Research Council of Norway 2017–2022, see Aure & Førde 2022), we have studied a number of reactions and integration initiatives in urban communities in Norway and Denmark. These initiatives came about as a humanitarian response to the large number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean to seek refuge in Europe in 2015, but also to the Danish and Norwegian governments' strict immigration policies and poor integration measures. The project is based on a collaborative approach, where we as researchers actively take part in the activities and encounters we study (for a methodological discussion, see Aure and Førde in the Editorial of this Special Issue). It is the experiences gained in these interventions that interest us in this article. How do people, through everyday politics and/or cultural practices, oppose discriminating politics and contribute to the capacity to live with difference? We shall pursue this question by way of examples from Tromsø and Bodø in Northern Norway and Hundested and Halsnæs in Denmark.

We argue that practices of everyday hospitality, of welcoming the unknown Other, serve as an important corrective to restrictive immigration policies. Faced with emergency, people mobilize hospitality as ethical action. The many welcoming initiatives offer embodied encounters contributing to negotiate and rework difference.

The article is in three parts. First, we present the theoretical framework of the analysis, primarily developed around the notions of hospitality and embodied encounters. Then follows a section on everyday hospitality, where we use examples to explore how people mobilize and take action when faced with an emergency. In the third section, we investigate the embodied encounters promoted by local theatre, dance and music activities, and their transformative potential for negotiating difference.

Interpretative Framework

The interpretation of the cases discussed in this article is approached from two connected but also different theoretical complexes: one of *hospitality* and one of *embodied encounters.*

Hospitality

In the twenty-first century, we have seen an increasing interest in the theme of *hospitality* within both the humanities and the social sciences. It has arisen from the experience of a globalized social life, not least connected to migration as generator of beneficent as well as hostile 'welcoming' practices.

The debate on hospitality is widespread and interdisciplinary and, as Dikeç, Clark and Barnett (2009) observe, it is growing into a translation point between continental philosophy and empirical research agendas within the humanities and social sciences. Many authors, independent of disciplinary affiliations, approach the concept through the later work of

Jacques Derrida (e.g., Bulley 2017; Dikeç 2002; Dikeç, Clark & Barnett 2009; Candea & da Col 2012; Casey 2011; Rosello 2001). A conspicuous element of this work is Derrida's neologism *hospitality,* expressing that hospitality incorporates its own contradiction (Derrida 2000). Hospitality and hostility are inseparable (etymologically as well as socially); it is the necessary ethical requirement of absolute openness to the Other paired with the equally necessary exclusionary sovereignty. Derrida develops this initial statement about the contradictory character of hospitality by the repeated statement 'we do not know what hospitality is' (Derrida 2000; Dikeç 2002). Obviously, it does not mean that the concept does not exist, but 'it is not a present being' (Derrida 2000: 8). It is an intentional act that often proclaims itself as a law, a duty or an obligation, that is, as a should-be rather than a being. The experience we get when offering or receiving hospitality cannot be a lasting one; it is practiced only 'in imminence of what is about to happen and only lasts an instant' (2000: 8). Finally, Derrida refers to the 'double bind' of hospitality coming out of the fact that the 'host' offering hospitality must be master in his or her house. 'He must be assured of his sovereignty over the space and goods he offers or opens to the other as stranger' (Derrida 2000: 14). He also emphasizes the necessity for hospitality of the simultaneous existence of a threshold and a door to open – in this way underlining his statement on an incorporated hospitality/hostility contradiction.

Derrida also touches on *ethics*, stating that '*ethics is hospitality'* (Derrida 2001: 17). He makes this claim in conversation with Emmanuel Levinas and his ethics of responsibility (Derrida 1999). Levinas' claim is that ethics comes before ontology. His ethics is an ethics of radical alterity, a question of encountering other as Other, that is, an invitation that accepts the right of the stranger to remain 'strange' (Levinas 1979, 1985). In this sense, hospitality becomes unconditional. Derrida objects that Levinas' unconditional hospitality is not possible; it is desirable but not achievable. All hospitality is *in practice* conditional. Nevertheless, they both operate with an idea of absolute alterity. Both Derrida's ethics of hospitality and Levinas' ethics of responsibility end up seeing ethical encounters in terms of preserving the otherness of the other.

The acknowledgement of the conditionality of hospitality opens the door to the *spatiality* and *temporality* of the concept (see Bulley 2017; Candea 2012; Dikeç 2002; Dikeç, Clark & Barnett 2009). We can follow Bulley when he describes hospitality as 'a spatial relational practice with affective dimensions' (2017: 7) that involves the interplay between ethics and politics but is first of all a practice of engagement with the stranger. The fundamental spatial dimension of hospitality is border or threshold (Casey 2011). The threshold is the place of the stranger, but it is also where hospitality is enacted and strangers are received. As a necessary condition for this to happen is, however, an opening or a door that allows crossing, and the enactment of a welcoming practice of 'giving place' must breach the threshold. In this sense, 'thresholds are the very scenes for the drama of responsiveness, hospitality, and responsibility' (Dikeç, Clark & Barnett 2009). The temporal dimension takes the form of localizable historical contexts and the more or less durable moments of hospitality on the one hand, and on the other, the futurity of unforeseeable encounters giving rise to charitable actions. More concretely, the temporality and spatiality of hospitality concern its particular characteristics moving through scales extending from intercorporeal bodies, households, communities, nation states, all the way to international organizations and 'hospitality industries'.

In this sense, Derrida (2001), giving up hope on (European) states as carriers of hospitality, looked to cities as sites for cosmopolitanism, hospitality and 'cities of refuge'. Many have followed him in this exercise. One example worth mentioning comes from Jonathan Darling who has explored how local people (community groups, organizations and local business) mobilized first one city (Sheffield) later a network of 15 towns and cities officially to declare

themselves as 'Sanctury Cities' welcoming asylum seekers and refugees (Darling, Barnett & Eldridge 2010, Darling & Bauder 2019).

A broader answer to the urge for spatial analyses of hospitality is Dan Bulley's book *Migration, Ethics & Power* (2017), in which he examines a range of practices of hospitality and their production of 'homes' on different scales. He identifies five modes of hospitality, each relating to particular practices and scales. Particularly, two of them are relevant to our analysis. The first is what he calls 'genocidal hospitality' working in interpersonal encounters. It is about how individuals or groups, encountering the most appalling emergency, can react with hospitality as an ethical action, for example, by hiding or protecting others in your own home. It often relates to situations where states sidetrack hospitality as an ethical practice and popular culture reacts by acting in the opposite way. The second related mode concerns Europe and its current hospitality crisis that we touched on in the introduction. Bulley calls it an '(auto)immunizing hospitality'. By that, he refers to the situation where a common European discourse adopts a metaphor of Europe as a 'home' with the necessity of welcoming the outside world at the same time as this is increasingly practised through a biopolitics where protection of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers is offered by 'outsourcing' to spaces and territories outside the European borders (Bialasiewicz 2012; Bialasiewicz & Maessen 2018; Gammeltoft-Hansen 2011).

Encounters and Mobilization

Although the ideas of hospitality forwarded by Derrida and his followers are important to us, we are more hesitant when it comes to his insistence on absolute alterity. It tends to exclude the possibility of a common humanity opening for dialogue. That is why we turn to encounter and to Merleau-Ponty and his phenomenology of the lived body, which emphasizes the *interrelational* structure of our embodied existence. It advances an ontology of a field where self and other are understood as emergent singularities within an interworld and as *both* equivalent and non-identical. Self and other are at the same time intertwined and divergent, and alterity is something that is created *in* encounters; accordingly, there can be no such thing as 'absolute' alterity (see also Simonsen & Koefoed 2020). In this regard, we can talk about a 'carnal hospitality'. This movement put embodied encounters (and, in our case, cross-cultural encounters) at centre stage. Encounter is about meeting in time and space, and they involve both identity and alterity. As such, they involve surprise and often also conflict – in the form of processes of inclusion contra exclusion or incorporation contra expulsion constituting the boundaries between bodies and/or communities. Cross-cultural encounters, then, are not something that simply involve pre-given, different 'cultures' getting in contact with each other; the differences are produced *in* the encounters (Ahmed 2000). In this sense, encounters are central to the maintenance, production and reworking of difference (Darling & Wilson 2016). On this background, the article inscribes itself into a now widespread discussion of 'geographies of encounters' (see Amin 2002; Valentine 2008; Leitner 2012; Merrifield 2013; Wilson 2017; Koefoed, Christensen & Simonsen 2017).

As said earlier, time and space are central in encounters. In the first instance, this is about face-to-face meetings as they are performed and experienced in everyday life. But it also involves other temporal and spatial scales – we can talk about historical-geographical mediations. The current encounters are infused with geographical imaginations of the Other handed down as a heritage from other times and other spaces – for example, places of historical or present colonialism. They are over-determined by historical and geopolitical imaginations of familiar bodies and bodies of strangers where the latter often are conceived of as threatening. In this way, encounters between embodied subjects always dwell between the particular and the general, that is, they are framed by broader relationships of power and

antagonism. This understanding of encounters renders incomplete Merleau-Ponty's general theorization of the social body as a body opening up and intertwining with other bodies and the surrounding world. It has to be revised or supplemented by an understanding of this world as a particular and already differentiated world. And in such a world 'what is meant by the social body is *precisely the effect of being with some others over other others'* (Ahmed 2000: 49). Consequently, encounters between embodied others always involve *spatial negotiations* with people who are already recognized as familiar or strange. The negotiations are played out over proximity and distance and involve spatial categories such as home, mobility, (imagined) communities and borders.

These processes render it relevant to look more closely at the political potential of encounters. The general literature on encounters emphasizes the doubleness of the production of anxiety, fear and resentment on the one hand and curiosity, community and conviviality on the other (see Amin 2012, Darling & Wilson 2016). Much work has been done on the dominance of (post)colonial imaginations of the Other through taxonomies of race, which are claimed buried but are 'buried alive' (Goldberg 2009) and through security logics and the anticipation of terror (Anderson 2014; Gregory 2011). Others are looking for the transformative potentials of encounters. Critical urban theory, for example Merrifield (2013), emphasizes collective action groups. Inspired by Louis Althusser and Henri Lefebvre, he explores the politics of urban encounters. To illustrate his point, he draws on examples such as *Occupy Wall Street* and *Los Indignados* in Spain as well as assemblies on *Tharir Square* in Cairo, Madrid's central square and *Syntagma Square* in Athens. Other examples could be the instantaneous emergence of groups of 'refugee friends' grown out of the hospitality crisis experienced in many European countries around 2015. Planning-orientated literature explores organized encounters addressing challenges related to cultural difference – that is, 'scripted events' where place, time and roles are fixed prior to the encounters (Christiansen, Galal & Hvenegaard-Lassen 2017; Fincher & Iveson 2008). Others again explore the potentials in what we can call *everyday politics*. Everyday politics is centred in the lived world, drawing attention to the way we experience from within. That includes the experiences of those who are living in and suffering from situations of oppression (Arendt 1958). A range of neologisms are suggested to grasp such mundane political acts, such as 'quiet politics' (Askins 2015), 'implicit activism' (Horton & Kraftl 2009) or 'ordinary citizenship' (Staeheli et al. 2012). All seeking a way to understand how seemingly mundane acts hold potential to nudge established patterns of control and authority and to anticipate new political acts.

In this article, the focus on encounters is accompanied with one of practices of hospitality. Through examples from Norway and Denmark, we in the rest of the article will look into mobilization and performance of embodied activities grounded in the civil society with the purpose of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers into towns and local communities.

Everyday Hospitality

In this section, we discuss, with examples from Norway (Tromsø and Bodø) and Denmark (Halsnæs and Hundested), how people mobilize and take action when faced with an emergency. It relates to Bulley's idea of *genocidal hospitality* (2017) or what Merikoski (2019, 2020) calls *contentious hospitality*. It is about how people are mobilized in a specific situation, where they are faced with an emergency that encourages them to react with hospitality as *ethical action* and responsibility on the interpersonal level (Derrida 2001; Levinas 1985). In a broader sense, the politics of everyday hospitality is based in the everyday spaces in which humans interact and take responsibility for the shared world. It can be spontaneous actions engaging with 'the stranger'. Or planned welcoming initiatives, not necessarily coordinated activities; sometimes it springs up among ordinary people and corresponds to the human ability to act

not alone but in concert (Arendt 1958). Our analyses are grounded in participant observation where we have taken actively part in various initiatives in Halsnæs, Tromsø and Bodø. The Hospitable Halsnæs case was followed closely in the period 2014–2018, being active part of the movement by sharing many of its activities. Koefoed has participated in weekly meeting with the movement, including participants' observations of demonstrations, the housing of a refugee family in the local community, cross-cultural events and meetings around food and dance, and monthly language cafees (2014–2018). In Norway, as part of the Cit-egration project, we have followed a range of cross-cultural activities in Tromsø and Bodø from 2017 to 2021, participating in events and networks such as those presented here and conducted interviews with organizers and participants. Førde has participated in one of the Forum Theatre events, and interviewed initiators, instructors, actors and three of the participants. She has also participated in three Open Actor Training events, and conducted a focus group interview with participants and instructors. For the Sisters Network, Førde has taken part from the start, doing participant observation in meetings and events (see Aure & Førde 2022 for further details on methodology).

The practice of everyday hospitality and the culture of saying 'welcome' to the unknown Other has been significant especially during the so-called 'refugee crisis' with the arrival of large numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean. It is characterized by different more or less loosely organized initiatives in the Nordic countries and all over Europe (Agustín & Jørgensen 2018; Rygiel & Baban 2019). Volunteers at the central station of Copenhagen were welcoming refugees and 'Friendly Neighbours' was an initiative that spread rapidly across Denmark and received increasing attention as an alternative approach to meeting refugees. Also in Norway 'Refugees Welcome' was having an impact, and in more than 85 cities in 30 countries across Europe, hundreds of thousands of protesters marched under banners saying 'Europe Says Welcome'. The example from Denmark we will use here is a small local movement Hospitable Halsnæs in the northern part of Zealand, which was active for four years (2014–2018). The movement grew rapidly to estimated more than hundred loosely organized members during the refugee crisis with the focus on developing a culture and a place of welcome. With the arrival of new immigrants the movement was working on welcoming and being friendly towards newcomers in the local community. The actions here were characterized by many different spontaneous initiatives and activities like creating *meeting places* in the local community with activities such as monthly cafés, with the possibility of talking, eating, dancing and creating music together, and creating a language café where people could learn Danish and Arabic in a language exchange. Other activities included 'visiting friends' that could create more intimate relations, friendships and helping hands: for instance, for collecting clothes and supporting children's participation in sports and cultural events. The aim of Hospitable Halsnæs was to creat a *place of co-existence*. These initiatives were not coordinated. They were local, spontaneous and small scale. What unified these local initiatives was a willingness to open up to newcomers and create spaces for alternative ways of living together across difference.

The beginning of what was later called the 'refugee crisis in Europe' that created a 'state of emergency' resulted in unpredictable actions and political happenings in the context of everyday hospitality. However, the local movement Hospitable Halsnæs in Denmark had already started with spontaneous local protests against the decision to close down a local refugee centre in 2014. The main political argument from the city council was that the asylum centre was spreading insecurity, fear and crime in the area. As a reaction, the local community announced a demonstration in front of the city council with a protest from one of the participants announced from a loudspeaker explaining that it is shameful and frustrating that the City Council has decided to close the asylum centre and by that cut the city off from the

outside world, deprived of the possibility of being part of the world community. This was followed by a political action. To put pressure on the local political establishment, the loosely organized group sent out a message on social media offering the asylum seekers housing. They explained that if the city council can't find a safe place for the asylum seekers, the local community will do it. The idea immediately gained support more broadly in the community and the initiative was debated passionately, with intense media attention from local and national media. The act of offering asylum seekers housing was not planned or negotiated with anyone. It was born out of the impulse to act and to set something in motion on our own initiatives. The idea was fostered by locals around a dinner table as a willingness to act and was in practice also the beginning of something very intense, unpredictable and sometimes dramatic. Soon after the political action was announced, a Red Cross worker communicated to Hospitable Halsnæs that there was a family in the asylum centre who needed protection. A refugee family from Bosnia with two sons, who were applying for humanitarian asylum with reference to a background in which the father had been imprisoned during the Balkan wars and was suffering from severe traumas and various psychiatric disorders, was asking for protection. Hearing the story of emergency, a group of local people decided to act. They went to the asylum centre, packed the family's things and opened their home to them. The action was related to the volunteers' experiences of a systematic lack of protection from the Danish state. Housing a refugee family in the local community was motivated by a wish from the locals to protect the two sons in the family who, after four years in Denmark, had become Danes.

Hospitable Halsnæs, like other movements, was operating politically with everyday hospitality in the in-between space between the local and the national. The particular characteristics and practices of hospitality is that it moves through scales extending from intercorporeal bodies, households, communities, nation states, to the international level (Candea 2012). Local demonstrations initiated by Hospitable Halsnæs were rescaled to the national level by announcing a national demonstration against restrictions in asylum politics in front of the Danish parliament declaring that the speaking of asylum tightening from the prime minister is obscene when up to 51 million people are fleeing war, violence, persecution and hunger. This was soon followed by a happening in the parliament where a small group of people from Hospitable Halsnæs broke into the discussion in parliament on asylum tightening with a self-composed poetic song. These people were arrested, but the idea of offering asylum seekers housing was rapidly spreading from the local to the national political agenda and was intensely debated amongst grassroots and parliamentary politicians. During a locally organized concert in support of the previous mentioned family that had just been moved out of the refugee camp, the Minister for Finance and Domestic Affairs was asking to participate and to meet the family. There was a lively debate in the national parliament on whether initiatives and political happenings that 'break the law' were something the minister should support. Later in the same week, the Danish association KL, the interest organization of the 98 Danish municipalities contacted Hospitable Halsnæs to learn more about the idea and local experiences.

In 2015, the difficult situation of immigrants was high on the agenda in Norway too; it was politically debated and civil society mobilized to make immigrants feel welcome. The many events initiated, ranging from language cafés, international music ensembles and theatre camps for young people to distribution of food and clothes, were partly in opposition to and partly a supplement to public policy towards refugees. Some of the spontaneous initiatives were turned into more organized and enduring activities, whereas many were short-term projects. As the years passed, with a strict immigration policy minimizing new arrivals of refugees, the situation of immigrants received less public attention and there were fewer activities of engagement with the unknown Other.

In Tromsø, this gained new attention in December 2019, as the tragic news of four bodies found in the cold sea shocked the city. They were a young Sudanese mother and her three children. The mother and two of her daughters died, while her youngest child survived and the mother was indicted for drowning her children. This tragedy touched the population deeply, as everyone asked how this could happen. Realizing that life could be so unbearable for newcomers to the city that it could lead to such a desperate act, a new public discourse on immigrants' living conditions was raised. As a response to the failing of society and the welfare state to provide immigrants with the necessary safety net to make life bearable, civil society remobilized. Immigrants' health and living conditions were again put on the public agenda, and new events initiated. A special focus was put on the vulnerable situation of the many young women immigrating through family reunion. A spontaneous commemoration gathered thousands with lit torches at the city square, and a fundraising initiative for the affected family received a massive response. These were acts of everyday politics, of people wanting to show solidarity and support for the affected family and the immigrant community, but also to recreate an image of the city as a solidary and tolerant community where people care for each other.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, a women's network called Sisters was established, aimed at creating a network to welcome, secure and support newly arrived immigrant women. The network was initiated by a midwife specializing in refugees' health in collaboration with Somalian women in the city. 'After the tragedy, many called me in despair: how can we help? I meet these women in my job as midwife; women who don't speak Norwegian, don't understand the system, but are to give birth here, or come with small children—they are so vulnerable', the initiator explains in our first meeting. She argues that the reorganized and specialized health care system fails to meet their needs. The Somalian women have many stories from their first period in Norway, of how hard it was to live here as mothers. They tell about the difficulties of finding their way around in their new everyday life, and of the fear of the system they did not know. As a young mother explains: 'The only thing I knew about Norway was that there was a group called *Barnevernet* (child welfare) that could take away my kids'. This fear prevented her from seeking medical help when her children were ill. The Sisters network is a loose network of volunteers from various organizations, such as Red Cross, Somalians in Tromsø, SEIF Tromsø (Self-help for Immigrants and Refugees) and engaged women from various immigrant communities in the city. The rationale of the network is that newly arrived women need help from both people who know their language and people who know the Norwegian system. Emphasizing the importance of knowing more people in the city, having someone to reach out to in critical moments, an informal meeting place was established: Saturday at two o'clock. Every Saturday women of various backgrounds, often with children, meet in an open café and playground in the city centre. There is no agenda, no obligation and no formalized community membership. These café meetings have again spurred new common activities and a Facebook group with information about and invitations to a multitude events and networks in the city.

We argue that the initiatives in Halsnæs and Tromsø arose from a specific situation of emergency and crisis of hospitality (Bulley 2017). The concrete practice of hospitality as ethical action and responsibility is about being faced with emergency but also becomes an important opposition to strict immigration policy in Denmark and Norway. The housing of a refugee family in Halsnæs and the tragedy of the drowned family in Tromsø are examples of shared engagement in immigrants' situation that encouraged people to act with hospitality. In Tromsø, just like in Halsnæs, the focus was on creating a place of co-existence. Such meeting places are crucial as stabilizing structures in people's everyday life, but also hold the potential for new and unexpected encounters.

Embodied Encounters

The many integration initiatives we have studied in Norway and Denmark demonstrate creative approaches to welcoming and including immigrants and creating spaces for encounters across difference. Many of them are centred around theatre, storytelling, music, dance and food. In this section, we will present a few such local initiatives enhancing cross-cultural interaction and engagement. We are concerned with the embodied encounters promoted by local activities, and how they can contribute to negotiating difference. As a practice of engagement with the stranger, we emphasize the interplay between ethics and politics involved in such encounters.

Reworking Difference

Art- and culture-based initiatives are seen to hold a special potential for cross-cultural exchange and understanding (Askins & Pain 2011; Aure, Førde & Liabø 2020). Arts and culture, such as theatre, music and dance, offer spaces for interaction where pre-established categories can be put aside. A fieldwork episode from Forum Theatre in Bodø, described below, illustrates how established positions and boundaries are challenged as they are constantly playing with and creating new characters and roles.

Around 30 immigrants, relatively newly arrived mainly from Syria, Ethiopia and Eritrea are gathered with Norwegian art instructors and volunteers, and Førde as an observing participant, in Folkets Hus in Bodø to perform Forum Theatre. The lack of common language skills is compensated by expressive bodies. As an introductory exercise, the participants explore different ways of greeting. The participants are asked to demonstrate how they greet in Syria, in Ethiopia and in Norway? How do they greet strangers, family members and close friends? Through the theatre exercise, the group exchange oral, but mainly bodily expressions of recognition: shaking hands, embracing and hugging. A safe space is created for testing others' reactions and negotiating borders of intimacy. As we perform, the borders are reworked, creating new possible scripts. These new possibilities are not restricted to the specific situation – they resonate beyond their own immediate events. The participants who entered the room as strangers to each other leave as more attuned (and less unalike) bodies (Førde 2019). The Forum Theatre is organized by Batteriet, a voluntary organization working against social exclusion, financed by the Directorate of Diversity and Integration. It is a part of the obligatory introductory program for immigrants. The aim of Forum Theatre is to increase participation and make multiple voices heard (Day 2002). The instructors and organizers in Bodø emphasize in interviews how this form of theatre offers a more appropriate language for interacting across differences. The language of bodily expressions allows more open and curious dialogues.

Performing theatre together also open up the possibility of switching roles. This can be illustrated by experiences from Open Actor Training in Tromsø. The Actor Training was initiated by HATS, the regional amateur theatre organization, as a means of creating a new meeting place for people of various backgrounds who are interested in learning acting techniques. The first Friday of Open Actor Training, 12 people are gathered at Rådstua, together with a professional acting instructor. The participants come from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Wales, Mongolia, Somalia, Romania, Syria and Norway. The event starts with an exercise where we walk around in a circle, throwing a ball to each other in fixed patterns of senders and receivers. Then new balls of different colours are introduced, passed around in new patterns and everyone has many others to pay attention to. We are not allowed to talk but have to get the others' attention using our bodies and facial expressions. One of the participants wonders what this has to do with acting. 'Everything', the instructor explains. 'We are practising on focus, on being attentive towards our co-actors'. Communicating with their bodies, the

participants learn to become sensitive to each other. Later, they get to practise role-playing. The Norwegian researcher is coupled with a young Syrian man, performing a play with a father scolding his son. We take turns to play each of the two characters. This improvisational switching of roles, typical of these activities, encourages the destabilization of prevailing lines of division (Aure, Førde & Liabø 2020).

In the fieldwork on Hospitable Halsnæs, we participated in cross-cultural events around food. Sharing meals is another way of practising openness across cultural backgrounds. It is Saturday evening and people are gathered in the community centre in Hundested in the northern part of Zealand, Denmark. From observations it is clear that everyone is excited: the evening is planned for eating, music and dance. The participants are a mix of people with backgrounds in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Bosnia and Northern America. Everyone has brought their favourite dishes to the table. The atmosphere is informal and the smell of food blends with the many voices from everywhere. It is an intense, sensuous experience of views, sounds and smells. People are sitting in small groups eating food from different cuisines. They express their joy in trying different things. The world is on the plate. Eating here together shows a way of practising openness to other cultures and there is a taste for diversity that produces a sense of what Cook and Crang call 'worldliness' (1996).

From the fieldwork it is clear that dance also takes a prominent role in Hospitable Halsnæs. From participation, we observed that one dance often spontaneously practised and performed in the community centre is dabke. It is a traditional folk line dance that originates from the mountain region in the Middle East. A few people with Syrian background are leading the dance but soon many others with very different background are drawn into the dance. The mobile bodies, the music and the rhythms together create an affective space. The material practice of music has the power to affect people, to draw them into the dance and to capture them with the intense atmosphere of the intermeshing of music, dancers and viewers. The practice and performance of dance, then, potentially, we argue, can create encounters of shared experiences of emotions between people, most of whom are strangers to each other or have never seen each other before.

These examples illustrate how art- and culture-based initiatives hold the potential of moving beyond pre-existing categories of culture and belonging. Participants emphasize the importance of 'the here and now' in these encounters, of the experiences they share, were their life situation outside of that room is put aside – if only for a while. Participants' immigrant backgrounds are sometimes accentuated, but more often made irrelevant. Both organizers and participants of these events emphasize the importance of the playful contact, which allows for exploring and expressing multiple identities, not reducing them to fixed identity categories. Performing theatre, eating, dancing and playing music together, the borders and hierarchical lines often present in their everyday lives are put aside, if only for a while. But such encounters might also be upscaled, as they can contribute to shape opinions and future competencies for encounter (Darling & Wilson 2016). The transformative potentials of these encounters lie in the way difference is constantly negotiated and contested.

Conclusion

Our analyses of local initiatives to welcome and include immigrants in Danish and Norwegian urban communities illustrate how local actors mobilize and take action in situations of emergency, and how these actions of everyday hospitality oppose discriminatory politics. Further, our analyses of the many embodied encounters taking place in theatre, food, dance and music activities demonstrate the potential of such initiatives to negotiate and rework difference. As we have argued the practices of everyday hospitality serve as an important opposition to restrictive immigration policies. Faced with emergency, people mobilize hospitality as ethical

action (Derrida 2001; Levinas 1985). They implicitly challenge the production of fear of the unknown Other, the rigidity of thinking about identities and belonging and restrictive immigration and refugee policies, which make it difficult for refugees to become full members of the community and society at large. Everyday hospitality and other refugee welcoming movements can be an alternative to a rather restrictive political climate around immigration in the Nordic countries and thereby have *transformative potential* (Merrifield 2013). It is related to what we with inspiration from Bulley call the 'hospitality crisis' in Europe, when the protection offered to vulnerable refugees came to mean supporting their resettlement in 'closer' spaces and territories (2017). It is as we have argued a self-destructive contradiction in Europe's ethos resting on a logic of caring for the stranger while at the same time immunizing Europe against 'threats' from outside.

This also emphasizes that everyday hospitality is transformative in the sense that it directs the discussion to another level from the abstract and ideological debates on numbers of refugees to concrete living people of flesh and blood. The act of being friendly and welcoming the stranger is *political* because it disturbs and implicitly challenges consensus politics (Arendt 1958), where the scripted narrative is about preventing immigrants from coming by being tough and by creating a space of exclusion. This is linked to the crisis and challenges to the Nordic welfare state dominated by an invisible slide towards Orientalist discourses and stereotypes. The progressive story of Nordic welfare communities has become dominated by the story of the threatening Other, especially during the 'refugee crisis'. We argue that the spontaneous or planned welcoming actions and everyday hospitality coming from below in practice show that alternative ways of doing things are possible. They are grounded in shared human experiences that can arise out of frustration or from a desire to be friendly towards the stranger.

The welcoming culture and the spontaneous actions and movements are not simply about people meeting and recognizing each other – they are more radically about how they enable the collective power experiment with reality, as discussed by Lefebvre. Not individually, but collectively, where the encounter with the unknown Other in itself is seen as a possible world where we mutually change. A new beginning and a politics of hope (Arendt 1958) or a differential space (Lefebvre 1991) turned towards the possible. Not a passive but an active demand and participation characterized by meaningful common engagement and social connections.

The politics of *everyday hospitality* transcends the institutional level and implements a much broader understanding of the 'political'. The politics of everyday hospitality is what we experience and live through, and our shared capacity to act. It is about forms of perceiving the world and relating to it – how we make sense of the world (Topolski 2015). The increasing number of refugees in Europe and the extension of the so-called 'refugee crisis' raise urgent political and ethical questions. The welcoming movement, in contrast to the present de-politicization and the erosion of democracy (Swyngedouw 2014, 2018), illustrates a capacity to act and is paying attention to the way we experience it from within, including the experiences of those who are living in and suffering situations of oppression.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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